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DAVID LEE MILLER

The Kathleen Williams Lecture, 2014: The Chastity of Allegory

for Esther

Building on Quilligan's discussion of the female perspective in Book III of *The Faerie Queene*, Berger's emphasis on "conspicuous allusion," and De Lauretis's notion of "technologies of gender," this talk focuses on "technologies of desire" in Spenser's Legend of Chastity. These include discourses but also other media—representational apparatuses of all sorts that evoke erotic feeling and shape it as experience and as expression. Spenser's concern with such technologies surfaces immediately in the proem, as it mirrors (and foreshadows) the Busyrane episode, and later in an allegory that seeks to represent representation along with the damage it can do, as images, objects, creatures, and characters disappear from the narrated action, quite literally absorbed into discourse. Against the pervasive harm of unchaste discourse, Spenser poses on the one hand a utopian fantasy of untrammelled freedom in erotic address, and on the other a visionary quest for the *ungesehenmachen* ("making-unhappened") of the amorous discourses dominant in Elizabethan literature, staged as a re-virgination of the culture's erotic imagination. These concerns re-emerge in *Amoretti and Epithalamion* and carry over into the 1596 installment of *The Faerie Queene*, where Scudamore appears as a failed counterpart to the poet-speaker of Spenser's sonnet sequence and marriage poem. The Dance of the Graces in canto x of Book VI offers a culminating version of the utopian fantasy of unconstrained erotic celebration, located now in the intimacy of the nuptial relation.

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In *Milton's Spenser*, Maureen Quilligan stresses the importance of a female perspective to the Legend of Chastity, noting that "direct addresses to female readers are far more numerous in Book III than elsewhere in the poem."¹ Today I'd like to build on Quilligan's influential description of "the politics of reading" in Book III by combining it with Harry Berger's emphasis on the reflexivity of Spenser's poems, which he describes as second-order "discourses about the discourses they represent." Book III in particular, Berger says, features "conspicuous allusion: presenting stock literary motifs, characters, and genres, so as to display their conventionality."² Taken together, these views suggest that Spenser will be highly self-conscious about the ethical and political risks a male poet takes in speaking publicly to women about their sexuality.

In combining these views I'd like to situate them within the framework suggested by Teresa de Lauretis in *Technologies of Gender*. Lauretis extends Foucault's notion of the "technology of sex" to encompass the whole range of media that work to construct gendered subjects.³ Such an approach has obvious relevance to a poem that aims to "fashion" its readers, and especially to that part of the poem which addresses readers specifically as sexual subjects. This broadening from "discourses" to "technologies" answers to the attention Spenser gives in Book III not just to verbal media but to all sorts of representational apparatuses: tapestries, bas-relief, statues, masques, magical illusions—mirrors more than one, indeed. These are presented along with a range of literary genres and motifs that are not just woven together in the narrative but are foregrounded "conspicuously" in Berger's sense as rhetorical transactions. In this way the pervasive reflexivity of *The Faerie Queene* takes a special turn in Book III, as ekphrasis and mythopoesis gain prominence, lesser forms like the idyll, the complaint, and the blazon are produced with a flourish, and the conventions of the fabliau burlesque the matter of Homeric epic.

Book III puts its array of genres and media on display as what we might call technologies of desire: representational apparatuses that evoke erotic feeling and shape it both as experience and as expression. Spenser gathers an encyclopedic range of such technologies into an allegorical hall of mirrors where he can juxtapose them to reveal their limitations. This special emphasis on cultural and poetic *techné* finds an apt symbol in Merlin's enchanted glass, as Kathleen Williams recognized in the title of her extraordinary book on *The Faerie Queene*.⁴ Exhibiting the properties sometimes of a mirror and sometimes of a crystal ball, Merlin's glass wounds Britomart to lead her beyond herself.⁵ By the end of Book V, however, this "beyond" will

turn out to mean nothing but her subordination and her disappearance from the narrative. I have written elsewhere about the end of Britomart's career in Book V; here I want to suggest that it deepens a critique of the heterosexual contract (in its early modern form) that Spenser initiates in Book III with its special focus on technologies of desire.

As a meditation not just on the perils and delights of sexuality, but on the perils and delights of writing as a man, for a public audience, about female sexuality, the Legend of Chastity is haunted by an anxiety about the act of address. This concern develops from Spenser's engagement with what Susanne Wofford calls the "fundamental Petrarchan insight," namely that "the problems of love and the difficulty of expressing love are one and the same."⁶ This anxiety of address appears in the opening words of the proem: the poet's subject is "far about the rest" (i.2), but to write of it, he says, "falls me" (i.1)⁷—a dative construction (it falls to me, it befalls me) that converts the act of address from deliberate choice into a misfortune overtaking the hapless poet, who must either rise to the occasion or sink beneath it. The topos of humility is conventional—we remember from Book I how the boldness of "Lo I the man" yields to "am now enforst" (pr.i.1, 3)—but in the proem to Book III this conventional topos takes a different turn.

In stanza 3 the poet asks, "How then shall I . . . Presume so high to stretch mine humble quill?" The second stanza has raised the stakes of such presumption, for he has declared both the virtue and the sovereign breast that enshrines it to be inexpressible:

But liuing art may not least part expresse,
 Nor life-resembling pencill it can paynt,
 All were it Zeuxis or Praxiteles:
 His dædale hand would faile, and greatly faynt,
 And her perfections with his error taynt. (ii.1-5)

Behind the named masters Zeuxis and Praxiteles hovers the figure of Daedalus, prototype of the artist whose hand "would faile, and greatly faynt": *bis patriae cecidere manus*, Virgil wrote of him, "twice sank the father's hands" (*Aen* 6.33).⁸ Trailing Daedalus is the memory of his dead child, the addressee of Vergil's lines: Icarus stretched his quills too high, his fall dumbly reenacted by the hand of the artist-father who fails to represent it.

The risks inherent to Spenser's project in Book III will not be fully revealed until the final canto, but the scenario wrenched to extremity

in Busyrane's tormenting of Amoret is already implicit in the poet's description of his task: through "liuing art" to "expresse" the "pourtraict of her [his sovereign's] hart," where "expresse" bears the force of its Latin root *exprimere* (to press out), and "pourtraict" bears the traces of its derivation from the French *pur + traire* (to drag forth). For a male poet to speak about any woman's sexual interiority is potentially invasive, coercive, or presumptuous, and therefore demands exquisite tact. When the woman is both a sacred virgin and a sovereign monarch, the sexual and political risks of "reading" her heart (in the mixed Spenserian sense of interpreting-and-declaring) are heightened, to say the least.

The scene of address staged in these stanzas returns in the action of Book III as it unfolds a series of thwarted courtships. Malecasta woos Britomart; Britomart falls in love with the "shade and semblant" of a knight she has never met; Merlin is entrapped by the Lady of the Lake; Marinell is grievously wounded by Britomart; Arthur pursues Florimell, Timias pines for Belpheobe, the Witch's son fears "to vtter his desire" (vii.16.4) for Florimell, and Palladine forces Argante to drop the Squire of Dames; the Squire of Dames, for all his vaunted success with other women, woos Columbello in vain; the Witch's son dallies with the False Florimell but yields her to Braggadochio, and an old fisherman assaults the true Florimell but is prevented and then keel-hauled by Proteus, whose rescue of Florimell prolongs the foiled attack in another key; Malbecco begs Hellenore to return home with him but is spurned; and in the concluding episode, Scudamore wallows outside the castle while Busyrane within mounts an unsuccessful campaign to seduce Amoret. Much of this action is framed by the miscarried courtships on display in the tapestries of the Castle Joyeous and the castle of Busyrane. Of the four successful couplings that offset this pattern of disaster—Venus enjoying Adonis, as Psyche finds Cupid, in the Garden; Paridell filching Hellenore's bells; and Hellenore living happily ever after with the Satyrs—two are confined to the mythic space and time of the Garden of Adonis, one is adulterous and brief, and one is cheerfully bestial.

For all their variety, these proliferating disasters of the heart are carefully ordered by a governing pattern. This governing conceit is, once again, the mirror, now in the form of its characteristic trope, chiasmus. Canto i's Castle Joyeous, with its tapestries and court of love, answers to Busyrane's castle in the final cantos. The inset narrative describing Britomart's first experience of love, in cantos ii-iii, is balanced against the fabliau in cantos ix-x. Merlin's prophecy in canto iii, followed by that of Proteus in canto iv,

is offset by Proteus's appearance to Florimell in canto viii. At the same time, Britomart's lament in canto iv anticipates Florimell's canto viii predicament—as Wofford remarks, “Florimell experiences the ‘wrack’ Britomart fears.” Cantos v and vii balance the Forsters against Argante and the Hyena of Lust, and they balance the arrested courtship of Timias against its parodic counterpart in that of the Witch's son.

At the center of this pattern we find the Garden. Here Spenser resituates the problem of human sexuality—and the challenge of finding a language adequate to it—within a vision that twins the creative processes of nature and mythopoesis. Here “the ioyous birdes” do not just “waken all the night with open eye,” as Chaucer has it in the Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales*—they find “trew loues,” and tell their loves abroad “without suspition” (42.7–9). As Baybak and his coauthors pointed out long ago, these lines appear at the mathematical center (or as the following line puts it, “Right in the midst”) of Book III.¹⁰ The passage subtly enacts the freedom of utterance it describes, flourishing the language of illicit love (“Franckly each Paramor his leman knowes,” 41.7) cleansed of all negative connotation by the paradisaical setting. Sexuality in the Garden is purely natural, envisioned outside of and prior to law and custom and even outside the category of the human, as Jonathan Goldberg has recently observed.¹¹ The freedom of the birds' joyous song and the frank coupling it celebrates offer a fantasy of unconstrained erotic celebration that contrasts pointedly with the poet's burdened voice in the poem.

The Garden's blending of human and natural sexuality extends to the landscape, where the female genitals—absent from the castle of Alma—reappear as the “stately Mount” of Venus (43.2), and where the vegetation itself comes alive with desire: the inner arbor of the mount is “of the trees owne inclination made” (44.3). Vegetation in the Bower of Bliss was grotesquely sexualized; here the details of the anamorphic topographia are rendered with a deft combination of delicacy and explicitness. The myrtles that cluster on the “round top” (43.2) of the Mount, says the narrator,

And from their fruitfull sydes sweet gum did drop,
That all the ground with pretious deaw bedight,
Threw forth most dainty odours, and most sweet delight.
(43.7–9)

Here Spenser's narrator matches the song of the joyous birds, naturalizing his true love as theirs is humanized, and telling it abroad without suspicion.

When poetic images leave this paradise, they are subject to depredations similar to those afflicting natural forms that “come into the world” by way of desire (32.2). Amoret’s suffering is analogous both to the “long troubles and vnmeet upbrayes” endured by Psyche (50.3) and to the “mortall payne” (33.4) that natural forms suffer when they enter the state of life. But whereas natural forms endure disease and death, human desire is shaped by the social and cultural forces whose absence makes the Garden a paradise. The description of naturalistic sexuality in the Garden is therefore flanked by episodes in cantos v and vii—the balked courtships of Timias and the Witch’s son—that set desire in a human and social context, emphasizing disparities of rank as if they were differences of kind, like species-forms in the Garden. These episodes enclose the utopian expressive freedom of the Garden within predicaments in which a lover of inferior station is unable “to vtter his desire” (vii.16.4).

The pattern I have described, of concentric or chiasmic parallels arrayed on either side of the Garden, is complemented in the second half of Book III by a second pattern, an emerging allegory that builds toward the scene in Busyrane’s castle. This allegory intensifies the poem’s concern with modes of amorous representation and address while making their dangers increasingly explicit. It begins in canto vii.

In a seemingly minor episode at the end of that canto, the Squire of Dames relates his history to Sir Satyrane. The Squire’s inset narrative, adapted directly from “The Inkeeper’s Tale” in Ariosto (*OF* 28), makes light of women’s chastity. An anecdote not recorded until the nineteenth century (and quite possibly apocryphal) relates that John Harington translated the tale and circulated it among the ladies of the royal court, whereupon the queen “punished” her nephew by barring him from the court until he had translated the rest of *Orlando Furioso*.¹² In the completed translation he publishes in 1591, Harington takes note of Spenser’s imitation:

The hosts tale in the xx viij booke of this worke, is a bad one: M. Spencers tale of the squire of Dames, in his excellent Poem of the Faery Queene, in the end of the vii. Canto of the third booke, is to the like effect, sharpe and well conceited; in substance thus, that his Squire of Dames could in three yeares trauell, find but three women that denyed his lewed desire: of which three, one was a courtesan, that rejected him because he wanted coyne for her: the second a Nun, who refused him because he would not swear secreacie, the third a plain country Gentlewoman, that of good honest simplicities denied him.¹³

If the anecdote about Harington's escapade is true, then Spenser's imitation of the tale may teasingly allude to it. But even if the anecdote is apocryphal, it does highlight the dynamics of the tale's narration and reception, which in turn are the point of Spenser's allegory.

Elizabeth's punishment of Harington mimics the commandments of the Squire's mistress, Columbell. As Park notes in recording the anecdote, "such a mode of punishment . . . was increasing the nature of the offense." In a similar vein, Columbell's edicts first require that her suitor offend and then punish him for doing so. Whether the wit of this mimicry is Elizabeth's or that of a latter-day fabricator, it plays upon an ironic tension between the narrative structure of the anecdote and a narrative about its social circulation. In the context of Book III this irony has considerable resonance. If the tale was making its rounds among the ladies of the court, they may have enjoyed a scandalous alternative to the inscription-by-paradigms-of-chastity that Spenser's text elsewhere holds up as its ideal. The queen's mode of punishment, too, by increasing the nature of the offense, sponsors a momentary ludic escape from such strictures. Given the role of Elizabeth-as-Belphoebe in enforcing the laws of gender, a note of carnivalesque inversion creeps in.

Spenser's text pointedly resists that ludic escape. The Squire speaks not to the ladies of the court, nor to any ladies at all, but to Satyrane: the tale is exchanged between men, whose amusement at its debunking of female chastity comes off as coarse rather than witty. Twice during the tale Satyrane laughs complacently at its anti-feminist ethos, and after the tale is done, the two knights turn back to discover that the Hyena of Lust has escaped from the girdle in which Satyrane had bound it. The implication is clear, according to the *post hoc ergo propter hoc* logic of allegory: the Hyena is liberated by the men's discursive unchastity.¹⁴

This power of unchaste discourse to free the monster is foreshadowed in Spenser's description of its capture. Satyrane finds that no matter how often he wounds the Hyena's "corrupted flesh," he "might not doe him die, but aie more fresh / And fierce he still appeard, the more he did him thresh" (vii.32.6, 8-9). This propensity to thrive on combat links the Hyena to Maleger and Furor from Book II, implying that in the beast, Satyrane combats an aspect of his own nature. No surprise, then, when we see the Hyena "still stronger grow through strife, / And him [Satyrane] selfe weaker through infirmity" (33.3-4).¹⁵ At this point the knight leaps onto the beast's back, forming a composite that alludes to his own double nature (half-Satyr) as it parodies the convention whereby mounts embody their riders'

passions. The scene turns farcical as the “enrag’d” knight heaps “strokes” upon the beast he straddles, while it “raged to be vnderkept” (33.5, 8-9).

At this moment Spenser suspends the action with an epic simile:

As he that striues to stop a suddein flood,
 And in strong bancks his violence enclose,
 Forceth it swell aboue his wonted mood,
 And largely ouerflow the fruitfull plaine,
 That all the countrey seemes to be a Maine,
 And the rich furrowes flote, all quite foredonne:
 The woeful husbandman doth lowd complaine,
 To see his whole yeares labor lost so soone,
 For which to God he made so many an idle boone.

So he him held, and did through might amate. . . .
 (44-45.1)

This simile echoes the Palmer’s admonition to Guyon, “The bankes are ouerflowne, when stopped is the flood” (II.iv.11.9). The echo points up the futility of Satyrane’s efforts, for the Palmer is advising Guyon that to tame Furor he must begin with Occasion, stopping the flood at its source rather than trying to dam its flow. The echo also makes the turn from simile back to live action all the more disconcerting: as Dodge observes, “Spenser’s comparison is imperfect, since the Beast is finally subdued.”¹⁶ He goes on to call this “a good example of [Spenser’s] indifference to exact illustration,” but the inaptness of the simile may be the point. “So he him held,” just like someone trying to stop a flood—that is, in vain.

What happens to those floodwaters drowning the countryside? If they represent concupiscence, then the answer lies in the trapdoor pun “amate,” which says on the one hand that Satyrane subdues his foe and on the other that he partners with it. Concupiscence forcibly repressed only seems to disappear. So the knight has barely begun to lead his meekly bound captive away when he is bounced out of his saddle (in a parodic echo of Guyon’s opening skirmish with Britomart) by the Giantess Argante, embodying female rather than male lust. He then shortly finds himself communing with her intended prey, the Squire of Dames. This brings us full circle: the figurative flood that disappears *from* the narrative now returns *as* narrative—not only the vulgarity of the Squire’s tale itself but the salacious pleasures of its telling and reception, laced with double entendres and chuckling complicity.¹⁷

The next step in this emerging allegory comes with the reappearance of the Squire in the close of canto viii as the narrator of Hellenore's seduction by Paridell, linking the fabliau to his earlier inset narrative as another instance of discursive unchastity. The Squire then, like the floodwaters in the simile, literally disappears from the narrative, absorbed into his function as narrator. By the time the others depart Malbecco's castle at the beginning of canto x, he is no longer numbered among the company. This marking of the fabliau as discursively unchaste is accompanied by an explicit address to an exclusively male audience. In the opening stanzas of canto ix, the Squire invokes "redoubted knights, and honorable Dames" in an initial apology for the salacious material to come, but he then flags the transition into fabliau with a formulaic "listen Lordings" (i.1, 3.1), tactfully assuming that the ladies will have left the room.

The comedy that follows is not only salacious. It is also malicious, depending as it does on the reduction of Malbecco to the contemptible stereotype of the genre, a hoarder of both gold and sexuality just waiting to be robbed and cuckolded, whose panic and misery, as he falters between rescuing wife or treasure, merit nothing but scornful laughter. At this point, however, the narrative takes a strange turn, for canto x will humanize Malbecco as he risks everything to regain Hellenore. Instead he unexpectedly gains our sympathy. Jilted by Paridell, Hellenore finds her slice of paradise with a band of Satyrs; in a moment of sublime self-parody, Spenser shows how the Garden's free mingling of human and natural sexuality might appear to the eye of the "fond gealosity" (vi.41.6) barred from those visionary premises. But the comedy of this scene is quite unlike that of Hellenore's seduction by Paridell. However much we may relish the Satyr's nine orgasms, our laughter is caught short by the exquisite anguish of the husband as witness to the scene, and by his humility in offering Hellenore complete forgiveness if she will come home. Mocked for his blindness in canto ix, he gets an eyeful here, and responds humanely, if abjectly, to a sight as painful to him as it is funny to us.

Malbecco gains our sympathy only, then, to lose his humanity in the spectacular *coup d'allégorie* that narrates his anguished redaction from person to persona. Here the disappearance into discourse we have been tracing in the text surfaces as an event in the story. At the end of Book III, Hellenore's imprisonment and liberation are balanced against Amoret's in a yoking as incongruous as that between the cuckold and his bride. Unexpectedly, however, the suffering most like Amoret's turns out to be that of Malbecco, stripped of human dignity by the generic ethos of the

fabliau. Its reduction of the husband to a stock figure of ridicule has passed from the tone and ethos of the narrative, in canto ix, into its action in canto x, where it resurfaces as an object of critique.

I want to suggest that the disappearances I have been describing—the disappearance of the simile's floodwaters, the disappearance of the Squire of Dames as he, like the floodwaters, is absorbed into the narration, and finally the disappearance of Malbecco's humanity—form an increasingly explicit series that traces the origins of unchaste discourse to repressed libido and then demonstrates the damage such conventional forms wreak on human subjects. This series prepares us for the spectacle of torture by discourse—and resistance to that torture—which we behold in the final cantos.

Recall that we exit the Garden of Adonis at the end of canto vi in the company of Amoret. No sooner does she arrive in Faery court than Cupid reverts to his former ways, leaving her admirers' hearts "wide launched with louses cruel wownd" (52.9). In canto xii we will meet one of those admirers—the magician Busyrane, who wields an arsenal of erotic technologies to inflict the same wound upon her in a lurid spectacle of poetic sadism.

The witness to this spectacle is of course Britomart. As it unfolds before her, it displays what ordinarily cannot be seen, the invasion of a subject by technologies of desire that fashion the self from within. Like animals queuing up to board Noah's Ark, the figures in Cupid's procession go two by two, but they do not form sexual couples. The sequence represents the course of illicit love as a progression through unstable affective vicissitudes that reciprocally give rise to each other. Roche describes all twelve figures as "sonnet metaphors come to life."¹⁸ Yet as the example of Sidney's *Astrophil* makes clear, Spenser has reversed field with these metaphors: rather than punishing the rejected lover, as in the sonnets, Cruelty and Despight are here shown punishing the lady, while context suggests that they are at least as much Busyrane's creatures as they are Amoret's attributes.¹⁹ In this way the evocation of sonnet rhetoric fosters a critique of its motives, a reflection upon the ethics of imposing coercive figures of speech on human subjects.

The pathos of that suffering is evoked in the description that culminates the procession: Amoret, propped on either side by Despight and Cruelty, appears like an image of death (st. 19)—presumably, the "death" with which her imputed cruelty and despite threaten the lover, whose suffering she is required to share by way of empathy coded as pity. Her breast is stripped naked and cut open, and in a detail as delicate as it is distressing, the narrator describes the wound as "freshly bleeding forth her fainting

spright" (20.7), evoking the intimacy of the imperiled link between body and soul. Finally, in a grotesque literalization of puns introduced in the proem, Amoret's heart is "drawn forth" (21.2).²⁰

The "cruell hand" (20.8) that inflicts this wound is absent from the spectacle in stanzas 19-21 of canto xii. Only in the third and final chamber of the castle will we encounter Spenser's version of the scene discovered by Lady Mary in the folktale "Mr. Fox," a chamber filled with the bloodstained bodies and skeletons of young women.²¹ Spenser traces the spectacle to its scene of origin, working back from the wound to the hand that makes it. After watching yet another day and night before the threshold to the final chamber, Britomart bursts in,

And her before the vile Enchaunter sate,
 Figuring straunge characters of his art,
 With liuing blood he those characters wrate,
 Dreadfully dropping from her dying hart,
 Seeming transfixed with a cruell dart,
 And all perforce to make her him to loue.
 Ah who can loue the worker of her smart?
 A thousand charmes he formerly did proue;
 Yet thousand charmes could not her stedfast hart remoue. (st. 31)

Line 7 might serve as the epigraph for Book III; it formulates with epigrammatic precision the patriarchal threat to companionate marriage.

This stanza presents a brutally catachrestic rendering of 2 Corinthians 3.3: "ye are manifest, to be the epistle of Christ, ministered by us, and written, not with ynke, but with the Spirit of the liuing God, not in tables of stone, but in fleshlie tables of the heart."²² At the same time, the commonplace of the hart transfixed with an arrow again turns wrenchingly graphic—even as, with the qualification of "seeming" (line 5), it is disenchanted as a literalized image. This disenchantment retroactively strengthens the figurative sense of "figuring" in line 2. The alexandrine extends this virtuoso stylistic performance that renders its tropes at once more literal and more figurative: the pun on "remoue" forces its affective and physical senses apart, insisting that although in the masque Busyrane seems quite literally to have removed Amoret's heart from her breast (xxi.1-4), he has not succeeded in making her "bend with the remover."²³

In this critique of Petrarchan sonnet rhetoric, Book III aligns Britomart's quest with an implicit quest by the poet for a new register of erotic

language.²⁴ Both of these quests culminate in Busyrane's inner sanctum as Britomart forces the poet-magician to re-verse his charms. The "bloody lynes" he reads over make her hair stand on end (36.5-7), but the result is a kind of magic we have not seen before in *The Faerie Queene*:

The cruell steele, which thrild her dying hart,
 Fell softly forth, as of his owne accord,
 And the wyde wound, which lately did dispart
 Her bleeding brest, and riuen bowels gor'd,
 Was closed vp, as it had not beene sor'd,
 And euery part to safety full sownd,
 As she were neuer hurt, was soone restor'd. . . . (38.1-7)

The arrow's soft "fall" from Amoret's wound, followed by the wound's spontaneous closing up, presents an almost pornographically explicit image of defloration-in-reverse. This imagery suggests that in reversing his charms, Busyrane dismantles the catachresis that compounds writing, wounding, sexual penetration, and the sting of sexual desire into a single fantasized event, "My Lady and my loue so cruelly to pen" (xi.10.9). Insofar as Busyrane's house and the magic that creates it embody cultural technologies of gender and desire rather than merely idiosyncratic fantasies, their undoing here prefigures a re-virginization of the culture's erotic imagination.²⁵ This is the visionary goal of the poet's quest in Book III.

At this moment we see Spenser anticipating Freud's discovery of the mechanism he was to call *ungesehenmachen*, or "undoing."²⁶ In Spenser's hands it is a technique for representing the undoing of representation, and so of course all of Busyrane's technologies of desire—his statue, his bas-relief, his tapestries, and his enchanted flames—follow (so to speak) in the footsteps of his masquing figures, who retreat into the final chamber only to disappear there. It makes sense that the enchanter himself likewise disappears, led out of his castle by Britomart but then absent from the scene of Amoret's reunion with Scudamore, witnessed by Britomart alone. If you think about it, he *has* to be absent, for this is the scene he can neither witness nor imagine. The lovers' hermaphroditic embrace replaces him in the poem.²⁷

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Stepping back from the Legend of Chastity, we may locate its series of poetic unmakings in the broader context of Spenser's work. There isn't time for me to do more than sketch this larger trajectory, but it starts, of course, with the disappearance in 1596 of the 1590 ending to the poem. I have argued elsewhere that the 1590 text never identifies Scudamore and Amoret as a married or betrothed couple: "My Lady and my loue" is the language of *amour courtoise*. In 1596 the poet effectively back-dates their marriage when he first introduces it, reimagining their narrative as that of a broken nuptial.

Among the things that happen between 1590 and 1596 are the poet's own courtship and marriage, celebrated in *Amoretti and Epithalamion*. Those texts are shadowed by the anxiety of erotic address I have been tracing in Book III, and their engagement with it carries over into the 1596 installment of *The Faerie Queene*. The series of disappearances that culminates in the vanishing of the enchanter and his furnishings makes it impossible, for me at least, to read the disappearance of Amoret in Book IV, canto x, as anything but deliberate. The very line in which Scudamore seems to register Amoret's presence, "both shield and she whom I behold" (IV.x.4.8), tells the story of Amoret's disappearance: just listen to the sound and you hear her gathered back into the shield that signifies her status as Scudamore's prize—the shield for which he is himself named. In a provocative literalization of the metaphor latent in the legal notion of *couverture*, Amoret is absorbed into her husband's name and persona. In this moment the hermaphroditic embrace is replaced by a more sinister incorporation. The last stanza of canto x confirms this reading when Scudamore compares himself leading Amoret out of the Castle of Venus to Orpheus leading Euridice up from the underworld. The irony of this simile has often been noted: Scudamore loses Amoret by looking back, replacing the bride standing before him with a retrospective account of her conquest.²⁸

In this sad ending, Spenser objectifies his deep and persistent misgivings about the heterosexual contract as his culture both practiced and imagined it. Those same misgivings hover around the edges of his most personal love poetry. The speaker of the *Amoretti* opens the sequence by identifying his beloved as derived from Helicon, the "sacred brooke" in which his rhymes themselves are "bathed" (9-10). In this he acknowledges openly his own role as *creator* of the female reader he addresses throughout the series. In

the sonnet that narrates the central and defining action of the series—the “thirsty deer” sonnet, about which Anne Prescott has written so beautifully²⁹—that central and defining action is narrated in a line whose syntactic ambiguity I have discussed elsewhere: “till I in hand her yet halfe trembling tooke” (67.11).³⁰ This line echoes the trembling vulnerability of Amoret’s exposed heart (xii.21.1) by way of the opening sonnet, where the poet had compared the leaves of his book, held in the beloved’s hands, to “captives trembling at the victor’s sight” (4), transferring to his pages the simile he will so often apply to himself throughout the sequence. That trembling, located at the edge where desire meets fear, passes from the poet’s body to the body of his text, the material pages on which it is written. In sonnet 67, it then passes to the lovers—but who is “yet half trembling,” the “I” who takes or the “her” who is taken? The trembling hovers as uncertainly between the two lovers as it does between fear and desire.

This is the moment in *Amoretti* that corresponds to the story of Amoret’s capture, and it offers a delicately crafted antithesis to Scudamore’s mastery. In the Busyrane episode, Spenser has imagined the undoing of courtly and Petrarchan love rhetorics, and this is the project he undertakes in his transformation of the sonnet sequence.³¹ But he trembles, I want to say, not only in fear of submission, but also, perhaps just as much, in fear of mastery. In that sense, the beloved’s trembling really does merge with his, for as much as anything he fears the consequences for her, and thus for them both, of her acquiescing to a submissive role. Spenser did not want to be Busyrane, and he wants very badly not to be Scudamore. The fear that he might be follows him even into the *Epithalamion*, where he begins a beautiful celebration of the lovers’ wedding day by announcing paradoxically that he will sing “vnto my selfe alone” (17), comparing himself to the very figure Scudamore will invoke in Book IV: “So Orpheus did for his owne bride” (16). We know what Orpheus did for his bride, and as Neuse and Loewenstein have both observed, it is not an auspicious precedent.³² Spenser imagines his own success in redeeming the language of love, projecting an image of failure in Scudamore, but he is too honest a broker not to let us see the two narratives as mutually entangled. In a culture of male dominance, it must be every husband’s fear to see himself as Orpheus.

The fantasy of unguarded erotic song appeals to Spenser so deeply because he fears it as much as he desires it. At the end of *The Faerie Queene* he returns to this fantasy, glimpsed in the birdsong of the Garden but now dilated into full visionary splendor as Colin pipes to a hundred naked maidens.³³ It is a dream of pure candor, in which the Petrarchan *candida cerva*

returns in the unselfconscious nudity of those lily-white maidens. Their freedom from public scrutiny is, of course, the counterpoint in Book VI to Serena's abject cowering under the gaze of the Petrarchan cannibals, who plan in their own way to make Serena and themselves "one flesh."

Colin's maidens neither cower nor tremble: the joy of their freedom is expressed in the image of them not just naked, but dancing to the poet's song. The Orphic anxiety of loss is displaced now onto Calidore as he Porlocks Colin's singing. This moment stages the loss of Euridice in a very different key, as the loss, now, of the fantasy enjoyed by the poet singing to himself alone. And yet the address to one Elizabeth, excusing the poet for his praise of another Elizabeth, does anchor that fantasy in the poet's marriage: "Thy loue is present there with thee in place," says the narrator (16.7). The song is not a duet; the voice that sings is Colin's. But what he affirms is that the shepherd lass in her living presence inhabits his voice. For all its evanescence, the Dance of the Graces is more than fantasy, dream, or vision: Calidore is drawn to the scene in part by the sound of "many feete fast thumping th'hollow ground" (10.4). The dance has a certain weight, a bodily reality. Even when Colin sings to himself alone, then, he is no longer alone: Elizabeth Boyle is with him, as the mystery of "real presence" passes from the Eucharist into the institution of marriage.³⁴ Her presence has a kind of reality for which Spenser's culture has not yet found a name, although it will become the ground and anchor of companionate marriage. This is the reality we have learned to call "intimacy."³⁵ In his efforts to unmake and remake the language of erotic address, we see Spenser anticipating, intuiting perhaps, the transformation of chastity into intimacy as the fully human experience of love.

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NOTES

I would like to record special thanks to Anne Lake Prescott for the role she played in arranging the invitation for me to give the Kathleen Williams lecture. In revising the talk for publication, I have benefitted from a number of comments made during the Q&A afterward; I am particularly grateful to William Oram for reminding me of those feet thumping the hollow ground on Mt. Acidale.

1. Maureen Quilligan, *Milton's Spenser: The Politics of Reading* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 188.
2. Harry Berger, Jr., *Revisionary Play: Studies in the Spenserian Dynamics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 462, 154. Another important precedent for my approach is Lauren Silberman, who argues in *Transforming Desire: Erotic Knowledge in Books III and IV of The Faerie Queene* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995) that the middle books of the poem “address the problem of making sense of the sensual world by subjecting conventional discourses of love to critique” (2).
3. Teresa De Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 2–3.
4. Kathleen Williams, *Spenser's World of Glass: A Reading of The Faerie Queene* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966).
5. The transition beyond narcissism is marked in canto ii by Britomart's fear that the mirror's image is nothing but an image, which would make her “fonder, then Cephisus foolish chyld” (44.6). For a more extended account of Britomart's career in the middle books of the poem, see David Lee Miller, “Gender, Justice, and the Gods in *The Faerie Queene*, Book V,” in *Reading Renaissance Ethics*, ed. Marshall Grossman and Theodore Leinwand (New York: Routledge, 2007), 19–37. Katharine Schwarz offers a contrasting view of Britomart's role as armed virago, seeing it as “not a narrative . . . but a problem of simultaneity” that disarticulates the homosocial and heterosexual economies. See *Tough Love: Amazonian Encounters in the English Renaissance* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2000), 138–74.
6. Susanne Wofford, “Britomart's Petrarchan Lament: Allegory and Narrative in *The Faerie Queene* III.ii,” *Comparative Literature* 39 (1987): 28–57 at 40.
7. *Edmund Spenser: The Faerie Queene*, ed. A. C. Hamilton et al. (London: Pearson, 2001).
8. *Virgil*, with an English translation by H. Rushton Fairclough, rev. ed. Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1922), vol.1 of 2.
9. “Britomart's Petrarchan Lament,” 44.
10. Michael Bayback, Paul Delany, and A. Kent Hieatt, “Placement ‘In the Middest’ in *The Faerie Queene*,” *PLL* 5 (1969): 227–34.
11. Jonathan Goldberg, *The Seeds of Things: Theorizing Sexuality and Materiality in Renaissance Representations* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009): “Sexuality [in the Garden] opens on and is part of a much wider domain than the social, the juridical, or the human” (102).
12. Henry Harington, ed., *Nugae Antiquae; being a Miscellaneous Collection of Original Papers in Prose and Verse*, 2 vols., newly arranged, with illustrative notes, by Thomas Park (London: Vernor and Hood 1804, rpt. New York: AMS, 1966): 1.x.
13. *Orlando Furioso*. Translated into English heroic verse by Sir John Harington (1591), ed. Robert McNulty (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972), 373.
14. Although for convenience I refer to the Witch's beast by its conventional nickname as “the Hyena,” the terms in which Spenser introduces it are slightly

more playful: "Like never yet did living eie detect," says the narrator, "But likest it to an Hyena was" (22.7-8). That is to say, "it's not like anything you ever saw, but it's more like a Hyena than anything else." This distinctly Spenserian technique of simultaneously proffering and withdrawing a similitude, which I have elsewhere termed "the Spenser two-step," suggests that the beast is marked from the beginning as a figure of speech—in the double or two-step sense of being on the one hand just a trope (no Hyena indeed, but a Hyena-similitude), but on the other hand also a paradoxically embodied—and ravenous—personification of lustful speech. (For the two-step, see Miller, "Death's Afterword," in *Imagining Death in Spenser and Milton*, ed. Elizabeth Jane Bellamy, Patrick Cheney, and Michael Schoenfeldt [New York: Palgrave, 2003], pp. 185–99 at 186–87.) In the text of canto vii, we can isolate the specific figure of speech from which the Hyena arises, for Florimell enters the canto on the wings of a simile that compares her to "an Hynd forth singled from the herd" by "a ravenous beast" (i.1–2). This figurative beast enters the action of the narrative as the Hyena, summoned in response to Florimell's precipitate flight.

15. The keyword "infirmity," echoing the description of Maleger as "most strong in most infirmitee" (II.xi.40.8), reinforces the sense that Satyrane's battle with the Hyena of lust offers a comic rendition of the Pauline battle between spirit and flesh, given extended treatment in Book II.

16. R. E. Neil Dodge, "Spenser's Imitations from Ariosto," *PMLA* 12 (1897): 151–204 at 201.

17. The Hyena, arising from and as lustful similitude, passes through another similitude of lust in returning to the discourse whence it came.

18. Thomas P. Roche, Jr., *The Kindly Flame: A Study of the Third and Fourth Books of Spenser's Faerie Queene* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), 74.

19. See Joseph Parry, "Petrarch's Mourning, Spenser's Scudamour, and Britomart's Gift of Death," *Comparative Literature Studies* 42 (2005): 24–49 at 39 on Busyrane as "Scudamour turned inside out": "The extravagance of Busyrane's vindictiveness corresponds neatly (perhaps too neatly) to Scudamour's excessively indulgent self-pity—a self-pity which seems to picture the inverted vindictiveness that animates the Petrarchan poetry of self-victimization." (Silberman, *Transforming Desire* 61–63, anticipates this analysis.) *Astrophil and Stella*, which circulated in manuscript during the 1580s, might well have appeared to Spenser as the most recent (and prominent) efflorescence of the Petrarchan and courtly love discourses that Busyrane seeks to impose on Amoret. In the *Letter to Raleigh* Spenser is blunt about Busyrane's designs upon Amoret, "whom he kept in most grievous torment, because she would not yield him the pleasure of her body" (74–76). *Astrophil*, demanding "the pleasure of her body" from another man's wife, torments Stella with displays of abject suffering similar to those exhibited by Scudamour in canto xi.

20. Parry analyzes this image as "an inverse" of Petrarch's self-description in *Rime Sparse* 23: 72–74. Joseph Campana argues that Amoret is "not an object of masculine, poetic aggression but the embodiment of a will to identify with suffering and thereby reimagine the gendered violence endemic to Petrarchan lyric subjectivity"

(*The Pain of Reformation: Spenser, Vulnerability, and the Ethics of Masculinity* [New York: Fordham University Press, 2012], 168). It remains unclear why she cannot be both.

21. See Mary Ellen Lamb, "Gendered Fictions in *The Faerie Queene*," in *Worldmaking Spenser: Explorations in the Early Modern Age*, ed. Patrick Cheney and Lauren Silberman (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2000), 97–99.

22. I cite the Geneva text from *The Geneva Bible, a Facsimile of the 1560 Edition*, ed. Lloyd Berry (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969). The image of the heart removed from the breast also echoes Petrarch, *Rime Sparse: Questa che col mirar gli animi fura / m'aperse il petto el' cor prese con mano, / dicendo a me: "Di ciò non far parola"* ("She, who with her glance steals souls, opened by breast and took my heart with her hand, saying to me: 'Make no word of this'"; 23:72–4, cited from *Petrarch's Lyric Poems: The Rime Sparse and Other Lyrics*, trans. Robert M. Durling [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976]). For an authoritative discussion of Busirane's castle as a rhetorical "place" of "abusive rhetoric," or catachresis, and of the classical rhetorical tradition that Spenser draws on, see Judith Anderson, *Translating Investments: Metaphor and the Dynamic of Cultural Change in Tudor-Stuart England* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 112–65.

23. Shakespeare, *Sonnets* 116.4

24. The critique extends beyond imitations of Petrarch to implicate a wide range of medieval and classical topoi, as Judith Anderson has observed (*Translating Investments* 114). Silberman, too, remarks that "The House of Busirane reflects critically on conventional, male-authored erotic discourses by exposing the manipulation of gendered constructs" (*Transforming Desire* 59), an understanding that I take to express the current critical consensus.

25. So C. S. Lewis declares that "When Britomart rescues Amoret from this place of death she is ending . . . centuries of human experience, predominantly painful" (*The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1936], 341). Characteristically, Spenser both imagines an end to this experience and, in the following stanzas and the opening of Book IV in 1596, projects its continuation. On Britomart's victory as a false resolution, see Harry Berger, Jr., "Busirane and the War Between the Sexes: An Interpretation of *The Faerie Queene* III.xi-xii," *ELR* 1(1971): 99–121 at 114.

26. For Freud, *Ungeschehenmachen* is "the typical form of defense in obsessional neurosis," but he does describe it as a "magical procedure" (J. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith [New York: Norton, 1973], 477–78). For Spenser, the magic is utopian rather than defensive.

27. In *Transforming Desire*, Lauren Silberman provides an especially illuminating analysis of the Ovidian treatment of Hermaphroditus, "caught between the poles of language and desire," as the mythic "subtext" of Book III (49–70, here at 53, 49).

28. Critics who have read the simile in this way include Thomas H. Cain, *Praise in The Faerie Queene* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1978), 166–7; Quilligan, *Milton's Spenser* 204–5; and Silberman. *Transforming Desire* 84–6.

29. Anne Lake Prescott, "The Thirsty Deer and the Lord of Life: Some Contexts for *Amoretti* 67-70," *SSt* 6 (1985): 33-76.

30. *The Poem's Two Bodies: The Poetics of the 1590 Faerie Queene* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 219. There I claimed "unambiguous closure" for the line and the sonnet, a reading that no longer seems to me necessary.

31. See Roger Kuin, *Chamber Music: Elizabethan Sonnet-Sequences and the Pleasure of Criticism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998) for an evocative description of *Amoretti* and *Epithalamion* as a deliberate transformation of *Astrophil and Stella*, "a single bold stroke that would kill the crocodile (who was blind and winged) and create a masterpiece" (89).

32. Richard Neuse, "The Triumph over Hasty Accidents: A Note on the Symbolic Mode of the 'Epithalamion'" (*MLR* 61 [1966]: 161-74) sees the poem as triumphing over Orphic separation: "The poem is born of a sense of privation, and the Orpheus simile indicates what is to be its major task: to invoke, by the magic of its music, the presence of the bride" (165). Joseph F. Loewenstein, "Echo's Ring: Orpheus and Spenser's Career" (*ELR* 16 [1986: 287-302]), calls the poet's invocation of Orpheus "curiously reckless" (289). Patrick Cheney, in *Spenser's Famous Flight: A Renaissance Idea of a Literary Career* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), takes the figure of Orpheus to be resolving tensions as it relocates the problematic genre of the love lyric within the arc of a laureate career (187-8). Heather Dubrow, *A Happier Eden: The Politics of Marriage in the Stuart Epithalamion* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), provides a useful overview of critical debate over the Orphic reference (35-6); the view for which I argue here differs from the sense of resolution in Cheney and Dubrow, although the difference is a matter of emphasis.

33. In an email to me, Elizabeth Fowler wonders why there are so many. It is an excellent question, and I am grateful to Professor Fowler for sharing her thoughts on the matter, especially as it signals the debt to Chaucer and his *Wife of Bath*, whose tale is much concerned with the possibility of a learning curve for tyrannical males. I suspect that the hundred maidens must also be a paradoxical trace of community, even deep within the mind. When the nuptial relation withdraws from the public gaze to celebrate its own intimacy, there remains some sort of implied or virtual sociality surrounding and in some sense participating in the union. That community is fully realized in *Epithalamion*; the hundred maidens may be the ghostly trace of this social witness that is somehow, like the beloved herself, present there in place, even though the poet's reverie depends on its literal absence.

34. In "The Intimate Other: Lutheran Subjectivity in Spenser, Donne, and Herbert," *MP* 108 (2011): 343-74, Esther Gilman Richey analyzes the trope of nuptial intimacy in the theology of Martin Luther, arguing that it finds its way into English Renaissance literature by way of the 1575 translation of his commentary on Galatians. Her analysis of the "movement toward erotic intimacy in theological terms" in Book I of *The Faerie Queene* (354) informs my sense of a Eucharistic dimension to the celebration of erotic intimacy on Mount Acidale.

35. We have also learned to separate companionate marriage from the heterosexual contract. What for Spenser is the anxiety of masculine address to an autonomous female would be described in twenty-first century terms as the anxiety of any wooer's address to an autonomous other.