



THE LIMITS OF EROTICISM
IN POST-PETRARCHAN
NARRATIVE

CONDITIONAL PLEASURE
FROM SPENSER TO MARVELL

DOROTHY STEPHENS

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Although theories of exploitation and subversion have radically changed our understanding of gender in Renaissance literature, to favor only those theories is to risk ignoring productive exchanges between “masculine” and “feminine” in Renaissance culture. “Appropriation” is too simple a term to describe these exchanges – as when Petrarchan lovers flirt dangerously with potentially destructive femininity. Edmund Spenser revises this Petrarchan phenomenon, constructing poetic flirtations whose participants are figures of speech, readers, or narrative voices. His plots allow such exchanges to occur only through conditional speech, but this very conditionality powerfully shapes his work. Seventeenth-century works – including a comedy by Jane Cavendish and Elizabeth Brackley and “Upon Appleton House” by Andrew Marvell – suggest that the Civil War and the upsurge of female writers necessitated a reformulation of conditional erotics.

The limits of eroticism in post-Petrarchan narrative

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The limits of eroticism in post-Petrarchan narrative

Conditional pleasure from Spenser to Marvell

Dorothy Stephens

University of Arkansas



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For Paul Alpers

Quae tibi, quae tali reddam pro carmine dona?

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Introduction

Provisional pleasures

While browsing through a card shop just before Valentine's Day a few years ago, I noticed a valentine with a photograph of a pre-Raphaelite painting on its cover. In the painting, a medieval woman with a cloud of golden hair bent fervently to kiss the hand of a knight who had clearly just slain the dragon now lying behind them. Half of a red lance protruded from the dragon's side, while the other splintered half remained in the knight's now-quiet hand. Because something about the card seemed out of kilter, I took it down to look inside. No surprises there: "You're My Knight In Shining Armour. Happy Valentine's Day." The problem was that in the painting, the knight was gazing quietly over his lady's shoulder, as though at some invisible complication or heaviness. Only when I looked at the back of the card did I learn that the 1898 painting by Mary F. Raphael (fl. 1889–1915) was titled *Britomart and Amoret*. I felt as though someone were teasing me – or perhaps (since I did not know the sex, sexual orientation, politics, or education of the card-maker who had paired Raphael's painting with that tag to form a valentine) it was my private pleasure rather than one I shared with someone else. To a card-maker who had not read *The Faerie Queene's* third book, with its bold heroine disguised as a knight in armor, the name "Britomart" would not necessarily look feminine, would it? Given that the card shop's valentine display clearly assumed heterosexuality and that the card's message did not announce itself as anything other than timeworn, I imagined an unsuspecting female customer buying the card for her guy. She would thus be sending an erotic message far more complex than she had intended – or than he would be likely to receive. This was a delightful game, yet I did not even know whose it was. Which two figures did this armored dalliance engage? Britomart and Amoret? (In the poem, after all, Amoret does not know at first that her rescuer is a woman.) Spenser and Britomart? An employee of the Marcel Schurman card company and myself? Myself and another purchaser? Mary

Raphael-the-pre-Raphaelite and her post-Raphaelite viewers? Or suppose I decided to send the valentine to a male friend whose familiarity with Spenser would allow him to enjoy the gendered layering? The card neither depicted a flirtation nor clearly enacted one; Raphael's maiden was solemnly grateful rather than blushing, the message inside was not coy, and even the red lance was hardly subtle. Yet although a valentine depicting, say, Titian's *Urbino Venus* – with her face half-turned, her smile half-formed, and her hand half-covering her pubis – might have had a more immediately erotic effect on its viewers, such a valentine could not have been any more intriguingly indirect or provisional in its sexual teasing than this one was.

Raphael's painting depicts a scene not to be found in *The Faerie Queene*; Spenser's Britomart saves Amoret from various perils but never from a dragon. Despite, and partly because of, its mismatch between illustration and written text (whether by "text" we mean the message in the card or the sixteenth-century epic from which Raphael took her title), this twentieth-century valentine with its surplus of messages can serve as an appropriate analogy for the complicated genderings in Spenser's poetry. Although all good flirtations involve a great deal of uncertainty about what is or is not going on, Spenser's narrative technique often resembles or incorporates flirtation while adding more layers of ambiguous intent than we normally recognize in a flirtation between two people. This book will use Spenser's poetry to define a flirtatious sixteenth-century literary mode that scholars have often glanced at without fully recognizing, which can best be described as a *conditional erotics*. Whereas all flirtation is conditional in the sense that the people involved cannot be sure of each other's wishes, the type of flirtation that this book addresses threads its way through wider uncertainties: because the participants may be narrative voices, readers, or even figures of speech as well as characters, the very existence of their erotic exchanges often seems a trick of lighting, an elusive shadow in our peripheral vision.¹ Many times neither the reader nor the participants know for sure who is dallying with whom or how they are gendered by the text. Yet I will argue that this dalliance is a source of great textual strength.

I want to raise questions about gender that are at once less antipathetic towards male authors and more cognizant of the unresolvable strangeness of sixteenth-century ideas about human sexuality than some recent feminist criticism has been. Briefly, the central questions of the book are these: to what sorts of feminine influence other than, or in addition to, that of the Virgin Prince does Spenser's *Faerie Queene* acknowledge or reveal a debt? In what sense can we say that this specifically Spenserian indebtedness to forms of behavior and thought that early modern

English culture labels “feminine” grows out of or participates in a wider set of sixteenth-century English attitudes toward eroticism? How do these sixteenth-century attitudes then shape the ways that people view English women who begin to publish imaginative literature in significant numbers for the first time in the seventeenth century? In answering these questions about Spenser, I make no pretense of compendiousness; for better or worse, my habit is always to work outward from small, luminous moments in a text toward the suggestion of larger possibilities. Similarly, my final two chapters will address the questions I have raised about the seventeenth century by working outward from two texts that cannot in themselves prove trends but that can show us richly what is possible. These chapters examine two seventeenth-century refigurations of Spenser’s topos, first in a comic drama by Jane Cavendish and Elizabeth Brackley and then in Marvell’s “Upon Appleton House,” which differs from mid-sixteenth-century Petrarchan lyrics in ways that strongly suggest both the intervening influence of Spenser’s conditional erotics and the pressure put upon that mode by the entrance of female writers into the marketplace.

The notion of a conditional eroticism informs the whole of my study; *Conditional Erotics* was intended to be the book’s main title until practical marketing considerations stepped in. Because two-thirds of the book will be devoted to defining my key term by example and discussion, any attempt to define conditional erotics in this introduction by summarizing those examples will necessarily seem oblique or elliptical. There are, however, some general characteristics of Spenserian textual eroticism that will become more intelligible once we have set the stage by looking at the origins and contexts of this mode.

Elizabethan courting

The confederation of literary techniques that I am calling conditional eroticism has its roots in the tradition of Petrarchan love poetry, becoming especially important for Sidney’s sonnets in the sixteenth century. Two of these sonnets will generate a great deal of the centrifugal force for Chapter 2. The strongest examples of the phenomenon, however, are in Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*, *Amoretti*, and *Epithalamion*, so Chapters 1 through 4 will chiefly discuss passages from the romance epic rather than short lyric poems. Spenser complicates, politically intensifies, and narrativizes a type of dalliance that Sidney, Greville, and others had already made possible in more lyrical and less complicated fashions.

A note about the term “post-Petrarchan”: I use this term somewhat differently from Roland Greene, who begins his study of the western

lyric sequence by postulating, “As soon as a European poet of the 1500’s lifts pen to write as a Petrarchan, he or she inevitably becomes a post-Petrarchan, reinventing the idea of a broadly scaled, self-oriented poetry for present circumstances” (*Post-Petrarchism*, 3). True as this must be in some senses (and Greene makes good use of it), in most argumentative contexts it is counterproductive to define Petrarchism as including only that which is indistinguishable from Petrarch. All genres vary a great deal internally; otherwise, we would have to define each genre as only an original example and its most slavish, least interesting followers. For my purposes, Petrarchism includes Petrarch’s *Rime sparse* and all the lyric sequences afterwards that imitate the *Rime sparse* to any significant degree.

Yet we need not insist upon a sharp distinction between Petrarchism and post-Petrarchism, either. With the latter term, I do not primarily designate what Heather Dubrow calls a “counterdiscourse” (*Echoes of Desire*, 8), nor an antagonism toward an earlier genre – though Spenser certainly had that at times. Rather, I am interested in a conversation between a non-lyric genre (the epic) and a lyric one (the Petrarchan sonnet sequence). Indeed, I am far less concerned with the move from the *Rime sparse* to English poetry than with how Petrarchism as defined in English sonnets begins to influence other English works. Rather than considering Sidney’s *Astrophil and Stella* as anti-Petrarchan or post-Petrarchan, then, I take Sidney to be the author who most familiarly defines the genre for England. (His anti-Petrarchan declarations are almost always humorously ironized by his imitations of Petrarch’s own self-criticism.) I think of *post-Petrarchism* as a body of literature, not usually in sonnet form, which recognizes the prior fact of Petrarchan lyricism and quotes it purposely out of context.

I should be more specific about my relationship to Dubrow’s work, since she must have been writing her *Echoes of Desire: English Petrarchism and its Counterdiscourses* at about the same time I was working on the Spenser portions of this book, and since our theories complement each other. The category of responses to earlier Petrarchism that Dubrow addresses differs from the category engaged by this present study. Dubrow’s “counterdiscourses” are by and large the conservatizing responses: those which attempt to counter the frustration and the gendered slippages characteristic of Petrarchism by fashioning a powerful male speaker who “achieves the consummation of which his counterpart in Petrarchism can, quite literally, only dream” (*Echoes*, 252). Dubrow and I agree that Petrarchism is complexly gendered, often making room for feminine agency even in sonnet sequences with male speakers, but whereas Dubrow looks at subsequent efforts to tame this complexity, I

look at subsequent efforts to heighten it, to search out its dangers – though in the context of a playfulness that can overtly deny the existence of risk.

In importing a quintessentially lyrical mode into his epic, Spenser might seem at first simply to take his cue from Sidney's use of ostentatiously and sometimes humorously Petrarchan sigla in his *Arcadia*, as when sighing lovers affix poems to trees (a topos later gleefully employed by Shakespeare in *As You Like It* and Marvell in "The Garden"). Yet even more than Sidney, I would argue, Spenser recognizes that at the heart of Petrarchism is not a set of tropes, gestures, and images (though he is quite capable of using these) but a method of enriching the representation of relationships among desiring human beings and among the conflicting desires of each individual. Explicitly neoplatonist in his *Fowre Hymnes* and in the *Faerie Queene's* Garden of Adonis (*FQ* III.vi), Spenser is nonetheless famously anti-Petrarchan in his critical portrayal of Busyrane's sadistic use of sonnet devices to torture Amoret, who literally carries her pierced heart before her in a basin, the wound in her breast giving her agony (*FQ* III.xii). It is to a great extent this very discomfort with the tradition, combined with fascination, that produces Spenser's conditional erotics. Although others among his contemporaries certainly ironize the sonnet tradition while using it, only Spenser is at once so invested, so disturbed at his own investment, and so determined to probe the wound of that disturbance. Before addressing conditionality more specifically in relation to Spenser's texts, then, we should briefly consider gender and conditionality in the Petrarchan tradition proper.

As Arthur Marotti, Louis Montrose, and others have pointed out, Petrarchism became increasingly important in court politics after Elizabeth Tudor ascended the throne; in one sort of court discourse, the ideal sovereign became the ideal beloved, and political ambition spoke the language of neoplatonic desire for both the enlightenment and the erotic fulfillment that only a beautiful woman could supply. The fantasy of marrying purely for love came to represent the equally improbable fantasy of being promoted purely for merit.² On the one hand, this sociopolitical system sometimes advanced Elizabeth's interests in frequently allowing her to offer her followers the conditional and ambiguous rewards of grace and love in place of, say, monopolies or hard cash, and it further allowed her to avoid ceding power to a husband who would only interfere in the marriage between the Virgin Queen and her country.³ Scholars such as Stephen Greenblatt, Jonathan Goldberg, Daniel Javitch, and Frank Whigham have usefully explored the ways that the queen's authority was veiled, ventriloquized, and disseminated,

often through amorous fictions and rhetorics that made it seem as though courtiers and subjects called all of the shots.⁴ Analogously, though in a deconstructive vein, Elizabeth Bellamy has argued that the very language Spenser uses to describe his queen only names her elusiveness. When he metaphorizes her as a mirror, she becomes “her own self-reflecting but ever-vanishing source, defying representation from the outside” (“Vocative,” 10). The fact that Spenser never received a court position and was therefore technically not a courtier only emphasizes the degree to which his unsuccessful bid for such a position, in naming England’s first national epic after Queen Elizabeth, demonstrates the success of her political appropriation of Petrarch.

On the other hand, some of these same critics have also been interested in the ways that Elizabethan writers used their *subjected* positions within Petrarchan discourse as a means of asserting their own *subjectivity*. Montrose writes that “the Petrarchan lover worships a deity of his own making and under his own control,” and Robert Mueller argues that although “the ambition of the courtier keeps producing and reproducing the absolute status of the arbitrary power,” this means (in Hegelian fashion) that the monarch depends upon the courtier.⁵ Indeed, according to Mueller, Spenser’s Gloriana (the “Faerie Queene” herself) “is the creation solely of Arthur’s quest for her. Arthur’s infinite desire is equated with Elizabeth’s endless stream of courtiers” (“Infinite Desire,” 757). Although Elizabeth differed from Gloriana in having a living presence, Montrose argues persuasively that Elizabeth Tudor had only partial authority in the production of “Queen Elizabeth”; this authority was shared by many people with competing interests, including writers like Spenser: “This is not to deny that there exists an authority ‘beyond the poem,’ but it is to *unfix* that authority, to put into question its absolute claims upon the subjects who produce the forms in which it authorizes itself” (“Elizabethan Subject,” 317, 331).

More recently, Richard Rambuss has cross-pollinated the theory that Elizabeth uses Petrarchism to frustrate her courtiers’ access to her power with the theory that her subjects use Petrarchism to claim at least a conditional, textual power. Starting with the etymological connection between “secrecy” and “secretary,” Rambuss argues that Spenser’s career as a secretary in the civil service is not as incidental as has been thought to Spenser’s fashioning himself into England’s first professional poet:

Rather than seeking to “name” Elizabeth, or to lift the “couert vele” that always obscures her, the poem’s investment, I suggest, lies precisely in maintaining that veil, in keeping her (as its) secret. And rather than occasioning the vocational crisis Bellamy describes, Spenser’s secreting of Elizabeth serves as the poetic

substantiation of his vocation as a poet who is also a secretary – who is, to recall Angel Day’s formulation, “a keeper or conseruer of the secret unto him committed.” (*Spenser’s Secret Career*, 76; Day, *The English Secretary*, Pt. 2, 102–103).

Rambuss emphasizes the politic and professional nature of Spenser’s proof that he can keep secrets, but I find Rambuss’s conjecture striking in its hint of a much more intimate flirtation between poet and queen than the courtship-contests figured by Montrose *et al.* Here, Spenser styles himself as someone who shares his mistress’s beauties only with her – if she will coöperate. Nevertheless, Rambuss shares with the critics who privilege Elizabeth’s control over her poet and those who privilege Spenser’s control over his queen the baseline assumption that Elizabeth is always at the center of Spenserian erotics.

Most Spenserian scholars interested in issues of sexuality and gender have focused their researches upon Elizabeth, and understandably so, given that Spenser’s epic turns to the queen for its inspiration, title, subject matter, and reward. In view of Spenser’s lifelong angling for a position at court, it would seem doubly logical to center my own study of textual flirtation upon the queen. Nor do I disagree with the historicist arguments summarized above. Yet the mythology of the Virgin Queen, which encouraged Elizabeth Tudor’s courtiers to flirt with her, fully explains neither Spenser’s responses to the pressures of femininity nor his explorations of the interactions between gender and narrative. Certainly *The Faerie Queene* is heavily invested in Elizabeth, but it also acknowledges, and is curious about, less glorious forms of feminine power and inscrutability. If it is true, as the last several decades of Renaissance scholarship have indicated, that Elizabeth shrewdly predicated her political control upon her difference from other women, validating her rule by claiming the “heart and stomach of a king” while paternally preventing her Maids of Honor from making even basic decisions about the directions of their own lives, then we should consider the possibility that feminine influences upon, and voices within, Spenser’s epic may sometimes look very different from Elizabeth’s idiosyncratic brand of feminine influence.⁶ It follows that the poem’s exchanges with other forms of femininity may differ importantly from its erotic exchanges with the “haughtie courage” of the queen (*FQ* IV.pr.5).

Jonathan Goldberg has taken issue with the current tendency to believe Queen Elizabeth unique in her gendering simply because she spoke of herself in both feminine and masculine metaphors, remained adamantly unmarried, and was powerful: “To treat her as ‘anomalous’ is to assume that biological sex and gender are unproblematically sutured in ‘ordinary’ cases and that heterosexuality assigns men and women to

stabilized and opposing positions. That is the work that marriage as an institution is supposed to do . . .” (*Sodometries*, 41). Reminding his readers that within femininity there are many possible configurations, Goldberg speculates that “Elizabeth’s ‘anomaly’ might well have been a potentially shareable position” (*Sodometries*, 61). This reminder is well placed, and in fact my interest lies precisely in problematic sutures of gender. Yet to the extent that we might define such sutures in Spenser’s work only in terms of Elizabeth as Queen, we would paradoxically treat her as an anomaly despite our best intentions. Gender identity aside, she was, of course, anomalous among women in many ways, and we cannot isolate her gendering from the other facts of her life. Even more importantly, both her supporters and her detractors *believed* her gendering anomalous, fearing and gaining strength from her Minervan powers, her inviolate body. Although I cannot hope – and would not wish – to speak about conditional erotics in *The Faerie Queene* without taking Elizabeth into account, neither do I believe it necessary or desirable to refer all settlements to her. Because other critics have already attended so productively to the queen, I have the luxury of bringing Spenser’s wooing of her into my present study chiefly to the extent that this wooing helps us get at Spenser’s constructions of femininity, rather than the other way around; and I will spend most of my time with forms of femininity in Spenser’s work that either avoid or are denied the limelight demanded by Elizabeth. Among other things, I will argue that the intricate genderings Spenser coaxed from the Petrarchan tradition often are important in ways that do not particularly distinguish court life from all other.⁷

Petrarchan selves

Some of these other forms of femininity are peculiarly allied to the poet’s inner self.⁸ Natalie Davis and Stephen Greenblatt have argued that in sixteenth-century Europe, the self was not formed by psychological individuation. People did not have a sense of a private, essential self at the core of being; rather, titles to selfhood were secured by community and family, and although one could certainly have secrets, the psyche was not a private or self-defining place but a microcosm of the contests, negotiations, and intrigues that went on in the social world. According to Greenblatt, Spenser envisions the psyche, like one’s position in the social world, as “extremely vulnerable to fraud” (*Learning to Curse*, 144; see also Davis, “Boundaries”). One contention underlying this book is that when Petrarchan poets search for ways of representing this potentially unfaithful inner self, they begin by calling it “lady.” Wendy Wall’s

observations about the oddly public version of intimacy generated by sixteenth-century sonnet coterie are apposite here:

Because the coterie charted a pathway that identified class boundaries, it reinforced a peculiarly socially defined sense of privacy. The social enclosure and exclusivity generated by the circulation of manuscript texts could be discussed thematically as “the personal.” Social privacy, when threatened by technological innovation, became articulated in Renaissance English culture as erotic intimacy. (*Imprint*, 188)

“The personal” is sibling to the self, and when written sonnets house the personal, selfhood becomes not only a textual matter but a peculiarly flirtatious one. Sonneteers such as Sidney and Greville often bring femininity inside the head of a male persona in the form of a woman’s *image* that also serves as a resident feminine *imagination* when it inspires new poetic images. Yet this in-house femininity is more complicated and potentially more troublesome than a muse. In “Early Modern Women and ‘the muses ffemall,’” Frances Teague has intriguingly explored the early modern fear that women authors could receive inspiration from the female muses only by having “tribade” sex with them, but even in this scenario, the muses were not envisioned as having complicated psyches. Whereas a muse may either inspire or withhold inspiration, the feminine figure that resides in a male poet’s head sometimes has intricate agendas of her own. Her serious dalliance with her host can metaphorically turn his body inside out or render it subject to its own fantastical projections. The Petrarchans complement the European explorers’ outward voyages by traveling inward, and, like the explorers, the poets encounter strangers. One could say cynically that because what the Petrarchans find inside of themselves seems to them an uncivil mess, they look around for someone to blame it on and fix naturally upon stony-hearted women, but the phenomenon is richer than this, especially in Spenser’s epic versions of selfhood. I suggest that in the sixteenth century, the interiority that would later develop into the modern private self was first conceived by male authors as a female *figure* who resided, as the female sexual organs resided in Aristotelian and Galenic medical theory, somewhere inside of and yet prior to the man’s own formation.⁹ Such a figure was certainly capable of unfaithfulness.

In a recent article titled “Making Defect Perfection: Shakespeare and the One-Sex Model,” Janet Adelman argues convincingly that the one-sex biological model from ancient Greece, which has captivated literary critics in the past dozen years, is almost completely absent from English vernacular medical manuals of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. This is an especially notable absence in the most popular manuals, except in the few cases where medical writers bring up the one-

sex model in order to refute it. Yet the fact that refutation was deemed necessary is, as Adelman acknowledges, evidence that it had some degree of popular hold (though not the hegemony so often currently accorded it). One need only read pamphlets from the controversy over women to see that a jumble of ideas from Galen, Aristotle, and the church fathers were often cited as proof in arguments written by the learned and the less learned. A favorite piece of supporting evidence for all sorts of arguments was the Aristotelian conception of woman's unstable intellect, morals, and body; she wandered.¹⁰ According to Ian Maclean's *Renaissance Notion of Woman*, although no one characteristic of women in the Aristotelian model (which included a great deal of information about femaleness and femininity beyond the biological) had been widely jettisoned by the end of the sixteenth century, the unquestioning assumption that Aristotle's picture was coherent had certainly waned, with every individual characteristic becoming subject to debate (pp. 82–83). At the same time, I would point out, the very fact that the nature of woman was more genuinely disputed than it had been for millennia seemed in a sense to emphasize that women were indeed erratic, making them the perfect representation of a man's inner turmoil and self-evasion. And the fact that Elizabethans' obsessions with secrecy and spying extended to a paranoia about what women thought or talked about when men weren't around meant that the male poet's relationship with his feminine inner self, who was largely hidden even from himself, involved complexities of voyeurism, desire, wooing, and teasing.

Responding to critics such as Ann Rosalind Jones and Gary Waller, who have written about female poets' struggles to join a masculine tradition, Gordon Braden has objected that Petrarchism seems to have been far more hospitable to expressions of women's desires than other literary genres and modes available in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. "Critical insistence on the maleness of Petrarchism is premature subtlety that blurs the texture of the tradition's historical placement and obscures what is unusual and noteworthy about its place in the grid of gender relations" (Braden, "Gaspara Stampa," 118; see Jones, *Currency of Eros*, and Waller, "Struggling"). Braden's article offers a useful revision of widespread interpretations of Petrarchism, mostly in view of the work of the Italian sonneteer and courtesan Gaspara Stampa. For my purposes here, however, it is important to consider his claim that even the body of Petrarchan poems written by men should not be described as overwhelmingly masculine: "Gendering Petrarchism as male, of course, second-guesses the usual Renaissance complaint. The standard joke about the Petrarchan lover is his effeminacy" (*ibid.*, 117). There is some confusion of terminology between Braden's usage and

mine; Braden occasionally uses “male” to mean what many feminist theorists would call “masculine,” as here when he speaks of male *gender*. It should already be clear that my project necessitates my distinguishing between male biology and masculine gender, or what is culturally constructed. (Studies such as that of Thomas Laqueur, who uses Foucauldian methodology to argue that even what we think of as sex – the body itself – is culturally constructed, do not at all obviate the necessity for making theoretical and practical distinctions between bodies and notions about bodies to the extent that we are able to do so, pressing always toward more refinement of our understanding.) But there is another problem with terminology in my intersection with Braden’s argument: clearly he is right to call our attention to the common sixteenth- and seventeenth-century practice of twitting amorous men, and especially sonneteers, for their effeminacy, but effeminacy and femininity are not exactly the same thing. The so-called effeminate person, in fact, is always male. Although those who label him effeminate consider him deficient in masculinity and tease him about being feminine, he neither fully participates in, nor projects an image of, the attributes his culture associates with women. Misogynists who teased male sonneteers for spending their days longing to enjoy their mistresses did not imply with that teasing that it was more fittingly women’s job to long erotically for other women.¹¹

If effeminacy is not exactly the same thing as femininity, however, neither can we equate it with masculinity. Instead, effeminacy is a social crime of association, a charge of vulnerability to a contaminating and enervating influence. In justifiably much-quoted essays, Stephen Greenblatt and Stephen Orgel have developed the theory that early modern ideas about male biology and masculine selfhood derived from the Galenic belief that female infants are essentially deformations – imperfect males.¹² Orgel goes on to contend that this medical belief fueled fears of effeminacy as something that signaled the possibility of regression or reversion:

The scientific arguments are used to justify the whole range of male domination over women. The frightening part of the teleology for the Renaissance mind, however, is precisely the fantasy of its reversal, the conviction that men can turn into – or be turned into – women; or perhaps more exactly, can be turned *back* into women, losing the strength that enabled the male potential to be realized in the first place. (“Nobody’s Perfect,” 14)

More recently, Janet Adelman’s research into English vernacular discussions of biology suggests that by the sixteenth century, men’s fears centered more upon the possibility of contamination by adult femininity outside of them than upon the possibility of regression to an embryonic femininity inside of them (“Making Defect,” 15, 31). In both scenarios, a

related fear was that women's erratic and irrational sexuality could endanger men who loved women too much. Orgel writes that men were wary of having their own sexuality stirred by that of women; the latter "is dangerous because it is not subject to rational control, which is a way of saying that it is not subject to any other kind of authority either" ("Nobody," 26). And Adelman's study of "suffocating mothers" in Shakespeare shows us the degree to which the maternal matrix could engulf men (*Suffocating, passim*).

Our knowledge of these fears (which certainly are not confined to the early modern period but which do have a peculiar force then) partly explains the feeling of many readers that Petrarchan poetry is both a masculine guild, in which female poets are always experiments, and a practice centered upon some sort of femininity. Critics too numerous to name have considered the links between misogyny and courtly love, between fear and neoplatonist idolatry, and between appropriation and the notion that poetic creativity is analogous to parturition. Pietro Aretino likens male courtiers to female prostitutes, and Gabriel Harvey says that the art of love is actually the art of whoring.¹³ The dependency of even misogynist male writers upon women's intangible largesse can certainly resemble a type of sexual trafficking in which men voluntarily take on the roles that Renaissance culture usually associated with prostitutes. But in a valuable article that focuses more on pamphleteers than sonneteers, Juliet Fleming suggests that early modern men who wrote explicitly for female audiences often did so as a form of protest, making use of their belief that selling themselves to female audiences was degrading. Writers like George Pettie and Barnabe Riche believed that Elizabeth's policies and the fact of feminine power caused their literary and military talents to go to waste, so they solicited peer support by voluntarily wasting their talents even more outrageously in writing frivolous "ladies' texts." Thus, although "it is the real or imagined presence of women that enables men to speak," the putative interaction between a Pettie or a Riche and his female reading audience is actually a performance designed for the consumption of a sympathetic male audience at one remove (Fleming, "Ladies' Man," 158, 162; see also 164).

Yet if we confine our labors to exposing, however subtly and correctly, the ways that erotic poetry written by men exploits or excludes femininity, we risk ignoring, as Goldberg says, that "not even these massive closures are effective everywhere, and [that] within the repressions and exclusions of women are also mechanisms that are productive – sites of resistance or of failure within the system" (*Sodometries*, 58). Adelman contends that even our fascination with the one-sex Galenic model can

make us fall unwittingly into complicity with a powerfully symbolic exclusion of women:

Contemporary users of the one-sex model tend to find it liberating insofar as it appears to break down the stability of gender categories. But at least in Shakespearean tragedy, there is nothing liberatory about the breakdown of gender categories: men like Hamlet or Lear famously dread the woman's part in themselves, and women who possess the rod are a source of horror. Moreover, the model apparently does away with the anatomical basis for gender – and hence for gender fixity – only at the cost of doing away with women: there is only one sex, and that sex is male. (30 in ms)

To a lesser degree, all theories of women's cultural exploitation must tread a paradoxically fine line between lifting women into view and eliminating them altogether. Central to the argument of this book is my conviction that to favor only theories of exploitation is to risk ignoring the extent to which productive *exchanges* take place between that which Renaissance culture labels masculine and that which it labels feminine. "Appropriation" is sometimes too simple a term for such exchanges. Conversely, if we confine ourselves to smoothing over the fears, ugliness, and confusions that inform these texts, we achieve a sense of sexual parity at the expense of what is certainly a more complicated and less palatable set of truths. When Gary Waller says that in Petrarchan poetry written by men, "rarely is there a desire for mutuality or negotiation," I am less comfortable with his formulation than I am when he writes of the sonneteers' "deliciously anxious fluidity . . . in a world that is unpredictable, uncertain, always threatening" (*Sidney Family*, 135). I can agree with Waller's former charge to the extent that these sonnets construct speakers – almost always male in England until Lady Mary Wroth – who are ostentatiously and sometimes hilariously self-centered (or even endearingly so), but desire locates itself in many textual crannies in addition to making itself felt in the main speaker's words.

One possible space for desire is the womb, whether literal or metaphorical, and although none of my chapters centers upon womb imagery *per se*, it is important to note that such imagery helps to inform the Petrarchan fascination with erotic exchanges between poets and the feminine imaginations inside their heads. In an article titled "A Womb of His Own: Male Renaissance Poets in the Female Body," Katharine Maus cites early modern medical opinion that the very humors enabling women to bear children also make women deficient in intelligence. How, then, asks Maus, can we explain the fact that so many male poets metaphorize their intellectual creativity as coming from their wombs, the female organ most directly responsible for the dampness of women's minds? En route to answering this question, Maus remarks that tradi-

tional complaints about women's duplicity can be rephrased as fears that women's bodies conceal secrets:

The woman's body, then, incarnates some of the particular privileges and paradoxes of Renaissance subjectivity. On the one hand she is constituted as something preeminently *seen*; the paradigmatic focus, as numerous feminist writers have pointed out, of the male gaze. At the same time her interior "difference," her lack of visibility, can become a topos of a *resistance* to scrutiny, of an inner truth not susceptible to discovery or manipulation from the outside. ("Womb," 273)

These fears about a woman's ability to conceal what really goes on inside her body (as when she prevents her husband from knowing that the child she bears is not his) turn into reassurance when the male poet imagines himself the possessor of a literary womb. The ability to conceal one's workspace and source of inspiration from prying eyes is an advantage; the literary womb's resistance to scrutiny is desirable rather than unsettling. Maus surmises that when men speak of writing from their wombs, they are claiming "another of those small enclosed spaces in which so many seventeenth-century poets discover their poetic identity and freedom" (*ibid.*). The problem for these men, says Maus, is that the female body is notoriously penetrable. Instead of overcoming this drawback by insisting upon the metaphorical nature of their own wombs and maintaining that "processes of mind and body cannot be confused or conflated," men writing during this period learn to live with the complexity: "such metaphors become, for English Renaissance writers, the sites of gender disorientation rather than of clarification" (*ibid.*, 275). Each of my chapters looks at the desires, strategies, and disorientations attendant upon some sort of feminine enclosure, whether bodily, rhetorical, ideological, or generic.¹⁴ Yet my starting note and undersong is the conviction that not all male writers even *desire* the elusive clarification that Maus mentions. Spenser, at least, positively courts gender confusion – and real confusion, at that, rather than a carefully engineered cross-dressing that ultimately reinscribes standard gender differences between the sexes. But this is not a happy comfort with androgyny or fluidity; it is a risky venture into territory not yet mapped or anatomized.

Flirtation and conditionality

In order to understand more fully how flirtation between people can be turned into a set of narrative strategies, we must first consider what a flirtation between two humans is. Intuitively, we all think we know, but intelligent sociologists and psychiatrists have developed conflicting definitions. In "Thoughts for the Times on War and Death," Freud

distinguishes human actions that are possible during and after a devastating war from those possible beforehand by comparing willfully blind prewar attitudes to those of people who flirt. Because flirtation avoids risk, it diminishes those who indulge in it; life is worthwhile, Freud argues, because death is possible:

Life is impoverished, it loses in interest, when the highest stake in the game of living, life itself, may not be risked. It becomes as shallow and empty as, let us say, an American flirtation, in which it is understood from the first that nothing is to happen, as contrasted with a Continental love-affair in which both partners must constantly bear its serious consequences in mind. ("War and Death," 290)

Noting Freud's scorn for America, the psychoanalyst Adam Phillips interprets the above passage to mean that people who flirt rather than engaging in mature continental love-affairs do so because they are unhealthily afraid to die (*On Flirtation*, xx–xxiii). Yet Phillips observes that "defiance [of death] can be a form of acknowledgement," and he theorizes, instead, that flirtation "keeps the consequences going" (xxiii). This present book's chapters on the Cavendish sisters and Marvell directly engage questions about the compatibility of flirtation and war, but throughout this book the serious risks, consequences, and purposes of playful eroticism are central issues. Chapter 1, for example, postulates that if a narrative event – such as Amoret's rescue from Busyrane – represents closure when gendered in one way, when gendered in another way it may represent only one in an ongoing series of consequences.

For the present, the important question is why we should attend to Phillips rather than Freud when defining flirtation. Freud is not alone in distinguishing flirtation from other forms of sexual interaction on the basis of its detachment from consequence. In an essay titled simply "Flirtation" in its English edition ("Die Koketterie"), portions of which he first published in 1909, the sociologist Georg Simmel argues that flirtation "is play because it does not take anything seriously"; indeed, the pleasure we take in it derives from its utter unconcern with past or future ("Flirtation," 147, 144). The flirt, who is female in Simmel's examples, acts as though she has a future goal while actually caring only for the present, the "purely subjective delights" of play (*ibid.*, 145). Yet if Simmel denies the coquette a sense of direction, he grants her a motive: because social custom will not usually allow any woman in 1909 to "decide the fundamental questions of her life," the flirt seizes the one form of power she can have, a symbolic one (*ibid.*, 141). With the memorable assertion that only a woman really knows how to do a really good job of refusing and conceding, Simmel argues that it does not really matter to the coquette whether she ultimately accepts a man or turns him

down. Before her decision, she has power; afterwards, either way, she loses that power.

Even a one-sided flirtation is much more than a series of empty moves designed to fend off decision-making, however. The moves themselves have content which may influence or even altogether preclude decision-making. Symbolic gestures may have literal effects, and play helps structure the world. Freud, of course, ultimately bases an entire clinical practice on the idea that symbolic gestures help structure the world, yet he, too, defines flirtation as an essentially unhealthy activity to be gotten over. Despite his respect for much of Freud's work, Adam Phillips is disturbed by the tendency of Freudian psychoanalysis to define the healthy, committed person as one who has resolved the imbalances and irrationalities that plague us when we are in love. In the introduction to his book, Phillips asks crucially, "What does commitment leave out of the picture that we might want?" (*On Flirtation*, xviii). His answer to this question, which he gives in its fullest form in a later chapter, is worth our attention:

In psychoanalysis love is a problem of knowledge . . . Lovers are like detectives: they are trying to find something out that will make all the difference . . . Lovers begin as prolifically inventive, producing entrancing illusions about each other (recycled from the past), only to be disappointed into truth. The madness of love is a journey from anti- (or dis-)foundationalism on to the rocks of conviction, so to speak . . . Psychoanalysis offers us . . . the romance of disillusionment in which falling in love is the (sometimes necessary) prelude to a better but diminished – better because diminished – thing; a more realistic appreciation of oneself and the other person (to which the rejoinder of the aesthete can be: If this is "real", then let's make something else) . . . But it may be that in this twilight home of disappointment, which psychoanalysis promotes, people are not suffering from their knowledge, but from losing a more ruthless capacity for self and/or other reinvention. It is not truth that they have gained but their versionality, so to speak, that they have lost. (Phillips, *On Flirtation*, 40–41)

Admittedly, this enthusiasm about "versionality" has a note of naïveté in that Phillips seems to ignore the limitations of flirtation itself. We can disagree with Freud's sense that flirtation is a period of dysfunction leading to the healthy realism of marriage without deciding that marriage or other extended developments between two people inevitably represent the diminishment of personal growth. All the same, I find Phillips's definition of flirtation compelling in that it incorporates ambiguity and indeterminacy while nevertheless avoiding an automatic retreat into simple disorder (our postmodern version of a refuge). If we wanted to recast the "ruthless capacity" that Phillips calls "versionality" in terms more familiar to historical literary criticism, we could say that it is an interactive and simultaneous self-fashioning, though not necessarily a

mutual one. We could say, moreover, that this self-fashioning is purposeful without having a clear trajectory: the two flirts' successive reinventions do not necessarily accumulate progressively or aim toward final, complete selves. Versinality begins to sound a great deal like Spenser's narrative method.

Before following that literary tack, however, I want to consider another of Simmel's statements, as he summarizes the work of "a French social psychologist" (unidentified by Simmel or his translator) to explain the cultural origins of flirtation. Despite his earlier insistence upon the purposelessness of the phenomenon, here he identifies what certainly might seem like a purpose:

It is simply not possible to possess all the attractive women – whereas in primitive times, such a[n] abundance of attractive phenomena just did not exist. Flirtation is a remedy for this condition. By this means, the woman could give herself – potentially, symbolically, or by approximation – to a large number of men, and in this same sense, the individual man could possess a large number of women. ("Flirtation," 150)

Although Simmel affirms the French psychologist's theory and demonstrates his interest in it, he cannot allow himself to think of these multiple possessions as important beyond the moment of play. One reason for his resistance on this point is his conviction that the flirt's overt vacillation has no connection with what she is thinking. All along, she is sure of her own resolve, just as the man is sure of his. The instability of their situation results from the woman's concealing her stable opinion, thereby keeping her suitor in doubt about the outcome of their relationship (*ibid.*, 141–142).

Toward the end of his essay, Simmel reminds us briefly that we can flirt with ideas or "important matters" as well as with people, but he does not explain how this sudden expansion of his definition of flirtation can be consistent with his earlier emphasis upon inconsequence and upon the flirt's resolved mind (*ibid.*, 151). Though not responding directly to Simmel, Phillips provides one possible answer when he constructs an origin for flirtation in the individual psyche rather than in the cultural unconscious:

In the Oedipal flirtations of childhood, that are a blueprint for the future, one person, the adult, is certain that nothing will happen, and one person, the child, urgently wants something to happen but can't be sure what it is (and is not yet equipped to deal with it). The two adolescents or adults, who will be able to flirt with each other on equal terms, will both be bringing this bemusing childhood experience to the encounter. From the child's point of view – and it is a scene which will haunt him or her through life – one person knows and is certain, and one person wants but doesn't know what to do (is working out what to do). This

inevitably unstable relationship then becomes internalized as one of the primary relationships one has with oneself. Adults flirt with their own (spurious) authority. Doubts flirt with convictions. (*On Flirtation*, xxiv)

I am not enough of a psychologist to say whether I agree that Oedipal desires in childhood structure our adult flirtations, but I do want to use Phillips's notion of the child's picture of its parent as a strong analogy for flirtation, at least. Whereas Simmel thinks of flirtation as one-sided, Phillips's theory about Oedipal memories allows for two-sided flirtations whose participants nevertheless *feel*, as the Petrarchan lover feels, a frustrating and enticing imbalance. Moreover, if we revise Simmel's idea of successive interactions with various partners by adding in Phillips's analysis of successive interactions within one dyad, we arrive at an idea of flirtation as much more than a period of deferring the inevitable admission of a decision that one has already made. If flirtation is not simply pretense but a voluntary entrance into genuine confusion, then the flirt cannot make calculated decisions or plan outcomes. To flirt is to venture into a conditional space in order to allow oneself to be multiplied. The flirt is both an authority and a neophyte, trying out stances – sometimes light-heartedly, sometimes ineffectively or painfully – as a child imagines itself into the adult world of multivalence. If the woman has historically been more likely to flirt than the man in heterosexual relationships (a questionable hypothesis but certainly one with great cultural force, especially when flirtation is associated with cuteness), her flirtation has served not only as an attempt to grab a frivolous power when serious power was inaccessible or as a way of fending someone off, but also as an attempt to make room for serious internal debate: “I don't know the way I'm going to think tomorrow; I can't trust my own judgment yet,” or “This flirting masks me, but if he can put up with teasing, maybe he'll put up with my real concerns,” or “I don't know much about him; if he sticks around, maybe I'll decide he's okay,” or “He and I would never do, but this interaction does teach me something about myself, so I want to pretend for a while that we could succeed as a couple.”¹⁵

When we transfer our image of what happens when people flirt with each other to our image of what Phillips calls flirting with one's own authority and what we commonly call flirting with an idea, we tend to let gender drop quietly out of the picture. But what if the ideas that one flirts with are ideas *about* the relationship between sexuality and identity? Using Simmel's anthropological scenario again: flirting with ideas can enable one to occupy a large number of gendered positions in succession. One could start, for example, by plugging “she” into the hypothetical quotations in the above paragraph, with either a male or a female

speaker. And if one is the writer of a narrative, one can complicate the flirtation by giving one's narrator multiple attitudes toward, and roles within, the conditions outlined by the quotations in the above paragraph. The flirt's power ends with "her" decision only if by "power" we mean "power over her suitor" rather than "power over herself" – the kind of power that may depend precisely on contingency and versionality.

When I say that Spenser's narrator flirts with us, then, I do not mean that he simply manipulates us, though of course he does that, as well. When female characters in *The Faerie Queene* stray from the masculine structures espoused by Elizabeth for all women except herself, such as the protection and guidance of husbands, they sometimes wander into the company of other women. Spenser often makes such women's relationships conditionally erotic, confining his suggestions of desire to hypothetical verbs, situations, and colorations that the plot clearly denies – as when Malecasta creeps to Britomart's bed to feel whether "any member mooued," a phrase designed to arouse us with an image that is, for this particular character, anatomically impossible. The poem fences in these conditional relationships between errant women, allotting them scant narrative space, as though they required careful supervision to prevent their becoming too important to the poem. Yet even in these constricted circumstances, some approximations of feminine community are formed – as when Amoret and Æmylia exchange griefs in the frightening confines of a prison. Moreover, Spenser's sometimes wary, sometimes teasing complicity with these brief, tenuous communities of feminine error give *The Faerie Queene* a type of energy very different from that provided by the poem's more explicitly valued relationships among male characters who serve the state; flirting with a provisional feminine error allows Spenser to reserve interior spaces of imaginative risk even when his poetry is imposing its avowedly masculine Tudor programs so severely that he seems determined to correct or deny the power of any deviations from the centralized control represented by Prince Arthur and Sir Artegall. As well as using conditional language to cordon off and supervise relationships among female characters, then, Spenser genders his own poetic processes conditionally, fashioning a specifically epic voice out of the sixteenth-century English sonneteers' tendency to speak of the poetic imagination as though it had a sexual identity unrelated to that of the author himself and as though this imagination could survive only by fighting for space inside the head. While Spenser often expresses anxiety over the feminine imagination for its inconsistency or disapproval of it for its waywardness, equating its operations with women's sexual inconstancy, he also invests in this imagination by making his own creative work contingent upon it.

This contingency often takes the form of narrative flirtation, a dalliance that occurs between narrator and readers or between points of view that the poem has gendered differently from each other, according to sixteenth-century ideas of masculinity and femininity. Alternating narrative movements that both undermine and depend upon each other transform the antagonistic and erotic Petrarchan tug-of-war into a teasing epic technique. Like a flirtation between two people, this narrative technique enables the poem to explore its self-contradictory impulses to pursue and to avoid modes of desire. Although Spenserian narrative resembles that of Ariosto in thematizing contingency when the characters' wandering, rather than their quests, leads them into adventure, Spenser differs from Ariosto in generating a narrative that is also versional in method and voice. Ariosto teases his readers, tells sexual jokes, cross-dresses his characters, and has them switch back and forth between hetero- and homoerotic encounters, but he does not toy with or risk the gender of his speaker.

A recent article by Gordon Teskey titled "Allegory, Materialism, Violence" can help us see why Spenser's particular merger of Petrarchism with allegorical epic is such dynamite. I will quote a good chunk of Teskey's material, because his complicated and quite wonderful argument deserves an honest airing before I twist it for my own uses:

Sexual relations in allegory, and the violence that is implicit in them, are figurations of the metaphysical desire to capture the heterogeneity of the material and convert it to form. ("Allegory, Materialism, Violence," 304)

The project of allegory [is] to capture the material and lift it up onto the level of concepts, making it seem as if the material were not the logical contradiction of matter but its eschatological destiny.

This capturing and sublation of the material, normally carried out in secret, is unexpectedly revealed in powerful allegorical texts at moments that are so shocking in their honesty that they have consistently been misread not as disclosures of what allegory is secretly doing but as departures from allegorical expression. Such moments literalize a gender metaphor from Neoplatonism, the moment of *raptio* in which matter, because of its perversity – which is to say its resistance to the desire of the male – must be ravished by form before its conversion (*conversio*) and return (*remeatio*) to the father [fn. omitted]: being ravished is what matter secretly wants . . .

In the moments I am speaking of, however, the real power behind this fantasy of the material is unmasked, so that we see violence being committed on an unwilling woman, and in such a way that there is no fantasy of converting her to the rapist's desire . . . [s]o that what we are shown is the capturing of a feminine principle that continues to resist, in captivity, being converted into an embodiment of the meaning that is violently imprinted in it. Examples from Spenser that come readily to mind are Amoret and Mirabella, the torture of each being an

asymptotical progression toward her becoming a personification of wifely consent. (*ibid.*, 300–301)

What happens when we experimentally substitute the idea of multiple genderings for Teskey's "heterogeneity of the material"? I have little wish to revise his argument in its own sphere, but I do want to make use of its potential intersection with mine. If we leaven Teskey's paragraphs about allegorical violence perpetrated *upon* femininity with the notion of erotic flirtation *among* variously gendered selves, we arrive at a technique of allegorical narrative that is ambiguously flirtatious and multivalent rather than unconditionally violent and unidirectional. The certainty and uniformity of violence against women in Teskey's model is supplemented in this model by the male narrator's ongoing risk of losing his direction or balance – of losing, indeed, his masculine title to himself. And although – or perhaps because – Spenser usually represents this risk in conditional terms, it is one of the most powerful forces in his poetry. One of the places where masculine entitlement disappears conditionally into femininity is the Cave of Lust. Chapter 1 will show that this male ghoulish lair is not only a hell-hole in which he enslaves, violates, and eats women who have erred but, strangely enough, a protective enclosure in which women find the freedom to develop a sense of community. When the poem colludes with femininity so far as to make room for the wanderings of feminine desire, it often paradoxically superimposes this license on the site of violation and of self-dispossession.

The intriguing hazard of self-dispossession that Spenser associates with the wooing of femininity gives form and energy to a great deal of his poetry, though often covertly. We see the anxiety and creativity that attend this risk-taking in Spenser's tendency to circumscribe feminine spaces (Chapter 1), in his proposition that one must be irrational or even mad to put oneself into such spaces (Chapter 2), in his fascination with the idea of looking into a mirror only to see Medusa gaze back (Chapter 3), and in his sense that femininity simultaneously weaves and unweaves his epic's whole cloth (Chapter 4). And here my sentences will echo some of Teskey's quoted above, in much revised form: it is the project of Spenserian allegory to capture the narrator's heterogeneity and lift it up onto the level of national telos, making it seem as if this heterogeneity were not the logical contradiction of a unified narrative purpose but a repeated underscoring of the nation's destiny. This capturing and sublation of multiple selves, normally carried out in secret, is unexpectedly half-revealed at narrative moments that are so slippery in their contingency that they have consistently been misread not as disclosures of what Spenser's allegory is secretly doing all along but as confusions or

aberrations of the larger allegorical pattern. For Spenser, allegorical narrative is an experiment in self-slippage, with no guarantee that balance can be recovered.

After Spenser

The last third of this book looks primarily at two seventeenth-century refigurations of the sixteenth-century development of narrative conditional erotics as exemplified by Spenser. The penultimate chapter argues that although women such as Jane Cavendish and Elizabeth Cavendish Brackley certainly respond to a masculine literary tradition that sometimes negates femininity, their more difficult task is to respond to a part of that masculine tradition that neither negates nor safely appropriates and contains them – a tradition, indeed, that oddly places a recalcitrant and only partly appropriable femininity at its center. In their comedy *The Concealed Fancies*, the Cavendish sisters (stepdaughters to Margaret Cavendish) ring the changes on their play's title as the leading female characters conceal from their suitors their desire eventually to marry, the suitors conceal from themselves the fantastic nature of their conception of women, and the suitors' secret fantasies are plundered and consumed by the women. The play reveals the female characters' determination to narrate their own lives; they speak of themselves explicitly as being constructed of language. Moreover, in this play the feminine spaces that Spenser circumscribes and polices even while he invests in them begin to represent not just femininity but women's entrance into the literary marketplace: Cavendish and Brackley make it clear that their female characters' negotiations with the language of Petrarchan fantasy resemble these characters' negotiations with their father, who taught them their love of artful language and is therefore quite specifically their literary forefather.

The final chapter uses Marvell, whose work comes after that of the Cavendish sisters, to theorize that both the polarizations of the Civil War and the entrance of female writers onto the scene necessitate revisions of sixteenth-century versions of conditional erotics. Marvell's "Upon Appleton House," which domesticates and eroticizes the woodland haunt of Spenser's monster Errour, looks back to Spenser not as the representative of a more innocent prewar time but as the representative of a time when texts could afford to skirmish with gender. Yet in rebuilding its own version of these skirmishes, "Upon Appleton House" must deal with its sense that femininity itself seems to be slipping out of bounds.

Part I

Spenser

1 Into other arms: Amoret's evasion

I haue seldome seene an honest woman to haue many frinds that wil take hir part . . . You may quickly ghesse a Strumpet by her multitude of friendes. Barnabe Riche, *Favltes Favlts*, G4v–r

A wind fane changabil huf puffe
Always is a woomman.

Virgil, *Thee First Fovre Bookes* (trans. Stanyhurst), 81

In a relatively minor passage from *The Faerie Queene's* Book IV, Spenser gives us a haunting description of Amoret as she recovers from a swoon to find herself in the “darknesse and dread horror” of Lust’s cave:

She waked out of dread
Streight into grieffe, that her deare hart nigh swelt,
And eft gan into tender teares to melt.
Then when she lookt about, and nothing found
But darknesse and dread horror, where she dwelt,
She almost fell againe into a swound,
Ne wist whether aboue she were, or vnder ground.

With that she heard some one close by her side
Sighing and sobbing sore, as if the paine
Her tender hart in peeces would diuide:
Which she long listning, softly askt againe
What mister wight it was that so did plaine?
To whom thus aunswer'd was: Ah wretched wight
That seekes to know anothers grieffe in vaine,
Vnweeting of thine owne like haplesse plight:
Selfe to forget to mind another, is ouersight.

Aye me (said she) where am I, or with whom?

(IV.vii.9–11)¹

We do not know at first who “some one” is, but her voice materializes so nearby as to take the place of Amoret’s own thoughts, and because all of the gender-specific pronouns for several stanzas belong to Amoret, the clause “as if the paine / Her tender hart in peeces would diuide” pierces both women with the same pang of grief. It is as though the “tender teares” of one woman proceed from the other’s “tender hart,” so that

when Amoret asks, “Where am I, or with whom?” her second phrase serves less as an additional question than as a reiteration of her first one. Unwittingly, she reveals the paradoxical nature of Æmylia’s warning: rather than ignoring yourself in order to worry about me, Æmylia advises, you need to make yourself aware that your hapless plight is just like mine.

But why does the poem have Amoret exchange confidences with Æmylia in *this* particular cave? We usually think of lust as the sort of urge that requires the maintenance of ever more emotional distance as physical distance decreases. (Spenser makes it clear that this is no Cave of Pleasantly Naughty Dalliance; the monster Lust is gruesomely homicidal.) One readily available but incomplete answer is that this cave, like caves in many romances, figures the interior of woman’s body, protected and protecting as long as man remains outside. When Æmylia makes her former life into a story for Amoret, we become conscious of other men besides Lust who hover at the cave’s entrance:

But what I was, it irkes me to reherse;
Daughter vnto a Lord of high degree;
That ioyd in happy peace

· · ·

It was my lot to loue a gentle swaine.

(IV.vii.15)

We may also become conscious of a slight ambivalence – not in Æmylia, but in the narrative – toward her change from a state defined by these men to a state in which, although she is “of God and man forgot” (IV.vii.14), she can enter into close communion with another woman. Because *The Faerie Queene* does not allow many such meetings between women to happen within its borders, however, the context as well as the contents of Lust’s cave deserve a closer look. This chapter is about the space within that cave and about women’s wandering to and from its enclosure. Although the second half of *The Faerie Queene* registers an intense anxiety about the forms of female power it presents, my premise is that Spenser’s song to his aging queen also colludes with a feminine eroticism that has little to do with greatness.

The Lust episode’s importance for the opening book of Spenser’s second installment will become clearer if we circle back to the end of the poem’s first installment, just after Amoret has escaped from another form of lustful coercion in the House of Busyrane. In order to weave Scudamour and Amoret’s courtship and marriage into Book IV, first published in 1596, Spenser unraveled the seluage of their story in Book III, by canceling the five final stanzas of the 1590 edition and replacing the lovers’ blissful reunion with a painful continuation of their separa-

tion. Mistakenly convinced that Britomart (whom he believes to be a male knight instead of a woman in armor) has failed to rescue Amoret from the enchanter Busyrane, Scudamour in the 1596 revision wanders off in search of other assistance. Jonathan Goldberg has written that Scudamour and Amoret's hermaphroditic embrace in the original ending to Book III represents a closure that the poem cannot allow itself or its readers to possess. Moreover, when Scudamour has the chance to "reclaim his wife" later in Book IV, he chooses instead to tell his friends a story about how he originally won Amoret from Venus. "Rereading," Goldberg argues, ". . . is his only prize. We are in Scudamour's place, left with our desire for an ending" (*Endlesse Worke*, 66). I would argue that Amoret strays from the confines of such a statement. Implicit in Goldberg's argument about Books III and IV is the idea that whereas Scudamour loses Amoret, Amoret loses herself; we cannot, however, dispense with Amoret simply by making her represent Scudamour's lack.²

Otherwise astute criticism has run momentarily aground in these shallows. Judith Anderson describes Amoret's relationship to Timias and his beloved Belpheobe after the Lust episode in Book IV:

She is part of their story, and when she is simply abandoned by them in the middle of it, she becomes, both narratively and morally, a loose end waiting to be woven into the larger design . . . In short, what befalls Amoret in the two cantos she shares with Belpheobe and Timias looks very much like the other half of their story, the half muted in Belpheobe's withdrawal from Timias and suppressed in her return to him. What befalls Amoret unfolds the "inburning wrath" of Belpheobe (viii.17) and gives tongue to the revilement and infamy that Raleigh's secret marriage incurred. ("In Liuing Colours," 59–60)

Anderson's commentary provides excellent guidance within its own territory, but if Amoret does function as a textual register of other characters' interiority, surely it is a mistake to treat her unproblematically as such. What, for example, does her story mean for female or male readers who do not desire the particular sort of closure that Scudamour or Timias desires? And why should we believe that the poem expects us to desire this particular closure?

When Amoret pours herself into Scudamour's waiting arms, her body does become an "instrument of mutual pleasure," as Lauren Silberman argues; nevertheless, the questions that various critics have raised about the torturer Busyrane as a figure for the male artist and Petrarchan poet should make us suspicious about this emblem's use of the female body as an aesthetic instrument.³ Glossing Busyrane as "*Busy-reign*," Harry Berger writes that the enchanter represents "the male imagination trying busily (because unsuccessfully) to dominate and possess woman's will by

art, by magic, by sensory illusions and threats – by all the instruments of culture except the normal means of persuasion” (*Revisionary*, 173). After Amoret’s escape from this authorial manipulation, her joyful embrace with Scudamour is bound to strike us at first as a direct contrast:

Lightly he clipt her twixt his armes twaine,
 And streightly did embrace her body bright,
 Her body, late the prison of sad paine,
 Now the sweet lodge of loue and deare delight:
 But she faire Lady ouercommen quight
 Of huge affection, did in pleasure melt,
 And in sweete rauishment poured out her spright:
 No word they spake, nor earthly thing they felt,
 But like two senceles stocks in long embracement dwelt.

Had ye them seene, ye would haue surely thought,
 That they had beene that faire *Hermaphrodite*,
 Which that rich *Romane* of white marble wrought,
 And in his costly Bath caused to bee site:
 So seemd those two, as growne together quite. (III.xii.45a–46a)

Yet Busyrane is not dead, and the hermaphrodite analogy takes shape almost on his doorstep. If we gaze uncritically upon the bride while she “pour[s] out her spright,” we risk the possibility of aligning ourselves with the proprietary voyeurism of the “rich *Romane*” who carved his own hermaphrodite.⁴ Emblematic immobility is a new situation for Scudamour, but the image of Amoret melting into his welcoming arms oddly echoes a previous image of Amoret welded to Busyrane’s cruelly phallic pillar of brass. The image of Busyrane’s pillar appears in the final canto of Book III, where Spenser elaborately schematizes the violent potential of sexual desire. Spenser leaves his readers to decide whether this violence represents fear or fantasy and whether it is filtered through Amoret’s consciousness as a bride, Scudamour’s as a groom, Busyrane’s as an artist, Britomart’s as an onlooker, or some combination of the above. At the very least, I hardly think we can rule out Busyrane’s agency here:

Ne liuing wight [Britomart] saw in all that roome,
 Saeue that same woefull Ladie, both whose hands
 Were bounden fast, that did her ill become,
 And her small wast girt round with yron bands,
 Vnto a brasen pillour, by the which she stands.

And her before the vile Enchaunter sate,
 Figuring straunge characters of his art,
 With liuing bloud 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? (III.xii.30–31)

Subtly or not, the hermaphrodite's visual echo of the brass pillar begins to make the hermaphrodite seem like Busyrane's own idea of a proper heterosexual relationship. Good women have often been admonished to keep still, of course, through happy times as well as adverse ones, and insofar as the hermaphrodite's ostensibly equal union of the sexes does recall Busyrane's brass pillar, we could say that it is all too normal in its social construction.

The Faerie Queene contains several hermaphroditic figures – notably the self-sufficient Venus, who “syre and mother is her selfe alone, / Begets and eke conceiues, ne needeth other none,” and Dame Nature, who “whether she man or woman inly were, / That could not any creature well descry” (IV.x.41; VII.vii.5). But the hermaphrodite analogy at the end of Book III in the 1590 edition differs from these others in representing the fusion of two distinctly sexed characters; the image is of a hermaphroditism something like Siamese twins, with two heads and four arms. The figure thus owes a great deal to Plato's *Symposium*, where Aristophanes speculates that humans were once hermaphroditic, with “four ears and two organs of generation and everything else to correspond” (*Symposium*, 190b). Love, explains Aristophanes, is our impulse to return to the state before we were severed, “by attempting to weld two beings into one and to heal the wounds which humanity suffered” (191c). Socrates modifies this simple picture later in the evening by saying that according to his teacher, Diotima, the object of love is to unite itself to beauty in order to procreate; nevertheless, Diotima's definition of love retains the hermaphroditic idea insofar as her emphasis on mutuality revises the traditional Greek notion that hierarchy is essential to a man's erotic experience. Reminding us that the Greeks believed that only women could experience sex as a mutual act, David Halperin writes that when Socrates quotes the teachings of Diotima, a woman, Plato means to find in female eroticism “an image of the reciprocal erotic bond that unites philosophical lovers who are jointly engaged in conversation and the quest for truth” (*One Hundred Years*, 131–136).

As Halperin goes on to argue, however, this philosophy of mutual love ironically erases femininity altogether, given that the supposedly feminine views attributed to Diotima are actually predicated upon male physiology. (So, for example, Diotima teaches that the reproductive function is inseparable from erotic pleasure.) “In other words, it looks as if what lies behind Plato's erotic doctrine is a double movement whereby men

project their own sexual experience onto women only to reabsorb it themselves in the guise of a 'feminine' character" (*One Hundred Years*, 142). But Halperin gives a word of caution:

The radical *absence* of women's experience – and, thus, of the actual feminine – from the ostensibly feminocentric terms of Plato's erotic doctrine should warn us not to interpret Plato's strategy simplistically as a straightforward attempt to appropriate the feminine or as a symbolic theft of women's procreative authority. For Plato's appropriation of the Other works not only by misrecognizing the Other but by constructing "the other" as a masked version of the same. (*ibid.*, 145)

Or, in the words of Teresa de Lauretis, this Platonic appropriation of femininity "has also had the effect of securing the heterosexual social contract by which all sexualities, all bodies, and all 'others' are bonded to an ideal/ideological hierarchy of males" ("Sexual Indifference," 20). Indeed, both Halperin and Philippa Berry show that *The Symposium* itself, as well as the critical tradition after Plato, codifies this elision of feminine desire by implying that Diotima must be merely a literary device invented by Socrates.⁵

Berry observes that the tradition of eliding Diotima informs the Renaissance neoplatonists' creation of their Petrarchan ladies, who wield moral, intellectual, and erotic powers precisely because they do not convincingly have existence apart from the men who write them (*Of Chastity and Power*, 36–37). In the House of Busyrane, which readers have long recognized as an allegory of a Petrarchan courtship, Busyrane concentrates all of his arts upon making Amoret fear her own wandering desires. More than that, however, in the process of turning Petrarchan *topoi* and tropes of sublimated desire (the burning passion, the Greek gods' visits to mortal women) into images of a particularly Petrarchan torture, he tries to make Amoret herself into a static emblem of sublimated pain when he shows Britomart a pageant in which Amoret "figures" the torments of love by being exhibited with a gaping wound in her breast, holding before her in a silver basin her bloody heart transfixed with a dart.⁶ This is what Amoret seems to escape when Britomart leads her to the waiting Scudamour in the 1590 edition of the poem. Yet the type of erotic bonding that we find in the neoplatonic tradition, where Diotima can only point toward masculinity, is precisely the danger that Spenser sets up for the 1590 Amoret who melts and pours her spirit into her husband's arms when she is overcome with "huge affection" (III.xii.45a). The phrase refers to her love but also powerfully suggests his erection that overmasters and mysteriously transforms her, until it is his desire with which she is filled.

Maureen Quilligan argues persuasively that although the pen that

Busyrane dips into Amoret's blood for ink makes him into a "sadistic sonneteer," Spenser "manages to correct this (male) art by viewing it from the opposite perspective of the lady, who usually merely peruses the lines of the poem" (*Milton's Spenser*, 198). She goes on to suggest that although Britomart forces Busyrane to close the gaping wound in Amoret's breast, his reversed charms cannot heal "the wound of desire – which Britomart shares with Amoret." By way of support for her suggestion, however, she quotes the hermaphrodite stanza, in which "*Britomart* halfe enuying their blesse, / Was much empassiond in her gentle sprite" (III.xii.46a), explaining that "*Blessers*, in French, is to wound; such wounding, a real anatomical event in sexual consummation, is bliss." Whether or not Quilligan's irony is intended, this seems an odd way to conclude a discussion of the specifically female point of view, since wedding nights are not always blissful for wounded brides. Britomart's naïveté could certainly allow her to envy the wound without realizing its burden of pain, yet if we really wish to read the wound from the "perspective of the lady," we must take into account the irony of the lady's naïve envy of this particular blessing. Most of Quilligan's chapter on "The Gender of the Reader" is extraordinarily insightful in its argument about the ways Spenser rewrites stories of masculine desire by viewing events from the perspective of the desired, desiring, or threatened woman; and Quilligan does go on to argue that in Book IV, the rest of Amoret and Scudamour's story demonstrates "the tension between husbandly love and its implicit antagonism to women." This takes the form of a "conflict within the terms of chivalric love" between "ladies' undeniable rights, and those rights granted by conquest" (*Milton's Spenser*, 206–207). But for Quilligan, because the conflict does not taint the hermaphrodite itself, the hermaphrodite's disappearance cannot represent anything but loss. In a conclusion that recalls Goldberg's, Quilligan writes that "what we are left with is a desire for the canceled text of the 1590 ending, a desire that Spenser satisfies with illusory substitutions" and that, "like the cancellation of the happy ending to Amoret's story, the cancellation of the 'Letter to Raleigh' suggests an entire reorientation of Spenser's initial program in the face of hard political realities" (*ibid.*, 207–208).

Although my own argument runs in a different channel from these statements of Quilligan's, in making them she joins the company of other critics, and for a very good reason: we do desire closure of *some* sort, even if we are sophisticated enough to analyze and enjoy the frustration of our own literary desire, and the poem does clearly set up the hermaphrodite as an example of blissful closure in *some* sense. Nor should we necessarily disagree when Quilligan explains the cancellation

of the hermaphrodite as Spenser's decision to "dismiss a male reader [Lord Burleigh], select a paradigmatic female one, and then reconstitute the canceled full-gendered readership (as imaged in the closing embrace of Amoret and Scudamour) within the 'androgynous' queen" (*Milton's Spenser*, 201). I do not so much want to contradict such readings as to select a different set of desires and relationships for our attention, with the conviction that just as there are other narrative positions possible besides ventriloquism on the one hand and subversion on the other, so are there other Amorets possible besides the Amoret whose meaning depends upon Scudamour at the same time that it validates him.

It is important to see, moreover, that if the hermaphrodite on Busyrane's doorstep resembles Busyrane's idea of the proper relationship between the sexes, it also begins to resemble his idea of the proper relationship between women. Signs in the House of Busyrane caution Britomart, "Be bold, be bold," and then "Be not too bold" (III.xi.54), quotations from the Bluebeard folk tale. In the Bluebeard text behind Spenser's text, the next sentence of the jingle is "Lest that your heart's blood should run cold."⁷ Because in the folk tale Mr. Fox (Bluebeard) commands Lady Mary not to look at his former wives, intending to make her join them if she does, Busyrane's own allusion to the tale implicitly warns his headstrong guest that it could be lethal for her to attempt any sort of meeting with the woman who is his prisoner.

I will return in Chapter 3 to the importance of the Bluebeard allusion in the context of Britomart's surrounding adventures; for now, suffice it to say that like the epic's revised edition in 1596, Spenser's original 1590 edition has Britomart choose not to heed Busyrane's implicit warning; she boldly enters and rescues Amoret. But Britomart's labor for Amoret's release has taken place on the prisoner's behalf rather than in her company. As Patricia Parker observes, deferring Scudamour and Amoret's union "preserves their difference and extends their story," allowing the poem to enlarge its definition of romantic love to include friendship – the titular virtue of Book IV (*Inescapable*, 93, 95). Beyond this concern for Scudamour and Amoret's relationship, however, we should notice that only by canceling the hermaphroditic embrace between Scudamour and the freed Amoret can the poem emphasize just how thoroughly both Britomart and Amoret have ignored Busyrane's warning that they stay apart. By canceling the hermaphrodite, the poem not only gives these two women an additional quest, it gives them a quest together, as friends. The distance between "Amoret" as the sign of Scudamour's proprietary loss in Book III and "Amoret" as the sign to Belphoebe of Timias's lust in Book IV constitutes a space for feminine desire, in which Amoret and Britomart may "wend at will" just as Scudamour does, and

without his company. This is the promise – and the warning – with which the second version of Book III ends.

I am arguing that the poem's replacement of the hermaphrodite revives and extends the implications of its disapproval of Busyrane's form of seduction. Busyrane insists that Amoret confine her thoughts and speech to his claustrophobic system of meanings – and if the other demands that he makes are immoral, they nevertheless exert pressure upon his prisoner because his initial demand for her rapt attention resembles similar demands made by moral men. Whereas Busyrane plies his arts to confine a woman, Barnabe Riche (whom I quote in my first epigraph for this chapter) claims it is men whose freedom of intellectual movement love curtails. These seemingly opposite arguments complement rather than cancel each other: "In loue, what seeth the eie? lasciuiousnes; what heareth the eare? lasciuiousnesse; what vttereth the tongue? lasciuiousnesse; what thinketh the heart? lasciuiousnesse; what in[c]ureth the bodie? lasciuiousnesse" (*Favltes Favlts*, 20v). For Riche, the male lover's senses do not serve as windows to the world but as claustrophobic walls. The only thing a man in love can apprehend is lasciviousness – which is to say, woman, since the surrounding text makes it clear that love's contamination proceeds from her innate impurity rather than simply from the impropriety of a particular relationship. We could pronounce Riche's cultural anatomy a rationalization, a blind for the social fact that it was women rather than men who were exhorted to confine their thoughts and speech to what the opposite sex wanted of them. On the other hand, Riche's rationalization is precisely the sort of discourse that reifies itself. Undoubtedly, men could and did sometimes feel claustrophobic in the presence of their own erotic responses to women. Spenser addresses this phenomenon early on: Red Crosse breaks out of *The Faerie Queene's* first canto by charging from Archimago's little hermitage into the open air, terrified by a conviction that Una has begun to wander sexually. In Book II, Phædrria, whose lack of moral purpose achieves a sort of purity in its thoroughness, laughs when her perversely wandering boat restricts the choices open to each man who embarks with her in the mistaken belief that she will ferry him to his destination. Aside from all of the complex concerns for property and legitimate succession, an errant wife, fiancée, or daughter disconcerted a man by robbing him of a safe haven, while someone else's errant wife, fiancée, or daughter provided the same man with a false haven that turned into confinement (in the manner of Acrasian or of Circean islands). This was a zero-sum sexual economy; enlarged scope for her necessarily meant narrowed sights for him.

Both the House of Busyrane and Amoret's subsequent journey in

search of her husband, who has left in despair, problematize the complex distribution of blame and punishment that occurred in the sixteenth century whenever a wife wandered. The wronged husband deserved the shame of a cuckold's horns because he was assumed to have given too little correction to his wife, leaving her too much to her own devices. He was culpable precisely because every woman left unsupervised was considered perilously on the verge of becoming morally wayward.⁸ Yet the requirement that women remain sexually constant – immovably fixed – was irreconcilable with the requirement that they always adapt to masculine social and literary structures. (As Peter Stallybrass points out, Othello takes Desdemona's submission of her own opinions to his as proof of her inconstancy; Othello tells Lodovico, "Sir, she can turn, and turn; and yet go on / And turn again . . .": *Oth.*, IV.i. 4.1.253–254; "Patriarchal Territories," 137). Britomart must wander to find Artegall, and Amoret, to find Scudamour, but their wandering exposes them to lustful men. When Scudamour and Amoret are separated in an unfamiliar territory, she becomes the stray by definition – but this condition also makes her the one who must adapt quickly if she wishes to remain "perfect hole" (III.xii.38).

Obviously, a woman's ability to adapt herself to the men around her would have dubious social value when it extended to her evil abductor, whatever his prerogatives as a man. Curiously enough, *The Faerie Queene* experiments with this ambiguity most explicitly in a passage that involves only women. I am thinking of the beginning of Book IV, where Amoret does not yet realize that her flirtatious rescuer is female. Amoret trembles:

For well she wist, as true it was indeed,
 That her liues Lord and patrone of her health
 Right well deserued as his duefull meed,
 Her loue, her seruice, and her vtmost wealth.
 All is his iustly, that all freely death:
 Nathlesse her honor dearer then her life,
 She sought to saue, as thing reseru'd from stealth;
 Die had she leuer with Enchanters knife,
 Then to be false in loue, profest a virgine wife.

. . .

His will she feard; for him she surely thought
 To be a man, such as indeed he seemed,
 And much the more, by that he lately wrought,
 When her from deadly thraldome he redeemed,
 For which no seruice she too much esteemed,
 Yet dread of shame, and doubt of fowle dishonor
 Made her not yeeld so much, as due she deemed.

(IV.i.6–8)

Within the story, Britomart's duplicity reflects a careful stratagem – albeit one that manipulates Amoret cruelly – since Britomart believes that her male disguise will make her and her timid charge appear less vulnerable to outsiders. What Amoret doesn't know, she can't betray to anyone else. At the same time, however, Britomart's armor allows this passage to do double service as a commentary on the relationships between the sexes by converting some of our laughter at the transvestite comedy into a sense of irony about glitches in the patriarchal system. Here, as in the original conclusion for Book III, Amoret acts in dutiful accordance with cultural expectations pressing upon her from two sides: she should be resolutely self-contained; she should be pliantly grateful. (The final two lines of stanza 8 do not say that “doubt of fowle dishonor / Made her not yeeld so much, as due *he* deemed.”) In Book III, Amoret's positive and negative obligations are divided between two male characters – Busyrane and Scudamour – who merge into each other allegorically only when it suits our particular critical agendas for them to do so. Amoret's momentary uneasiness with Britomart here in Book IV clearly tags these competing obligations as a cultural paradox: the notion that every man of miscellaneous goodness who saves a woman from torture “right well deserue[s] as his duefull meed, / Her loue, her seruice, and her vtmost wealth” cannot seem anything but misguided in this comedic context; by indicating that strong bonds do not assure sexual parity, the poem tacitly underscores its mistrust of the absolute fusion represented earlier by the hermaphrodite (IV.i.6).

At the end of the second book of *Il Cortegiano*, when Castiglione's female characters rebel against several disparaging remarks made about women, they call upon a sympathetic man, Lord Julian, to defend them. In Sir Thomas Hoby's 1561 translation, Lady Emilia teases Julian, “You are counted the protector of the honour of women, therefore it is now high time to shew that you come not by this name for nothing, and . . . now must you thinke that in putting to flight so bitter an enemie, you shall binde all women to you much more, and so much, that where they shall doe nothing els but reward you, yet shall the bondage still remaine fresh, and never cease to be recompensed.” A few moments later, she declares roguishly that women are not only as virtuous as men but “a great deale more, and that it is so, ye may see, vertue is the female, and vice the male” (Castiglione, *Courtier*, 182–183). Yet her humor has already undercut itself in the subtext of her first request, which amounts to a promise that Julian's defense of the ladies' virtue will prompt them to give it to him. As with Spenser's hermaphrodite, the metaphor of emotional and social bonding points toward a metaphor of emotional and social bondage.⁹

If we collapse the commentary on women's friendships implicit in Amoret and Britomart's story (where Britomart must protect the two of them from possible marauders by pretending to be male) with the story's commentary on heterosexual relationships (where Britomart represents actual men), we arrive at a third reading: if women's unavoidable inconstancy exposes them to lustful or otherwise demanding men, it also may expose them to other women. This possibility often generates anxiety in Renaissance texts, bound up as it is with the suspicion that women's friendships may supply goods and services over and above those supplied by husbands or lovers.¹⁰ Without registering much anxiety at this point, however, Spenser's text heads directly toward this question of what one woman renders another. The two stanzas quoted above, in which Amoret tries to render the same service to her male rescuer that she withholds from him, enclose a stanza about the way that Amoret's serviceable nature allows her rescuer to bait her:

Thereto her feare was made so much the greater
 Through fine abusion of that Briton mayd:
 Who for to hide her fained sex the better,
 And maske her wounded mind, both did and sayd
 Full many things so doubtfull to be wayd,
 That well she wist not what by them to gesse,
 For other whiles to her she purpos made
 Of loue, and otherwhiles of lustfulnesse,
 That much she feard his mind would grow to some excesse. (IV.i.7)

Nothing in Britomart's history of comical aggression toward strange knights (as when she and Paridell crash like bump-cars in Book III) has quite prepared us for her infliction of gratuitous anxiety upon a waif who cannot defend herself. The motives we are given for Britomart's teasing are that she wishes both "to hide her fained sex" and to "maske her wounded mind." The first motive constitutes a strategy; the second hints at a poorly rationalized sadism. Yet each of these phrases encloses two opposing ideas. In Spenser's grammar, where two negatives make a deeper negative and where redundant intensifiers – "fowle euill," "greedy *Auarice*," "equall peares" – defy our accusations of superfluity, hiding one's fained sex means that one does an awfully good job of hiding it. But of course the phrase also means, illogically, that Britomart manages to hide her pretense of being male. And if she "maske[s]" her painfully frustrated desires the way that Busyrane masques his, she is not concealing but displaying, putting on a show of signs meant to be deciphered. (Remember that in Busyrane's house, the "wounded mind" is Amoret's, masqued publicly as a heart in a silver basin.) These two phrases' duplicity about Britomart's duplicity suggests that her flirtation is more

than just a private antidote for tedium and that she halfway intends Amoret to guess what her armor hides. If Amoret hesitates in the face of this riddle, still believing in her rescuer's specifically masculine seductiveness, our own partiality for the other half of the answer (that this knight is really a woman who flirts only in order to feign) may excuse her.

But Britomart dallies more with Amoret than she ever does with Artegall, and it is tempting to say that at this stage of the game, she mostly feigns in order to flirt. By keeping her helmet on, Britomart can afford to raise the dialogue to a higher erotic pitch, engaging in a closer intimacy than would otherwise be allowable. (One thinks of that valentine with Mary Raphael's painting.) Although the text thereby betrays a male fascination with eroticism between women, it also demonstrates concern for the two characters and an unwillingness to carry its farcical use of them beyond a certain point. Britomart's public unhelmeting when she and Amoret do reach a castle transfers the humor of Amoret's nervous sense that her rescuer's conversation is "doubtfull to be wayd" onto lords and ladies who can hardly believe their eyes when a fierce knight turns out to have floor-length tresses: "All were with amazement smit, / And euey one gan grow in secret dout / Of this and that, according to each wit" (IV.i.14). Her traveling companion's vast relief at this new turn of events could have been treated comically but is not:

And eke fayre *Amoret* now freed from feare,
 More franke affection did to her afford,
 And to her bed, which she was wont forbear,
 Now freely drew, and found right safe assurance there.

Where all that night they of their loues did treat,
 And hard aduentures twixt themselues alone,
 That each the other gan with passion great,
 And griefull pittie priuately bemone. (IV.i.15–16)

These stanzas have an erotic subtext; the double entendres of "passion," "bemone," and "hard aduentures" reinforce one's initial sense that the phrase "their loues" not only points outward to two male objects but encloses a more private exchange between the two women. They speak "twixt themselues alone" of their previous "hard aduentures," while at the same time, they speak of "hard aduentures" that happen "twixt themselues alone."¹¹

Like the water that half-covers Sir Guyon's dripping bathers in Book II, this enclosure may titillate outsiders, but because Book III has already given us an investment in Britomart's and Amoret's individual griefs, the stanzas above do not request primarily that we "see and know, and yet abstain."¹² Instead, we are asked to see, know, and sympathize – perhaps

even to envy this friendship which provides such a telling commentary on Book IV. Stanza 16 shows both the narrator's indulgence and something like respect in refraining from laying the two women's conversation bare to us. It may seem as though Spenser has repeated the time-honored riddle about what women discuss when men aren't around (of which the time-honored answer is, "As it happens, thank god, they always talk about us"), except that the imprecision of "their loues" allows eavesdroppers no assured answer.¹³

These two women do find "right safe assurance" with each other, banishing their own doubts precisely at the moment when ours enter. It is wonderfully puzzling that the one happy bed scene in the whole poem appears here. This is the closest *The Faerie Queene* gets to the *Epithalamion*'s joyful nocturnal union of two heretofore separate persons, and because Spenser refers to Britomart and Amoret indistinguishably in the stanza describing their nocturnal conversation, the absence of mastery that the *Epithalamion* both asserts and undercuts seems here in Book IV actually a present condition for one night. While the text declares literally that each of the women longs to complete herself in her absent mate, the subtext at least momentarily believes in the self-sufficiency of their interaction with each other.

This interaction moves out of its safe enclosure the next day when Britomart and Amoret meet Blandamour, whose name "descrie[s] / His fickle mind full of inconstancie," as if to heighten by contrast the example of female constancy that the poem has just shown us (IV.i.32). As soon as Blandamour spies the two women, naturally believing one a "knight aduenturous" and the other "his faire paragon, his conquests part," his immediate reaction is to attempt to steal the strange knight's lady. Britomart has other ideas:

The warlike Britonesse her soone adrest,
 And with such vncouth welcome did receave
 Her fayned Paramour, her forced guest,
 That being forst his saddle soone to leaue,
 Him selfe he did of his new loue deceaue. (IV.i.36)

"Her fayned Paramour" and "his new loue" ought to refer to the same ironically frustrated relationship, but they do not. Blandamour sees in Britomart only an armored knight; if he had won the joust, "his new loue" would have been Amoret.¹⁴ The humor of Spenser's reference to Britomart's "fayned Paramour" depends upon our knowing, as Britomart and Amoret do, that both of them are equally appropriate targets for Blandamour's lust – and equally inappropriate, of course. And so when they gallop off, the man who has crassly attempted interference lies

in the dust, “Well warned to beware with whom he dar’d to dallie” (IV.i.36). Just who *is* “whom,” anyway? Given the slippage inherent in Spenser’s word “dallie” (which wanders uncontrollably between eroticism and violence, perhaps translated most aptly in our phrase “mess around with”), and given the skirmish of grammatical references in previous lines, this “whom” means both women. Blandamour would separate them by distinctions of gender; they demur.

Although the relationships that develop between women and men in this poem do not prohibit friendships among men, they often exclude or put pressure on those among women. Yet the authorial voice that asks us to take pleasure in Britomart and Amoret’s exchange of confidences clearly is not asking us to believe along with Barnabe Riche that one can tell a strumpet by her multitude of friends. Granted, Spenser does not argue coherently against this position, and in fact, he provides much support for it in characters such as Duessa and Ate, or Serena (who meets a rapist when she wanders away from Calepine in search of flowers). I suggest that it is precisely because of the overwhelmingly negative cultural pressure upon women’s friendships – superadded to the pressure of romance narrative structure, which tends to deflect and defer the desires of both sexes – that the few female alliances allowed in the poem take on such importance. While some of the poem’s voices attempt to circumscribe or constrict relationships among women, other narrative voices seem on the point of acknowledging that these socially marginal alliances provide the poem with a kind of energy found nowhere else.

Blandamour’s divisive and coercive impulses resurface so often in other men who meet the two women that these male characters begin to reflect badly upon the whole patriarchal enterprise (an enterprise conscientiously promoted by much of the rest of the poem). After having disarmed Blandamour, Britomart and Amoret next appear at the tournament for the False Florimell, another exercise in the acquisition of female property. Humorously enough, Britomart wins the prize, but she does not explain her refusal to accept the False Florimell by unhelmeting and revealing her own sex, as on other occasions. Nor does the narrator give the explanation for her. Instead, we are asked to compare the admirable nature of her and Amoret’s existing relationship to what *would* be the questionable nature of the False Florimell’s relationship to any of the knights who have jousting for her, including some of the poem’s most illustrious heroes:

Britomart would not thereto assent,
 Ne her owne *Amoret* forgoe so light
 For that strange Dame, whose beauties wonderment
 She lesse esteem’d, then th’others vertuous government. (IV.v.20)

The critique of the traffic in female property takes another turn when Satyrane decides to let the False Florimell choose her own mate. His method is not to ask her preferences but to set her in the middle of a circle of men in order to observe “to whom she voluntarie came” (IV.v.25). These are the tactics we use with puppies or small children when we ourselves are feeling childish enough to want to know their favorites. Childishly, then, the False Florimell moves “of her accord” to the buffoon Braggadochio. General indignation takes the field, and when Braggadochio removes himself and his prize that night by stealth, all of the men trot off in droll pursuit. Britomart remains behind with “*Amoret*, companion of her care” (IV.v.30).

Before Britomart reappears in the following canto, her relationship with Amoret has already brewed further discord, as we learn when Artegall and Scudamour meet companionably “vnder a forrest side” to swap grudges (IV.vi.2). Artegall, who has no idea that his destiny is to marry the strange knight who unseated him at the tournament, feels bitter over having been deprived of his chance to win the False Florimell. The stranger, he says, “hauing me all wearie earst, downe feld, / The fayrest Ladie reft, and euer since withheld” (IV.vi.6). Meanwhile, Scudamour has been tricked by Ate into believing that this same unknown knight, who rescued his bride from Busyrane’s house, has been having an affair with her ever since. Though we know he is wrong about the affair, one of Britomart’s functions in the poem is in fact to withhold female prizes the way some of Spenser’s women withhold sexual favors; it is her aggressive substitute for coyness. And so the two men have reason to grumble:

Whiles thus they communed, lo farre away
 A Knight soft ryding towards them they spyde,
 Attyr’d in forraine armes and straunge aray:
 Whom when they nigh approcht, they plaine descryde
 To be the same, for whom they did abyde. (IV.vi.9)

Plainly, “communed” means “conversed,” but when Britomart sends both Scudamour and his horse to the ground in the following stanza, the narrator’s wry observation that “neither [man nor horse] greatly hasted to arise, / But on their common harmes together did deuisse” (IV.vi.10) links the men’s conversation with the holding of certain experiences and attitudes in common (at the same time that it establishes community between a man and the beast who serves him). Artegall and Scudamour’s version of community centers upon their “common harmes,” while their anger brings them together precisely because they know that they do not hold *things* in common. Britomart, their common enemy, is the one who has perversely drawn their female property back into circulation.

I would argue, then, that Britomart's tenacious refusal to "forgo" Amoret "so light" bears only superficial resemblance to the male knights' attempts to keep hold of female property, and that by the same token, Britomart and Amoret's wandering in each other's company while searching for their lovers bears only superficial resemblance to the knightly rush for Florimell's look-alike. Spenser sets the stage for the latter contrast in his argument for this same canto, which has to be one of the funniest and most profound moments in the poem: "Both Scudamour and Arthegall / Doe fight with Britomart, / He sees her face; doth fall in loue, / and soone from her depart" (IV.vi.arg.).

Despite Britomart's tenacity, however, Amoret goes "astray" while her friend lies sleeping outdoors (IV.vi.36). Carelessness on Britomart's part? Perhaps so, since Spenser often uses naps to represent the temptation to let down one's guard. But if we move from the chronology of the plot to the order of the poem, we see that the more immediate reason for us to read in stanza 36 about Amoret's straying is that in stanzas 20 through 33 Britomart and Artegall have seen each other without armor for the first time and have fallen in love. If the plot does not directly say that this heterosexual union will put extra pressure upon the two women's story, the poem's ordering does suggest such a possibility. Squeezed between the stanzas in which Britomart tells of Amoret's earlier disappearance and those in which she and Artegall first become allies are two stanzas that take one last look at the odd negotiations the two women have been making with the world's view of them: in stanza 34, Scudamour interrupts Britomart's and Artegall's pleasurably embarrassed murmurs because of his own, less pleasant anxieties about his absent bride. Obviously, Amoret cannot have been having an affair with this strange knight, after all, given that the knight has turned out to be a maiden. But where *is* Amoret, if not in this knight's arms? Confused and unhappy, but polite, Scudamour begins his request for an explanation from the golden-haired Britomart, "But Sir . . ." (IV.vi.34).¹⁵ In the following stanza, Britomart herself inscribes a kind of epitaph upon the monument of her and Amoret's friendship: "Ne euer was there wight to me more deare / Then she, ne vnto whom I more true loue did beare" (IV.vi.35). There is not room among the living for this "true loue" and Artegall, too.

The coincidence of Scudamour's confused perception of Britomart's gender (even as he clearly perceives her actual sex) and Britomart's declaration of love for Amoret in the same passage in which the poem supplants Amoret with Artegall may throw some light on the Cave of Lust, which is where Amoret lies at this narrative moment. But my metaphor is misleading, because I do not propose to light up the Cave's

dark interior, only to point out its obscure internal contradictions: first, although the monster Lust is extravagantly male, Amoret loses herself to Lust – becomes lustful – while in the company of the sleeping Britomart. Second, unlike the House of Busyrane, the Cave of Lust enacts the opposite of violation’s wound, when the darkness enables Amoret and Æmylia to develop a sense of community by emptying out their painful life stories. The cave protects these women’s intimate conversation even as it imprisons their bodies.

“Community” may seem a broad label for just two people, but of course there is a third prisoner in the cave, to whom Æmylia owes her life. We learn of this debt when Amoret asks Æmylia about survival:

Thy ruefull plight I pittie as mine owne.
 But read to me, by what deuse or wit,
 Hast thou in all this time, from him vnknowne
 Thine honor sau’d, though into thraldome throwne.
 Through helpe (quoth she) of this old woman here
 I haue so done, as she to me hath showne.
 For euer when he burnt in lustfull fire,
 She in my stead supplide his bestiall desire. (IV.vii.19)

The old woman who supplies her own body appears genuinely selfless here; if we follow the allegory, we may conclude that lust as well as Lust acts upon this unnamed woman, but the stanza’s tone and the narrative situation give more occasion for our admiration than for our censure. Æmylia expresses gratitude for help rather than horror at the woman’s wickedness, and the “lustfull fire” and “bestiall desire” are “his.”

After Amoret escapes, Belphebe peers into the cave’s shadows to ask who remains. With eerie sparseness, Spenser tells us that she sees nothing and hears only “some litle whispering, and soft groning sound” (IV.vii.33). Grievs shared within the cave have prepared us for pathos here, but the light of moral day requires that our sympathy make distinctions among women:

Then forth the sad Æmylia issewed,
 Yet trembling euery ioynt through former feare;
 And after her the Hag, there with her mewed,
 A foule and lothsome creature did appeare;
 A leman fit for such a louer deare.
 That mou’d *Belphebe* her no lesse to hate,
 Then for to rue the others heauy cheare. (IV.vii.34)

As long as the women remained inside Lust’s cave, the poem asked us to sympathize with their fear of male invasion from without. Now, however, when the cave empties itself out, a female character absorbs

and re-emits that element of threat. Daylight transforms the unnamed “old woman” into a “Hag” who incurs both Belphoebe’s and the narrator’s contempt. The burden of disgust has moved from a male rapist to one of his captives. No one defends her; the poem does not refer to her again.

Just what distinguishes the old woman’s surrender of her body in the cave from Amoret’s self-“ouersight” in worrying about a stranger’s sobs – or from Æmylia’s own captivity to Lust? Daylight declares our questions moot by bidding us to believe its loathsome picture of the old woman’s true nature and to compare this picture with Æmylia’s purity. Yet Æmylia and Amoret emerge from the cave’s immoral influences into a confusingly immoral world, where dashing young rescuers give sexual wounds and then more or less accidentally leave their rescued maidens to famish, as Timias does.

The relationships constructed by women who are hedged with threats of violence – Britomart and Amoret, Amoret and Æmylia, Æmylia and the old woman – differ markedly from Amoret’s relationships with men after her rescue, and Spenser takes pains to underscore the difference. After Arthur has cured Amoret’s wounds with herbs and restored Æmylia to her lover, he escorts Amoret onward in search of her husband. At this point, the poem carefully echoes and intensifies its earlier account of Amoret’s discomfort at finding herself alone with a knight who might, within the poem’s terms, justly claim a debt of gratitude from her:

But now in feare of shame she more did stond,
 Seeing her selfe all soly succourlesse,
 Left in the victors powre, like vassall bond;
 Whose will her weakenesse could no way repressse,
 In case his burning lust should breake into excesse. (IV.ix.18)

As with Britomart in canto i, here Amoret remains unknowingly safe in Arthur’s care, and as earlier, the protector with whom she travels has a romantic quest of his own. There is just one difference:

Thus many miles they two together wore,
 To seeke their loues dispersed diuersly,
 Yet neither shewed to other their hearts priuity. (IV.ix.19)

Whereas Britomart and Amoret break their silence and soon become close confidantes when Britomart takes off her helmet, good breeding will not allow Arthur and Amoret to speak more than a few courteous words while circumstances dictate that they sit closely together on a horse. Or rather, Spenser calls good breeding to mind here, though he chooses not to do so in other outwardly similar situations.

The phrase “Yet neither shewed to other their hearts priuity” retroactively deepens the value of that earlier relationship with Britomart. It also retroactively makes Amoret’s and Æmylia’s mingled, shadowy voices all the more important in that their tenuous response to divisive violence has given the poem a means of questioning the restrictions placed upon women’s public – and private – expression. In fact, the statement that neither Arthur nor his charge “shewed to other their hearts priuity” marks the end of Amoret’s conversations in the entire poem, since this is the last line that brings her before our eyes. From here on, she remains silent and invisible, existing only in the mouths of other characters, who refer to her as if she were present but who never speak directly to her. In one sense, a chaste woman’s silence can never be mysterious, since it is so completely expected, but Spenserian critics have long felt the necessity of imagining a lost or unwritten interpolation that would cancel the narrator’s silence on the subject of Arthur’s merely implicit presentation of Amoret to her voluble husband. (See IV.ix.38–41, where a stanza could be inserted.)

After Book IV sets up a reunion between Scudamour and his bride, it inexplicably replaces the bride’s presence with the bridegroom’s story of their courtship.¹⁶ To paraphrase Æmylia’s warning in the cave, the text apparently forgets Amoret’s self to mind another. But the oddest maneuver of all in the silent presentation of the bride is simply that Scudamour does not refuse to take Amoret back. After all of her wandering and sexual wounding, she remains unproblematically blameless when she comes home to the husband whom she left on their wedding day. Scudamour need not swallow his pride or debate whether to strangle his wife in her bed, because in his account, she is still a virgin. I propose that we consider Amoret’s silence in the face of Scudamour’s story about her chastity and his loss of it a type of resistance – not so much from a female character to a male one as from one of the poem’s narrative voices to another. If Scudamour attempts through his oral reminiscences to reconstitute Amoret as the perfectly whole sign of his proprietary loss, crying up her value within a masculine system of meanings, then rather than interpreting her failure to reappear as her own loss of self, we can read her absence as a successful resistance to mere contextualization. The coercion of discourse joins that of desire here, and if we read this scene back into the passage about Lust’s cave, the masculine forces just outside the cave’s entrance pose semantic dangers as well as sexual ones. Within the story, of course, Amoret does want to return to her heterosexual context. Nevertheless, Spenser renders the cave’s interior perfectly ambiguous for the poem’s own set of desires. Just as a wife’s body is and is not her own territory, the cave is and is not woman’s context.

So it is with Amoret's body. Because Scudamour, Busyrane, Lust, and Timias are in one sense representations of the same person, Amoret's wounds become various representations of one attempt to possess her. Thus the continual retelling of Amoret's violation and reconstitution of virginity places the story of her wandering into other women's arms both before and after that of her rape, effectively allowing her straying from Scudamour not only to invite the damage that men do to her – as the traditional moral would run – but also to cure it. Nor does her husband repossess her healed body.

Even well-educated Englishwomen of the Renaissance tended to believe much of what they were told about their need for masculine protection in view of the intellectual and physical weakness of their own sex; nevertheless, their diaries, letters, and published writings give little indication of their accepting the charge of inconstancy that men routinely leveled against them. Some writers questioned the Petrarchism of previous decades for having attempted to ascertain women's interior constancy and purity by deciphering arbitrary emblems: white hands, starry eyes, golden hair.¹⁷ One of Petrarch's most devoted followers in *The Faerie Queene* is the enchanter Busyrane, who surrounds himself and his prisoner with emblems of cruel inconstancy that carry no less power for all their unpleasantness. Busyrane misreads Amoret as someone susceptible to his rewriting, someone whose heart's blood he can make into his ink. I would argue that Spenser counteracts Busyrane's authorial misreading not so much by providing correct readings elsewhere in the poem as by testing the limits of women's power to resist the standard definitions that would bond them always to men.

What does this say about Spenser's relationship to his chief reader, a female prince? In response to recent critics' tendency to emphasize Elizabeth Tudor's participation in an androcentric social order, Philippa Berry argues that the courtly cult of Elizabeth often represents Elizabeth as a Diana surrounded by women, or as an inaccessible, feminine moon. "In order to understand her contradictory historical position *as a woman*," Berry writes, "we have to consider the potentially subversive representation of Elizabeth as a Petrarchan or neoplatonic beloved who also had both worldly and spiritual power" (*Chastity and Power*, 5). Berry goes on to speculate that although Spenser begins his career by praising the cult of Elizabeth in the *Shepherdess Calender*, where Eliza is a shepherdess queen among shepherdesses, the final books of *The Faerie Queene* testify to Spenser's growing dissatisfaction with the courtly cult. Yet although I agree with Berry that Spenser begins to decenter Elizabeth as his epic progresses, it does not therefore follow that he represents all feminine power as becoming progressively weaker. On the contrary,

some of the voices in his poem turn toward another sort of femininity – a femininity just as secretive as the Eliza of the cult, but far less committed to the masculine good. If Elizabeth's male courtiers and poets feel sometimes barred from the feminine interior of her circle of power, they can nevertheless participate by declaring themselves her servants and her body politic. But Amoret is not the politically powerful queen, nor is she the Petrarchan mistress whom Scudamour paints when he narrates the story of the day he stole Amoret from Venus's temple. She is, finally, no one to whom any man can bond himself.

In this way, *The Faerie Queene* puts itself in the delicate position of sympathizing with a type of feminine error that does not always benefit men. Spenser differs from more single-minded moralists of his day in the degree to which he opens his text to the very powers that threaten it – specifically to a female world not entirely controlled by male expectations. Doing this, he allows women's alliances to trouble some of the poem's most resolutely trod paths, including those that lead toward matrimony and a propertied empire, yet these glimpses from inside the female world continue to gain poetic strength after various other motivating energies of the poem have dissipated. It is true that Amoret resembles Plato's Diotima in her ability to confer poetic power. Yet Amoret's silent disappearance differs from that of Diotima in that Spenser's text, unlike Plato's, registers its own inability to speak for the woman who has vanished.

In 1615, Joseph Swetnam warned “vnmarried wantons” that their waywardness had made them lose their very identities, leaving them without definition: “You have . . . made yourselves neither maidens, widows, nor wives” (*Araignment*, 204). Two years later, the pseudonymous Ester Sowernam retaliated with a pamphlet on the title-page of which she described herself, with an air of defiant mystery, as “neither Maide, Wife nor Widdowe, yet really all, and therefore experienced to defend all.” Amoret – who leaves her husband's side before they have consummated their marriage, undergoes a series of rapes that leave her “perfect hole,” and bereaves Scudamour at the very moment of their reunion – is unreasonably neither maid, wife, nor widow. Yet she is really all, and therefore experienced to defend her particular brand of evasion and error.

2 “Newes of devils”: feminine sprights in masculine minds

In one of *The Faerie Queene*'s most relentlessly allegorical passages, Spenser dissects the castle that belongs to a woman named Alma, revealing to us piece by piece the anatomy of its architecture. Its rooms are organs; its daily occupations are those of digestion and elimination; its thrifty housewife is the soul. The poem's speaker takes pains to distinguish intemperate bodies from this exemplary one:

What warre so cruell, or what sieg so sore,
As that, which strong affections do apply
Against the fort of reason euermore
To bring the soule into captiuitie.

. . .

But in a body, which doth freely yeeld
His partes to reasons rule obedient,
And letteth her that ought the scepter weeld,
All happy peace and goodly gouernment
Is settled there in sure establishment . . .

(II.xi.1–2)

Yet this seemingly well-bounded allegory, at times almost clunky in its demands for an obvious reading, turns out to provide an imperfect container for the imaginative faculty: a servant named Phantastes allows his visions, which prove to be characteristically feminine, to cross and recross the body's proper outlines. I will argue that by conceiving the human imagination in gendered terms, Spenser ends up rearranging the architecture of the self. Although readers of *The Faerie Queene* have often felt that the poet is suspicious of the imagination, Spenser uses gender to confuse the issue of “good” versus “bad” forms of imagination and then – startlingly – goes out of his way to privilege this self-confusion. One way of looking at the Alma passage would be to say that it attempts to smooth over the religious or moral implications of the poet's own attachment to illusory products of the human mind. Yet the episode's dalliance with the *social* implications of a gendered imagination allows us to read the self-contradictions of Spenserian allegory neither as

differences calling for resolution nor as endless repetitions of failure but as a culturally significant flexibility.

News of devils

Instead of beginning with Spenserian allegory, however, I will begin with Elizabethan lyric, which concerns itself more compactly with the relationship of gender to the imagination. The speaker of Sidney's Sonnet 38 describes a dream in which he imagines that the woman whom he cannot possess during his waking hours has actually come to him:

This night while sleepe begins with heavy wings
 To hatch mine eyes, and that unbitted thought
 Doth fall to stray, and my chiefe powres are brought
 To leave the scepter of all subject things,
 The first that straight my fancie's error brings
 Unto my mind, is *Stella's* image, wrought
 By *Love's* owne selfe, but with so curious drought,
 That she, me thinks, not onely shines but sings.
 I start, looke, hearke, but what in closde up sence
 Was held, in opend sence it flies away,
 Leaving me nought but wailing eloquence:
 I, seeing better sights in sight's decay,
 Cald it anew, and wooed sleepe againe:
 But him her host that unkind guest had slaine. (*Astrophil and Stella* 38)

When *Astrophil* opens his eyes, the lovely contents of his brain leak out – but he cannot go back to sleep, because *Stella's* image has murdered sleep. All the same, the “wailing eloquence” with which *Astrophil* is left serves less as an unhappy compensation for the “nought” that remains of *Stella* than as a poetically fortunate fulfillment of it, and although *Astrophil's* declaration that he sees “better sights in sight's decay” ostensibly means only that the dream held within his mind pleases him more than the empty room he finds upon waking, the phrase also hints jokingly that even if *Stella* herself were to walk into his bedchamber, he would prefer to possess her empty but well-wrought image.

We can situate this sonnet within a whole tradition of Petrarchan lyrics that tell of speakers' crestfallen realization, upon awaking, that the beloved's presence was only a dream. Poems such as Wyatt's “Unstable dreame according to the place,” Donne's tenth elegy, and Shakespeare's “Weary with toyle, I hast me to my bed” imbue the mind's images with neoplatonic eroticism, so that despite or perhaps because of the disappointment that the speaker feels upon waking, his dreams receive both his and our central interest. (As Anthony Low observes, we like *Astrophil*

and *Stella* partly because Astrophil's futile longing so closely resembles our postmodern ideas of endless deferral; see *Reinvention of Love*, 28.) It is the images within the dreamer's head, rather than the beloved person's body out in the room, that provide true representations of ideal beauty. Shakespeare's sonnet "When most I wink, then do my eyes best see" ends by declaring that nights are "bright days when dreams do show thee me." The last three words mean "show thee to me," but they also carry the sense, "show thee to *be* me."

This Petrarchan tradition undercuts itself with irony at every turn, as when Shakespeare rearranges the Petrarchan sexual politics by addressing his sonnets to a man, but the various poets' irony does not necessarily mean that their poems somehow actually value flesh-and-blood lovers over the products of the human imagination. The sonneteers take their cue not only from Plato's images but also from Pygmalion's less philosophical fantasies. Ovid tells us that because Pygmalion didn't dare ask the gods for his ivory maiden as a wife, he asked for the next best thing: a wife *like* his ivory maiden ("eburnea virgo" versus "similis mea . . . eburnae"; *Met.*, X.275–276). In other words, Pygmalion prefers an animated ivory to a real woman, no matter how ivory-like that woman's skin. In fact, one could say that there is no physiological difference between a breathing *eburnea virgo* and a breathing maiden *similis eburnae*, just the difference of who has created her. It is precisely this etiological difference (rather than sexual otherness, for example) that excites Pygmalion.

Into this tradition steps Fulke Greville. His night sonnet from the sequence *Caelica* doesn't mention love or a mistress, doesn't seem even vaguely gendered, and certainly doesn't idealize the mind's productions. He describes the way that a diseased imagination can produce delusions in dreams or in the dark:

In Night when colours all to blacke are cast,
 Distinction lost, or gone downe with the light;
 The eye a watch to inward senses plac'd,
 Not seeing, yet still having power of sight,
 Gives vaine *Alarums* to the inward sense,
 Where feare stirr'd up with witty tyranny,
 Confounds all powers, and thorough selfe-offence,
 Doth forge and raise impossibility:
 Such as in thicke depriving darkenesse,
 Proper reflections of the error be,
 And images of selfe-confusednesse,
 Which hurt imaginations onely see;
 And from this nothing seene, tels newes of devils,
 Which but expressions be of inward evils.

(*Caelica* 100)¹

Greville's dreamer empties his own emptiness onto a landscape of shadows. From this external vantage point, the projected nothings stare back at their maker's clouded eyes, in a sterile parody of Petrarchan lovers who beget "babies" within their mutually reflecting gazes. Although it is true that Greville avoids erotic language here, apparently fixing our whole attention upon moral philosophy, this sonnet does appear in a sequence devoted to the praise of Caelica. Even more importantly, this poem nods silently but unmistakably to a whole community of dream sonnets by previous authors, including his friend Sidney. Because virtually all of these other sonnets are overtly gendered, we cannot call this one ungendered even though it contains no sexual references, no proper names, and indeed no personal pronouns. (In other words, it is gendered by virtue of the "Don't think of elephants" principle.)

Greville's poem generates its charge of excitement by deforming the difference between maker and work of art – between the mind and the images it contains – which is a difference that other poets have already eroticized. Greville's warning about "expressions of inward evils" sends a shudder of recognition between the creating subject and its created object, in a "depriving" darkness where the eye's ability to judge colors is not the only "Distinction lost." If we read Greville's poem as a serious parody of sonnets like Sidney's, we can conclude that here the elusive mistress who cannot be tamed even by what Sidney calls "closde up sence" becomes delusion itself, and a devil; her mock-murder of Sleep, who had been her host, reshapes itself into a fearfully serious invasion of her lover's mind.²

Yet Greville's poem is not so much an aberration from the sonnet tradition as it is a recognition of the weirdness already in the culture's idea of what it means to be a poet. The dreamers of both Sidney's and Greville's sonnets are subjected to images they cannot control, but Greville argues further that this passivity really signifies a lack of self-control or self-containment, since the illusions forged by any "hurt imagination" reproduce that imagination's own error. The idea wasn't new; political and religious theorists had long held that discord from within a country or soul wrought more complete damage than that from without. However, if it is the errant mistress who manifests the dreamer's "selfe confusednesse," then this male dreamer's imaginative powers turn out to be feminine, monstrous, and delusive. The difference between Pygmalion's hands and what they have sculpted erodes in this context; when the dreamer examines himself, he sees feminine images of nothingness.

Convention might seem to drain these last two statements of significance: scholars had imported from Latin the habit of referring to the body's vital spirits by feminine pronouns, and this linguistic custom

settled well with Church theologians, who appreciated the social implications that attended their use of the feminine gender to designate human souls in their relationship to a male God. Yet no generalized convention ever completely frees itself from the particular needs to which it responds, and in order to address a few of Spenser's particular entanglements with fancy, I would like to make fancy's gendered status strange again. What does it mean when a female spright inhabits a male mind?

Letting her in

The questions that Greville's and Sidney's lyrics raise about the relationship of artistic self-containment to feminine images of confusion become generalized in *The Faerie Queene*. Although Spenser's works demonstrate a strong interest in neoplatonic images of idealized femininity within the male mind, now and then this interest makes an abrupt turn onto a more hazardous track, where feminine delusions become inextricable from poetic conception itself.

One could legitimately argue, as David Lee Miller has done in psychoanalytic terms, that Spenser reappropriates feminine procreativity for his own creative purposes, "mak[ing] the poet's mind . . . into an allegorical womb . . ." (*Two Bodies*, 241). Miller defines this reappropriation with some sympathy:

Spenser may well approach the ethical concerns of feminism as nearly as is possible for a male writer in a nondemocratic, patriarchal tradition and social order. His exploration of gender in Book III of *The Faerie Queene* sets out to redeem the impulse to mastery . . . But it does so incompletely. Male desire seeks restlessly to cross the threshold of the feminine "Other"; like allegory itself, it mingles the impulse to seek out what is mysterious with a need to domesticate it, to make otherness a medium through which sameness reconstitutes itself. (*Two Bodies*, 217)

Yet Miller's reading does not apply to some of the poem's most important crosscurrents and undertows. Although men's desire may seek to "cross the threshold of the feminine 'Other'" and to "domesticate it," such an artistic plan could be genuinely successful only if feminine desire actually were purely a male construct or, alternatively, if feminine desire in the extra-textual world actually could be kept completely at bay by the impermeable boundaries of each male-authored book. One can always return to the recontainment theory when discussing a man's artistic work – or the work of a female writer in a male culture, or the work of any writer whose culture has a patriarchal past, or the work of anyone whose culture has written its own history in patriarchal terms. But precisely because this sort of theory dusts almost every surface, it would seem

productive now and then to observe that it covers almost no surface completely. At the very least, we must ask what happens to a man's text when a woman reads it. If by reading it she helps to make it, then the recontainment of the feminine cannot be complete, since she cannot possibly read herself as purely an image of masculine desire.

We might further ask ourselves what *sort* of feminine creativity Spenser's text attempts to use in order to "reconstitute" itself and whether all of those attempts succeed in reconstituting something that we could call sameness in the poem's voice. In Chapter 1, I made the claim that although Spenser was far from being radically or systematically subversive, his poem does not always serve patriarchal interests. I argued that when *The Faerie Queene* allies itself to a creativity that it identifies as feminine, this alliance does not always constitute ventriloquism or appropriation, given that the poem seems invested in types of femininity that are genuinely dangerous. My present project is to suggest that because of these occasional alliances, we can no longer use the fact of its male authorship to justify our assumption that its speaking voice is purely masculine. Yet when I refer to the Spenserian narrator's loss of his gender's boundaries, I do not mean that something called "the feminine" cleverly triumphs over a purely masculine poet's best-laid plans, but that whereas the Spenserian narrative has an avowedly masculine set of purposes (including its speaker's control over the direction and efficacy of his textual journey), it gains a very different sort of power whenever it begins to release its grasp on the masculine "I" and to read the delusions of feminine understanding into its own most intimately enclosed spaces.

Tourism

One of *The Faerie Queene's* most famous allegorizations of the human imaginative faculty, Alma's servant named Phantastes (who sits in a chamber thronged with illusions), appears at the narrative center of an elaborate system of personal boundaries and distinctions. No reader can fail to notice that when Arthur and Guyon enter the castle walls as visitors, they find their own inner temperaments externalized and given visible forms in Alma's two ladies-in-waiting, Prays-desire and Shamefastnesse. Nor can any reader fail to notice that the passage asks us to find our own bodies opened up and displayed in every aspect of this anthropomorphized Castle of Temperance: its door clearly resembles an open mouth, its presence chamber a heart, its turret a brain, and so on. As the temperate soul who defends her body from corruption, Alma stays chastely within her castle walls, and indeed, Spenser first introduces Alma's castle as the antithesis to any "fowle and indecent" body which,

“Distempred through misrule and passions bace . . . / growes a Monster” (*FQ* II.ix.1).

Yet it is instructive to compare Alma to the chaste bride in the *Epithalamion*, of whom the groom boasts that she “suffers not one looke to glaunce awry, / Which may let in a little thought vnsownd.”³ Alma does allow her thoughts to wander outward, toward images of monsters: the grotesque and bestial ghosts led by Captain Maleger, who storm her castle gates. More importantly, whereas scholars have usually stressed the highly schematic orderliness of this episode, I will be arguing that the confusion of Alma’s fancy – its contemptible generation of images from nothing – does not confine itself to Phantastes’ small chamber in Alma’s turret-brain. If we seek to reconstitute our own forms in the mirror of Alma’s otherness, looking for reflections of ourselves in Alma’s anthropomorphized chambers, we will discover instead that her castle is a refracting glass where our likenesses break apart and recombine.

The passage that describes Alma’s castle is notoriously intricate, prompting generations of readers to try their hands at mapping out an order by matching the various features of the castle to specific features of the human body. In Spenser’s scheme, as A. C. Hamilton explains in his note to II.ix.18.1, “Alma signifies ‘the soule of man’ . . . anima, or reason . . . and hence the rational soul or Mind.”⁴ Like living persons, that is, this castle has a female soul. This in itself makes perfect sense according to Renaissance physiological theories, and critics have also looked to Renaissance physiology for help in deciphering the following lines about masculine and feminine bodily parts:

The frame thereof seemd partly circulare,
 And part triangulare, O worke diuine;
 Those two the first and last proportions are,
 The one imperfect, mortall, fæminine;
 Th’other immortall, perfect, masculine,
 And twixt them both a quadrate was the base . . . (II.ix.22)

Hamilton’s marginal note summarizing the explanations that readers have offered for this geometry takes up four hefty paragraphs; he says, in part:

The simplest physical explanation is that *circulare* refers to the head, the *quadrate* to the body, and *triangulare* to the lower body with legs astride . . . As creation imposes form upon matter, the one is *masculine* and the other *fæminine* . . . Their union illustrates the hermaphroditic state. Further, the circle and triangle refer to spirit and matter, or soul and body. The *quadrate*, a rectangle or square, is the trunk of the body. Symbolically, these three figures refer to the three souls in man: the circle to the rational soul . . . , the quadrate to the sensible, and the triangle to the vegetable.

I have no problem with this as a condensed version of what Spenser's contemporaries could have excavated from the stanza, but confusion does set in if we decide to ignore symbolism for the time being and to think of *FQ* II.ix–xi as a story about a female character named Alma. If, as Hamilton seems justified in stating, the masculine, immortal part of the castle's frame is "the rational soul," how are we to imagine Alma, whom Hamilton's earlier note tags as this same part of the soul? Is this rationality feminine or isn't it? The more closely we look at Alma, the less vividly we see her image.

The theory of hermaphroditism does not satisfactorily answer this question about Alma's sex. Spenser is perfectly capable of describing hermaphrodites, as when he introduces Dame Nature in the Cantos of Mutabilitie. Here in the cantos about Alma, *only* the stanza about triangles, circles, and quadrates (which is the stanza that has always drawn the most critical attention) uses sexual imagery in a way that suggests hermaphroditism. Otherwise, in the less abstract stanzas that carry the narrative while providing much clearer individual images, masculine and feminine identities overtake each other in succession, as if competing for ratification, rather than appearing side by side. That is, if we follow Arthur and Guyon's progress, we meet a purely feminine Alma at the gates of her castle. As the two knights enter the castle's mouth with its set of thirty-two guards, they pass beneath a mustache, "a wandring vine, / Enchaced with a wanton yuie twine" (II.ix.24). We lose sight of the male face as we move indoors; Alma's hospitality and control over her surroundings make us experience her castle once more as a woman's dwelling. In the turret of this dwelling, however, we meet three men in three chambers: Phantastes (fantasy); a second, unnamed sage (identified by some critics as Judgment); and finally Eumnestes (good memory). In other words, this female castle has a masculine mind.

Or is it a male castle with a feminine mind? Here is what Phantastes' room looks like:

His chamber was dispaigned all within,
 With sundry colours, in the which were writ
 Infinite shapes of things dispersed thin;
 Some such as in the world were neuer yit,
 Ne can deuized be of mortall wit;
 Some daily seene, and knowen by their names,
 Such as in idle fantasies doe flit:
 Infernall Hags, *Centaurs*, feendes, *Hippodames*,
 Apes, Lions, Ægles, Owles, fooles, louers, children, Dames. (II.ix.50)

Phantastes occupies himself with "all that fained is, as leasings, tales,

and lies” (stanza 51). As David Miller observes, Phantastes lacks “a principle of discrimination”; that is, nothing within the stanza tells us which of the creatures that it names are dreams and which are dreamers (*Two Bodies*, 185). More specifically, I would add, Spenser’s list fails to indicate sexual distinctions. According to a common Renaissance belief, “fooles, louers, [and] children” belong in the same category with “Dames” precisely because of the untethered nature of their thoughts. We could compare these thoughts to Amoret’s quintessentially virginal fantasies in the House of Busyrane, when that enchanter tortures her with fears of what marriage will be like:

There were full many moe like maladies,
Whose names and natures I note readen well;
So many moe, as there be phantasies
In wauering wemens wit, that none can tell . . .

(III.xii.26)

As well as fantasizing about monsters and women, then, Phantastes indulges in an essentially feminine activity when he fantasizes. Considering that the poem presents Phantastes as a generic figure who is representative of human imaginations in general, the combination of his masculine identity with this feminine activity seems pointedly problematic.

Our movement past Alma’s castle-face, through her halls, and toward the interior of her body leads us to expect some sort of narrative center – the heart of the matter. In some ways the text does provide such a centering and ordering for Arthur and Guyon: the knights meet their own characters face-to-face while flirting with Prays-desire and Shamefastnesse in Alma’s parlour-heart, and from the chronicles in Memory’s chamber they begin to understand the meaning of their own quests within a larger historical pattern. Yet although it is tempting to see Alma’s castle as a place of exemplary order, as when John Guillory argues that “Spenser is very careful to subordinate imagination to reason and memory,” this taming of the imagination by the rational powers represents only the Renaissance ideal (*Authority*, 35). Alma’s story does not fulfill that ideal, since it fails to contain Phantastes’ irrational femininity within his chamber – or, indeed, within the sober boundaries of Alma’s dwelling.⁵

As readers have noticed, Captain Maleger’s army of passions besieging the castle gates resembles Phantastes’ shifting collection of grotesques within.⁶ The “monstrous rablement” of soldiers includes shapes that we saw in Phantastes’ chamber: owls, apes, fiends (II.xi.8). Here, however, the narrator clearly identifies these shapes as the outward passions or sensory data that attack a chaste body, as in riotous living, seduction or rape. Thus, in a sense, Phantastes turns Alma’s castle inside out,

emptying Memory's chronicles of wars, as well as Arthur and Guyon's flirtation with Alma's ladies-in-waiting, onto the surrounding plain. Keeping this mingling of inner and outer in mind (as it were), we can now profitably reread the first stanza of the first canto about Alma. Even before the poem brings Arthur and Guyon to Alma's territory, it describes her castle to us as a body "kept in sober government" and asks us to contrast this "faire and excellent" body with another type of body which, "Distempred through misrule and passions bace . . . / growes a Monster, and incontinent / Doth loose his dignitie and natiue grace" (II.ix.1). The stanza ends, "Behold, who list, both one and other in this place." Hamilton glosses "one and other" as "Alma's house of temperance and Maleger," a sound enough reading. Clearly, "in this place" may mean "in this canto" or "in this geographical area." By the time we have finished the following canto, however, we can see both sober government and misrule "in this place" of Alma's body, and her imagination's misrule has grown many monsters.⁷

Phantastes' images do not simply provide a feminine complement to the other sages' masculine rationality. Alma's fantasy unsettles the oppositions between dreamer-subject and dreamed object (fooles, Owles, Centaurs), between masculine and feminine (Phantastes as dreamer, dames as dreamers, Alma as dreamer), between inner chastity and outer threats to that chastity (Phantastes' monsters, Maleger's monsters). It unbalances these oppositions not by destroying difference but by setting it on the move, just out of our line of vision at any given moment. This is not a matter of androgyny, as when we look at Dame Nature and cannot be sure whether she is male or female; instead, in Alma's house, difference is always where we are not looking. To borrow the phrase with which Spenser describes the bride's Medusan virtues in the *Epithalamion*, Alma's difference is "that which no eyes can see."

It is true that the *urge* to locate difference rationally once and for all – to separate oneself righteously from the world of impurities – plays itself out even more demandingly in Alma's castle than it does during Guyon's tour of Mammon's cave earlier in the Book of Temperance. The temptation that Guyon's story acts out for us is not so much one of intemperance as the seductive wish to see ourselves victorious over or unsusceptible to intemperance.⁸ But if the rational faculty that would give us this immunity resides in the head, so does the fantasy, and in Alma's head the illusory nature of these protective boundaries becomes apparent.

The reasons for Alma's inability to sustain this distinction are not only that her fantasies emigrate, however, or that Captain Maleger attempts a military takeover, but that the heroic Guyon and Arthur enter, taking us

along. They enter as honored guests, after a bit of difficulty. Here is the description of their first sight of the castle, before they realize it is under siege:

[T]hey spide a goodly castle, plast
Foreby a riuer in a pleasaunt dale,
Which choosing for that euenings hospitale,
They thither marcht: but when they came in sight,
And from their sweaty Coursers did auale,
They found the gates fast barred long ere night,
And euery loup fast lockt, as fearing foes despight.

Which when they saw, they weened fowle reproch
Was to them doen, their entrance to forstall,
Till that the Squire gan nigher to approach;
And wind his horne vnder the castle wall,
That with the noise it shooke, as it would fall:
Eftsoones forth looked from the highest spire
The watch, and lowd vnto the knights did call,
To weete, what they so rudely did require.
Who gently answered, They entrance did desire.

Fly fly, good knights, (said he) fly fast away
If that your liues ye loue, as meete ye should;
Fly fast, and saue your selues from neare decay,
Here may ye not haue entraunce, though we would:
We would and would againe, if that we could;
But thousand enemies about vs raue . . .

(II.ix.10–12)

While the watchman is still speaking, Maleger's ragged crew swarms out of the surrounding caves. Arthur and Guyon drive them back, although they find themselves somewhat disconcertingly "Hewing and slashing at their idle shades; / For though they bodies seeme, yet substance from them fades" (II.ix.15).

On the one hand, Arthur and Guyon are fighting the men who want to force a way into Alma's body. On the other hand, they are fighting the men who are barring their own access to Alma's body: "They entrance did desire." The phrase recalls a stanza toward the beginning of this same canto, before we have caught sight of Alma's castle. After the introductory stanza which contrasts bodies "kept in sober government" with those whose base passions make them turn into monsters, we learn that while Arthur and Guyon have been riding together, Arthur has become curious about a portrait of a woman on his friend's shield. Without letting on that this same woman's face once appeared to him in an erotic dream, Arthur asks casually what it means. Guyon's reply is a tribute to "the mighty Queene of *Faerie*":

Faire Sir (said he) if in that picture dead
 Such life ye read, and vertue in vaine shew,
 What mote ye weene, if the trew liuely-head
 Of that most glorious visage ye did vew?
 But if the beautie of her mind ye knew,
 That is her bountie, and imperiall powre,
 Thousand times fairer then her mortall hew,
 O how great wonder would your thoughts deuoure,
 And infinite desire into your spirite poure!

(II.ix.3)

For the purposes of this study, it makes more sense to consider the stanza as part of a discourse about Elizabeth that we can use to gain insight into the operations of gender within Spenser's work than to consider it as part of a discourse about gender that can give us insight into Elizabeth's influence over Spenser. Thus: these lines about Gloriana's portrait heed the canto's opening warning against the intemperance of base passions, insofar as it is Gloriana's goodness and bounty – rather than seductiveness – that inspire longing in her viewers. Simultaneously, the lines ignore and therefore justify the warning against intemperance in that their eagerness leaves behind all pretensions to “sober gouernment.” Gloriana's bounty is a thousand times fairer than her face, but the desire that she causes swallows up that thousand; it is infinite.⁹

The poem displaces Gloriana's bounty onto Alma later, when Arthur and Guyon are indeed allowed to view the beauties of Alma's mind and to enjoy her hospitality. The image of thoughts being devoured, which Guyon uses to describe Gloriana's effect on her amazed viewers, resurfaces in Phantastes' chamber, where lovers are witless. But the infinity of desire – that even more devouring impulse that “would and would againe, if that it could,” to paraphrase Alma's watchman – reappears in Maleger rather than in the two courtier knights (ix.12). Arthur and Guyon ask Alma for little else besides a place to spend the night, and their hungry response to her gift of the chronicles keeps well within the bounds of propriety.

Arthur and Guyon slash at Maleger's troops so that the text can distinguish them from him – so that we can enter the castle gate alongside two heroes whose polite request for shelter seems a far cry from Maleger's chaotic passions. With the set-piece staging of the canto's opening compliment to Elizabeth, and with its use of the subjunctive mood (“*if* the beautie of her mind ye knew”), the text encourages us to forget or at least cordon off the infinite urgency of those desires by the time we meet Maleger. If we bring the earlier and later passages together, however, we will notice that Alma's fortress represents two different types of enclosure in relation to Arthur's and Guyon's functions within

the poem: she figures their own bodies in that she figures all human bodies (male and female) assailed by sensory data; but she also represents a femininity quite separate from them, a hidden source of bounty which they desire to disclose and know.

The conflation of these two types of enclosure produces a strange scenario: while looking down from their own turret-brain, Arthur and Guyon see themselves approach the castle gates, wondering what bounty they will find within. So long as we believe in the generic, this duplicity presents no real problem; man seeks to know himself. But once we think of the castle as in some way female, Arthur and Guyon's occupation of it (claiming its secrets as those of their own bodies) would appear to clinch Miller's argument that Spenser is appropriating femininity to aid in his project of self-definition. In the proem to Book II, as in the *Epithalamion* (to which we will pay closer attention in the next chapter), no one can look directly at a beautiful woman's interior virtue without becoming petrified or blinded:

The which O pardon me thus to enfold
 In couert vele, and wrap in shadowes light,
 That feeble eyes your glory may behold,
 Which else could not endure those beames bright,
 But would be dazled with exceeding light. (II.pr.5)

Only the privileged poet/bridegroom can even guess at what these interior spaces look like. In an almost parodic contrast, Alma gives a docent tour: here is my heart (yours), here my seat of virtue (yours, yours).¹⁰

Remember, though, that when angry swords slash through Maleger's ghostly followers, "though they bodies seeme, yet substance from them fades" (II.ix.15). Looking at these projections of light and shadow, Arthur and Guyon see insubstantial portraits of themselves, but Spenser's language also leaves open the sense that these images portray the two knights' own insubstantiality. Although masculine desires to reappropriate femininity doubtless inform Alma's story, the text also makes way for the reverse action: insofar as Guyon and Arthur see themselves in Maleger's shades, they see not only their own passions but also their own femininity. Patricia Parker has noted that throughout the *Faerie Queene*, "Spenser's language remains ambiguous about the relation of inside and outside," lessening the distinction between subjective and objective (*Inescapable*, 68). Here, as projections of "fooles, louers," and "Dames," the two knights are reproduced and redrawn by Alma's imagination. The situation will resurface at the end of Book II in the Bower of Bliss when Acrasia hovers smotheringly over her beloved prey, and indeed Spenser's descriptions of Maleger's "monstrous rablement /

Of fowle misshapen wights” recalls the unmanned victims of Acrasia’s Homeric model, Circe (II.xi.8). But when I say that Guyon and Arthur see their own femininity in Alma’s images, I do not mean that they, like a sonneteer, look at the beloved’s image for so long that their obsession with her makes them effeminate in other men’s eyes. Instead, I want to make the more radical claim that the characters Guyon and Arthur become, in some sense, the foolish and empty delusions of foolish and wavering “dames.” Instead of simply concentrating on Alma as an image in their minds, Arthur and Guyon become an image in her mind – nor is this image either beautiful or rational. This business of being re-formed by feminine disorder is precisely the opposite of what Arthur and Guyon want, which is to score a definitive triumph over intemperance. Eumnestes’ chronicles offer them definition, by giving them a manifest destiny, but Captain Maleger’s shadowgraphs offer Arthur and Guyon only the opportunity to see themselves mirrored in a feminine nothingness: newes of devils.

Errour’s murmuring

“Alma’s Nought” is the title of David Miller’s chapter about these cantos, so this present study is not the first to recognize a vacancy at the center of the Castle of Temperance. Whereas Miller locates the vacancy in Alma’s lack of genitals (since these organs are omitted from the castle tour), I have located absence in Alma’s “idle fantasies,” the quickly fading substance of “things dispersed thin” (II.ix.50). But of course the space in Phantastes’ chamber is idle, vain, or empty chiefly according to the sort of definitions one finds in the Renaissance pamphlets against women, which maintain that foolishness is nothingness and that “Dames” are foolishness. If one listens to Maleger’s phantom troops rather than simply slashing at them, one hears a something:¹¹

But soone the knights with their bright-burning blades
Broke their rude troupes, and orders did confound,
Hewing and slashing at their idle shades;
For though they bodies seeme, yet substance from them fades.

As when a swarme of Gnats at euentide
Out of the fennes of Allan do arise,
Their murmuring small trompets sounden wide,
Whiles in the aire their clustring army flies,
That as a cloud doth seeme to dim the skies;
Ne man nor beast may rest, or take repast,
For their sharpe wounds, and noyous iniuries,
Till the fierce Northerne wind with blustering blast
Doth blow them quite away, and in the *Ocean* cast. (II.ix.15–16)

These gnats, whose “clustering army flies” through the air, prefigure the flies in Phantastes’ chamber which, we learn a few stanzas later, “buzzed all about, and made such sound, / That they encombred all mens eares and eyes . . . / All those were idle thoughts and fantasies . . .” (II.ix.51).

At the same time, their buzzing recollects a famous stanza in Book I where the Red Crosse knight is overrun with imps vomited out of the mouth of a female monster named Error. Spenser compares these imps to a swarm of gnats:

As gentle Shepheard in sweete euen-tide,
 When ruddy *Phæbus* gins to welke in west,
 High on an hill, his flocke to vewen wide,
 Markes which do byte their hasty supper best;
 A cloud of combrous gnattes do him molest,
 All striuing to infixe their feeble stings,
 That from their noyance he no where can rest.
 But with his clownish hands their tender wings
 He brusheth oft, and oft doth mar their murmurings. (I.i.23)

In an account of the political implications of this incongruously pastoral image as an analogy for Red Crosse’s battle with Error, Jeffrey Knapp observes that the gnats’ “tender wings and murmurings generate a pathos that counters any repudiation of them,” and that the skirmish between shepherd and gnats “disrupts our sense not only of the other fight’s ferocity but of its stakes; now the human seems the brute” (“Error,” 809, 808). To this insight (a very real one, considering the critical tendency to explain these gnats primarily in terms of the Renaissance identification of small flying insects with a multitude of sins) I would add that because the imps spew from Error’s mouth in a “filthy parbreake” of “bookes and papers,” the “murmurings” of stanza 23 serve to make her texts audible (I.i.20). In addition to generating our sympathy for the “tender” gnats, Spenser’s pastoral analogy builds to its greatest poetic self-assurance at precisely the moment when it borrows its alliterative music (“mar their murmurings”) from the indistinct speech of feminine error.

Spenser’s reproduction of Error’s murmuring both in Alma’s chamber of confused fantasies and in the nightmarish troops who disembody Arthur and Guyon suggests that whatever fear the poem registers about the possibility of discovering its own debt to an essentially monstrous, essentially feminine imagination is mingled with an investment in the erotic exchanges between this feminine disorder and the masculine borders that would wish to contain it.

“Slypernes”

In *The Instruction of a Christen Woman*, a handbook by Juan Luis Vives that garnered respect from the humanists when Richard Hyrde translated it into English in 1529, we read this warning: “Womans thought is swyfte and for the most parte unstable walkyng and wandrynge out from home and soone wyl slyde by the reason of hit owne slypernes I wot nat howe far” (sig. C3v). The move from “swyfte” to “walkyng and wandrynge” seems strange even though we realize that Vives is associating swiftness of thought not only with women’s lack of self-control but with their lack of mental self-containment. Yet it is the final two phrases that seem, in their intriguing paranoia, to give the sentence a purpose and destination. The latent eroticism of “hit owne slypernes” suggests that the speaker imagines a scene in which the woman’s body follows her fantasies out from home, as if sliding on a river of come straight into a lover’s bed, but even this fear does not fully explain the mystified and mystifying tone of “I wot nat howe far.” The phrase implies that only by allowing his own imagination to wander untethered can the man possibly envision the journey that feminine thought may take. When Alma’s projected fantasy redefines Arthur and Guyon into strange forms – the monstrous shadow-graphs that constitute Maleger’s troops – these two knights *become* the “I wot nat howe far.” They do this neither by reappropriating the fantasy nor by excavating its secrets, but by remaining confidently unaware of its relationship to them.

Coda

From Greville’s “newes of devils” to Alma’s murmuring delusions, this chapter has suggested that when the disarray of the feminine imagination appears most externalized, it may turn out to be most internalized. But why would Spenser want to dally with such a conception of poetic creativity? We can find one answer, albeit a paradoxical one, in his miniature set-piece about oratorical power in Book IV. Because Renaissance poets so often point to Orpheus as the perfect image of a poet, modern readers of *The Faerie Queene* have often commented upon Spenser’s stirring evocations of Orpheus, David, and the persuasive orator Menenius Agrippa in the rhetorical flourish that opens Book IV’s second canto:

Firebrand of hell first tynd in Phlegeton,
 By thousand furies, and from thence out throwen
 Into this world, to worke confusion,
 And set it all on fire by force vnknown,

Is wicked discord, whose small sparkes once blown
 None but a God or godlike man can slake;
 Such as was *Orpheus*, that when strife was growen
 Amongst those famous ympes of Greece, did take
 His siluer Harpe in hand, and shortly friends them make.

Or such as that celestiall Psalmist was,
 That when the wicked feend his Lord tormented,
 With heauenly notes, that did all other pas,
 The outrage of his furious fit relented.
 Such Musicke is wise words with time concented,
 To moderate stiffe minds, disposd to striue:
 Such as that prudent Romane well inuented,
 What time his people into partes did riue,
 Them reconcyld againe, and to their homes did driue. (IV.ii.1–2)

In support of his contention that “Spenser builds his defence of the poet in Book IV on two allusions to Orpheus,” Thomas Cain says this of the above stanzas:

[Orpheus, David, and Menenius Agrippa] exemplify the humanist defense of the poet’s importance to the state. Spenser’s quasi divine poet of concord corresponds exactly to Comes’ Orpheus, whose pacifying eloquence makes him “the kind of man the rest of society must acknowledge as superior.” (*Praise*, 165–166; ref. to *Mythologiae*, VII.14)

Spenser’s second allusion to Orpheus in Book IV comes when Scudamour compares his bold seizure of Amoret from the Temple of Venus to Orpheus’s recovery of Eurydice from hell:

No lesse did *Daunger* threaten me with dread,
 When as he saw me, maugre all his powre,
 That glorious spoyle of beautie with me lead,
 Then *Cerberus*, when *Orpheus* did recoure
 His Leman from the Stygian Princes boure.
 But euermore my shield did me defend,
 Against the storme of euery dreadfull stoure:
 Thus safely with my loue I thence did wend. (IV.x.58)

The analogy is ironic here, not only because readers familiar with Boethius or Comes will know that in Orpheus’s trip to the underworld, the success of his musical artistry gives way to the erotic failure of his self control, but also because, as Cain points out, “Scudamour has none of Orpheus’s eloquence. He is instead a figure of impulsive physical action” (*Praise*, 166). Thus in Cain’s account of Book IV, both references to the singer affirm his civilizing power – the first reference by direct declaration and the second by ironic absence: Orpheus’s eloquence is exactly what Scudamour needs in order to civilize himself (*ibid.*, 167).

More recently, Bartlett Giamatti has made even larger claims for the two stanzas quoted above:

All *The Faerie Queene* is here: discord and division, and all-consuming fire, to be slaked only by the “god or godlike man,” the poet . . . It is instructive that Spenser’s definition of poetry and its power follows upon the divine examples of Orpheus and David and proffers, as it were, the example of Menenius Agrippa, the civic example of a polity unified. He is always teaching us and his Queen, always celebrating his awesome lineage and potency as a poet, claiming quasi-divine status for the poet and for his moral art. (“Prince,” 334–335)

A full treatment of Spenser’s involvement with the Orpheus myth would need to read Orpheus’s failure in the underworld (suppressed in Book IV’s second reference to Orpheus) against the claims made for “the poet” in Spenser’s first reference to Orpheus.¹² But what I suggest here is that although Orpheus certainly does figure the poet in the second canto of Book IV, as everyone says, he does not do so in an uncomplicated or direct way. We will notice this if, after reading the stanzas about Orpheus, David, and Menenius Agrippa, we continue reading before drawing our conclusions. At the very least, that is, we should take the entire three-stanza analogy into account rather than only the first two-thirds of it, since the third stanza makes the analogy far more surprising. After the stanza quoted above about the “celestiall Psalmist,” the narrator draws the connection between his historical precedents and his present characters. Just as Orpheus, David, and Menenius Agrippa tamed their audiences with supernaturally powerful song, so Glauce, the old woman who accompanies Britomart in her travels, seeks to calm three knights who have been inflamed by the spiteful lies of two witches, Duessa and Ate:

Such vs’d wise *Glauce* to that wrathfull knight,
 To calme the tempest of his troubled thought:
 Yet *Blandamour* with termes of foule despight,
 And *Paridell* her scornd, and set at nought,
 As old and crooked and not good for ought. (IV.ii.3)

It is in light of this stanza that we must read the first two stanzas about Orpheus, David, and Menenius Agrippa. First and foremost, Spenser compares this magnificent Orpheus to Glauce, a crone most often remembered for her role as Britomart’s affectionate but bumbling nurse in Book III. When Britomart first falls in love with an image of an unknown man spied in her father’s crystal ball, she believes she will never be able to fulfill her longing. As a result, her health declines rapidly. In the office of a surrogate mother, Glauce tries to cure her charge with

charms. Instead of making this witchcraft either beneficently powerful or frightening, Spenser makes it humorous in its very solemnity:

Then taking thrise three haire from off her head,
 Them trebly breaded in a threefold lace,
 And round about the pots mouth, bound the thread,
 And after hauing whispered a space
 Certaine sad words, with hollow voice and bace,
 She to the virgin said, thrise said she it;
 Come daughter come, come; spit vpon my face,
 Spit thrise vpon me, thrise vpon me spit;
 Th'vneuen number for this businesse is most fit. (III.ii.50)

We are asked to appreciate Glauce's sincerity and her anxious love for her charge at the same time that we see how ineffective her remedies are:

Thrise she her turnd contrary, and returnd,
 All contrary, for she the right did shunne,
 And euer what she did, was streight vndonne.
 So thought she to vndoe her daughters loue:
 But loue, that is in gentle brest begonne,
 No idle charmes so lightly may remoue . . . (III.ii.51)

In the Orpheus passage in Book IV, if Glauce at first seems beside the point, then that is the point. Commentators upon the story of Britomart's girlhood in Book III have called Glauce superstitious, ridiculous, "down-to-earth," "common sensical," "homely," wise in her own way but a "figure of fun," "church-going," "comforting," "normal," "forthright," "ingenuous," "backward," "motherly," "undisciplined," "benign but rude," "fruitless," "astringent," "defective," and above all, "comical."¹³ Linda Gregerson has taken Glauce seriously enough to make the nurse's admonition that Britomart should love someone like herself but not too much like herself into a paradigm for many of Spenser's ideas throughout the poem (*Reformation, passim*). A rough summary of most critics' interpretations of Glauce, however, would seem to indicate that whereas Glauce's name may associate her etymologically with Minerva's owl (appropriately enough, given Britomart's emblemization as Britain's Minerva), her wisdom is at best haphazard, limited, and quickly supplanted by the greater wisdom of Merlin, who prophesies a more glorious future than Glauce herself could ever have imagined for her nursling. Nor do any of these descriptions of Glauce miss their mark; she is indeed all of these things.

Book III's commentators have enjoyed Glauce too much to scorn or despise her outright; nevertheless, when these and other commentators have turned to the firebrand stanzas in Book IV, they have inadvertently joined Blandamour and Paridell's company in setting Glauce critically

“at nought, / As old and crooked and not good for ought,” simply by failing to notice the odd centrality of her presence here. Gregerson derives her sense of Glauce’s significance only from the nurse’s teachings in Book III, and although Lauren Silberman does mention that Glauce serves “more or less as a female go-between, the traditional function of the old nurse figure” in Book IV, calling Glauce’s mediation “knowing,” Silberman does not link this pacifying, feminine function with the grand image of the poet Orpheus (*Transforming*, 115). I have found only one reader who explicitly acknowledges Glauce’s connection with Orpheus. Goldberg mentions the analogy in passing, yet his discussion is about Scudamour’s loss of self rather than about Glauce and quickly veers away from her:

An elaborate simile compares Glauce’s attempts to calm Scudamour to David ministering to the possessed Saul, Agrippa’s soothing the maddened Roman crowd – even to Orpheus’s mending strife and making friends. Yet Glauce’s ministrations are rather ambiguously directed to someone simply named “that wrathfull knight” . . . (*Endlesse*, 105)

Most readers who become intent upon scrutinizing Spenser’s Orphic progress seem to need to blink Glauce away as if she were an extraneous particle floating on the eye’s surface, too close for visual apprehension. Because of her chiefly comic role thus far, with her ineffectual folk medicine and her old-womanish fancies, she has very nearly become invisible in a heroic context. We can look directly at her in the Orphic stanzas without really seeing her, because we think we are looking at the male poet. Furthermore, the gendered confusion of not being able to see Glauce is still more confusing because it is not simply a matter of wondering whether a character is male or female. Again, as in Alma’s castle, difference is always where we are not looking.

Glauce does seem remarkably out of place – not so much in stanza 3, where her wise but thwarted attempts at peacemaking seem natural for an old woman precisely because they require the narrator’s sympathetic defense – but in stanzas 1 and 2, where the golden rhetoric of peacemaking is an art that only “a God or godlike man” can master.¹⁴ Our memory of Glauce’s changeable and superstitious efforts to calm the lovesick Britomart in Book III (efforts just as fantastic in their own way as Britomart’s daydreams about Artegall, only less to the purpose) does not sort well with Orpheus’s silver chords or with Agrippa’s shrewd policy.

Inasmuch as Spenser’s description of Orpheus in the firebrand stanzas alludes to the singer’s successful venture rather than to his equally celebrated failures, it should by all rights represent a characteristically masculine imagination dedicated to the service of reason rather than a characteristically feminine fantasy subservient to the womb’s erratic

movements. But unlike Philip Sidney, Spenser neither cleaves exclusively to *eikastike* poetry nor attempts to drain *phantastike* poetry of its power to harm. Rather, narrative voices throughout *The Faerie Queene* emphasize the risky but powerful irrationality of the fantastic – and then frequently align themselves with this unreliable form of imagination. Instead of trying to work out a way of sanitizing the uneasy relationship between fantasy and allegory, Spenser goes out of his way to feminize and discredit fantasy even as he weaves it inextricably into his accounts of what it means to be a poet.

By refashioning a limited old woman into Orpheus, the speaker strangely deforms his project of self-fashioning. Of course Spenser puts each of his characters to different uses at different times, and it would be a mistake, I think, to work backwards from the firebrand stanzas of Book IV in such a way as to suggest that Glauce somehow stands for the poet in Book III, as well. Yet on the one hand, we cannot isolate Glauce's Orphic role from our previous experience of her, and on the other hand, Spenser does not introduce Glauce here in Book IV merely as a humorous foil for the majestic poet. Although the poem certainly has asked us to laugh affectionately at Glauce's antics in Book III, the three firebrand stanzas avoid comedy where they could easily have indulged in it. The "Such . . . such . . . Such" formula of the first two stanzas leads us to believe that the period closing these stanzas marks a rhetorical climax; every rhetorician knows that three examples are enough to carry a point, and we have just been given three examples of successful peacemakers in Orpheus, David, and Agrippa. The fourth "such" that introduces Glauce in the next stanza – over and above what we have expected – thus affords a ripe opportunity for bathos. Yet Spenser exploits the possibility only negatively, in the manner of one who quells another's snigger by giving it grave attention. "Such vs'd wise *Glauce* to that wrathfull knight," says the speaker, and we must take this woman seriously if we notice her at all.

At the same time, this passage does not suddenly transform Glauce into an admirable model for the masculine rhetorician. Most basically, Glauce fails to bring about a reconciliation between herself and the scornful knights, but the firebrand passage casts even deeper shadows on the poet's likeness. A squinting modifier in the second stanza introduces the ambiguous possibility that the poet's song is as fiendish as the disorder with which it contends:

. . . such as that celestial Psalmist was,
That when the wicked feend his Lord tormented,
With heauenly notes, that did all other pas,
The outrage of his furious fit relented.

(IV.ii.2)

Does David charm Saul's wicked tormentor with heavenly notes, or do the fiend's heavenly notes torment Saul? In a sense, the biblical Saul was indeed tormented by those heavenly notes, so the momentary ambiguity in Spenser's image of the poet is powerful.

Importantly, however, the passage feminizes this tormenting fury. Although the discordant knights in this passage are male, Spenser's language about the furor that Glauce must allay strongly recalls the vocabulary of antifeminist pamphlets as well as his own descriptions of Ate, the witch of discord, in the previous canto. In the pamphlet wars, as in Spenser's descriptions of Ate, the daughters of Eve stand behind men's violence and are morally responsible for it. Women are the ones most regularly accused of being hellish, of working man's confusion, of having "stiffe minds, disposd to striue" (this last sort of accusation being an illogical but hardly surprising concomitant to the complaints about women's wavering minds), and of imitating the furious Thracian women who dismembered Orpheus in the episode that this passage suppresses. In one sense this antifeminist vocabulary is logical enough for Spenser's purposes; we have already gathered that Ate, the witch of discord, will preside over the men and women of Book IV, setting them at variance with one another. But peering out from behind the firebrand stanzas, like striped tigers in striped grass, are a couple of tricks: by far the strongest image here is that of the firebrand of hell, which effectively gives energy *to* Orpheus rather than simply opposing him. Even as the text clearly tells us that Glauce-as-Orpheus is battling a "firebrand of hell first tynd in Phlegeton / By thousand furies," Spenser's imagery oddly associates this Orpheus with that very firebrand. When the narrator tells us that "small sparkes once blowen / None but a God or godlike man can slake," it is as though the size of the flame is witness to the intellectual and moral size of the godlike man – who is Glauce (ii.1). Thus the passage dresses Glauce-as-Orpheus in a role that borrows energy from Ate, a very different old woman. Like Alma, Glauce is an apparently static, benign female figure who turns out to have a close relationship to a serious confusion.

When we arrive at the stanzas about Glauce's peacemaking attempts at the beginning of canto ii, we have just come away from a scene at the end of canto i in which the same knights who now scorn Glauce were levelling insults at Ate; Scudamour called Ate a "vile hag" (IV.i.48). Indifferent to insults, Ate was manipulatively pretending to encourage peace among the squabbling knights. Primarily the poem asks us to appreciate the difference between Ate's hypocritical peacemaking and Glauce's earnest efforts, but the direct move from Ate's scene to a passage in which the same men respond to Glauce's benign peacemaking with equal scorn must raise questions about the misogynist nature of that

scorn. In a sense, Spenser enables Glauce to become an Orphic figure by giving her some of Ate's demonic power. Indeed, the poem's rewriting of Ate hints that if Glauce were not an old and inept worker of charms, she might instead be a furious one.

It is tempting to read Spenser's always ambivalent handling of the "feminine" imagination – the imagination whose immediate roots are in Virgilian *furor* and the Horatian *afflatus* rather than in a reasoned conceptualization of images – as attempts to tame the poetic forces that Spenser finds scary. But we see the tame side of Glauce before seeing her association with the firebrand, so that it would be more correct to say that the latter inflames the former rather than that the former pacifies the latter. My sense is that although the poem's respectful handling of Glauce in the firebrand stanzas asks us to sympathize with her rational, masculine peacemaking attempts and to censure the irrational rage that the men have caught from Ate, it also slyly leads us to sympathize with an old woman's rage – which is the image that momentarily confronts us when the poem's imagery illogically conflates the vile Ate with the sweet, harmless Glauce.

Nor is this reading a matter of forcing modern theory upon Renaissance practice; if this passage bends the narrative's adverse judgment of Ate into something less absolute by indirectly drawing our attention to the gendered bias in that judgment, then Spenser is proving himself a fine reader of Virgil, whose gendering of *furor* also leaves open the possibility that feminine fury may occasionally command our uneasy sympathies rather than simply our fear. Virgilian epic and Petrarchan romance are in many ways widely divergent, but Spenser's use of both traditions illustrates that part of his culture's idea of what it means to write poetry is grounded in a literary history of deeply ambivalent identifications with feminine forms of inspiration, rhetoric, and imagination.

This idea will become clearer if we consider the way in which notions of *furor* from the *Aeneid* connect Spenser's gentle peacemaker with Ate, his "mother of debate" (*FQ* IV.i.19). Here is the final stanza of *FQ* IV.i, immediately following the passage in which Ate hypocritically pretends to calm the men while actually inflaming them, and immediately preceding the firebrand passage that compares Glauce to Orpheus. Scudamour believes Britomart has stolen Amoret from him, but he is unable to confront Britomart, given that he does not know where she is. So he vents his frustration on Glauce:

The aged Dame him seeing so enraged,
 Was dead with feare, nathlesse as neede required,
 His flaming furie sought to haue assuaged
 With sober words, that sufferance desired,

Till time the tryall of her truth expyred:
 And euermore sought *Britomart* to cleare.
 But he the more with furious rage was fyred,
 And thrise his hand to kill her did vpreare,
 And thrise he drew it backe: so did at last forbear.

(IV.i.54)

Spenser's repetition of "furie" and "furious," along with the adjective "flaming," evokes the general atmosphere of the *Aeneid*, where Virgil consistently uses images of burning to illustrate the ways that women's *furor* infects men. More specifically, these lines recall the final lines of Virgil's epic, in which Aeneas stands over Turnus with his sword raised, debating whether to let the blow fall. If Scudamour's raised hand mimics Aeneas's sword and if Scudamour's "flaming furie" mimics the hatred with which Turnus has infected "pius" Aeneas ("furiis accensus," *Aen.*, XII.946), then Glauce ironically becomes, like Turnus, an instrument of the goddess of discord. No twist of Spenser's plot logically excuses this reading, but only a revision of his phrasing would erase its shadow.

Ate's own identification with the Furies is obvious enough, since Ate persuades various knights to quarrel in the same way that the "Gorgonian venom" of Virgil's Fury, Allecto, persuades Amata and Turnus to begin a war that darkens the *Aeneid*'s second half ("Gorgoneis Allecto infecta venenis," *Aen.*, VII.341). What I am suggesting is that this identification helps Spenser to link Ate more firmly with Glauce while ostensibly keeping them far apart. We might remember that when Allecto strips off "her savage mask . . . and her Fury's shape" in order to appear to Turnus in his sleep halfway through the *Aeneid*, she decides to give herself the appearance of a wrinkled old woman named "Calybe, thrall in age / To Juno and a priestess of her temple" ("Allecto torvam faciem et furialia membra / exuit, in voltus sese transformat anilis . . . Calybe Iunonis anus templice sacerdos . . .": *Aen.*, VII.415–419).¹⁵ At first, she appeals to Turnus's manly pride: does he intend to let the Trojans get away with stealing his betrothed, she demands, or will he instead raise an army and attack their ships? So Turnus replies with manly pride, though it is not the response Allecto wants. More than anyone else in the *Aeneid*, Turnus and his closest allies attempt to barricade their identities against feminine contamination and to purge their mouths of feminine words. In this case, his derision fastens itself onto Allecto:

Hic iuuenis, vatem inridens, sic orsa vicissim
 ore refert: "classis invectas Thybridis undam
 non, ut rere, meas effugit nuntius auris;
 ne tantos mihi finge metus; nec regia Iuno
 immemor est nostri.

sed te victa situ verique effeta senectus,
 o mater, curis nequiquam exercet, et arma
 regum inter falsa vatem formidine ludit.
 cura tibi divum effigies et templa tueri;
 bella viri pacemque gerent, quis bella gerenda.”

(VII.435–444)

Now, making light of her,
 The young man gave his answer to the seer:

“News of the squadron making port on Tiber
 Has not failed, as you think, to reach my ears.
 Do not imagine me afraid. Queen Juno
 Has not forgotten me. But old age, mother,
 Sunk in decay and too far gone for truth,
 Is giving you this useless agitation,
 Mocking your prophet’s mind with dreams of fear
 And battles between kings. Your mind should be
 On the gods’ images and on their shrines.
 Men will make war and peace, as men should do.”

Like Blandamour and Scudamour in the presence of their would-be peacemaker, Turnus levels “termes of foule despight” at this warmonger, whom he considers, as Spenser might put it, “old and crooked and not good for ought” (*FQ* IV.ii.3). More specifically, he sneers at Allecto’s fancy; she imagines dangers to no purpose and her prophecies are “vaine *Alarums* to the inward sense,” to borrow Greville’s phrase.

If that were all there were to this incident, it would simply provide a parallel to Glauce’s ill treatment without giving us any further insight into the effect of Glauce’s identification with an heroic Orpheus, but we must not forget that Allecto soon takes the starch out of Turnus’s self-sufficiency. Enraged at being accused of senility, she throws off her aged disguise, rolls her now-blazing eyes, raises hissing snakes from her hair, and hurls a flaming torch at her interlocutor’s torso. Turnus is impressed. Sarcastically, Allecto flings Turnus’s patronizing statements back at him:

“en ego victa situ, quam veri effeta senectus
 arma inter regum falsa formidine ludit.
 respice ad haec: adsum dirarum ab sede sororum,
 bella manu letumque gero.”

(VII.452–455)

“Look at me now, sunk in decay, see how
 Old age in me is too far gone for truth,
 Deluding me with battles between kings
 And dreams of fear! Look at these dreams of mine!
 I come to you from the Black Sisters’ home
 And bring war and extinction in my hand.”

Clearly we are supposed to recoil from this female apparition just as Turnus recoils from what Spenser's narrator would call her "firebrand of hell first tynd in Phlegeton." The vision proves its horror by sending Turnus into a frenzy for blood, making him set off six books of needless slaughter between the his people and the Phrygians. Yet although the *Aeneid* regularly presents Allecto as the very distillation of malice, her encounter with Turnus momentarily creates a kind of moral rip tide. That is, at the same time that her dramatic metamorphosis causes general dismay, it also represents a specific wish fulfillment for female readers of the poem: when confronted with taunts about the inadequate nature of her sex, Allecto proceeds to demonstrate a more than adequate control of the situation, making Turnus seem ridiculous in the process. Unlike mortal women, she actually can prove that her wrinkled exterior conceals fire.

Glauce does not succeed in controlling *her* situation, but Spenser's powerful Orpheus simile makes room for at least the wish, if not its fulfillment. By preventing our knowing while we read for the first time the two stanzas about Orpheus's, Agrippa's, and David's successes that these analogies point to Glauce, and by whisking these heroes' successes away almost as soon as we realize that Glauce is the subject of their analogy, Spenser confines the image of Glauce as a fiery orator within a very small space. Nevertheless, this description of Orpheus that so famously represents the glory and power of the poetic imagination borrows its fire from a fantastical old woman's brief and conditional metamorphosis.

3 Monstrous intimacy and arrested developments

The previous chapter argued that Spenser allies himself with feminine fantasies that resemble the “nothing seene” of Greville’s sonnet, the “newes of devils” produced by a deluded mind. It argued further that Spenser associates the poet’s enchanting phrases with those of a bumbling old woman “set at nought”: Glauce, who for a moment provisionally takes on the fantastic powers of both Orpheus the singer and Allecto, Virgil’s fire-hurling Fury. I want to move from that discussion of feminine fantasy to a more specific investigation of the relationship between feminine monstrosity and the spellbinding powers of Spenser’s poem. Susanne Wofford has written that *The Faerie Queene* contains many examples of “displacement onto a demonized woman of precisely the principle that generates the narrative” (*Choice*, 290). The notion of conditionality can enlarge our understanding of this phenomenon; Spenser’s demonized women are not merely repositories for displaced blame but testing-grounds for – and even sources of – a narrative sense of self that the poem recognizes as powerful even while it hems it in by labeling it hypothetical. Concentrating on Britomart, with significant attention also paid to the bride of the *Epithalamion* and to Mutabilitie, this chapter will argue that Spenser often arranges for a praiseworthy female character to clash with a monstrous character in order to show us an alternative version of the heroine that the plot of the poem vigorously contradicts. Yet these alternatives are seldom static allegorical emblems; instead, they conditionally offer the possibility of an interaction between each heroine and her monster. These interactions usually remain mere possibilities, being cut off before there can be any development, but the fact that they are often set in erotic contexts makes their very incipience more provocative than fully delineated interactions would be. If these arrested developments do not represent flirtations in the mind of each heroine involved, they nevertheless represent the poem’s flirtations for her, increasing her versionality (to use Adam Phillips’s term) as well as increasing the poem’s gendered versionality through her.

Strange bedfellows: Malecasta and Britomart

Like Ariosto's Angelica, Britomart uses martial arts to defend her chastity, but because Britomart's eroticism is more naïve than Angelica's, her Minervan military prowess is more incongruous. When Britomart stops for the night at Malecasta's castle – a haven of wantonness – she keeps most of her armor on during dinner, as if Spenser wanted us to feel both the moral weight and the sometimes droll unwieldiness of Britomart's innocence. The mere removal of Britomart's helmet, which unleashes a cascade of golden hair, drives Malecasta's retainers pleasantly to distraction. Britomart responds to these knights' admiration by becoming forbiddingly Minervan:

For she was full of amiable grace,
 And manly terrour mixed therewithall,
 That as the one stird vp affections bace,
 So th'other did mens rash desires apall,
 And hold them backe, that would in errour fall;
 As he, that hath espide a vermeill Rose,
 To which sharpe thornes and breses the way forstall,
 Dare not for dread his hardy hand expose,
 But wishing it far off, his idle wish doth lose. (III.i.46)

No sooner has Britomart's winsome demeanor aroused men's desires than her obvious willingness to defend her chastity with militant force arrests those desires. Her male admirers can indulge only in wishes, imagining the delight of being able to pluck a thornless rose. Yet Britomart's scare tactics – flirtatious enough, in their own way – have no deterrent effect on Malecasta: “All ignoraunt of her contrary sex, / (For she her weend a fresh and lusty knight) / She greatly gan enamoured to wex” (III.i.47).

Even before Britomart's unhelmeting, Malecasta has lived up to her name (“badly chaste”); we are told that she is “of rare beautie, sauing that askaunce / Her wanton eyes, ill signes of womanhed, / did roll too lightly, and too often glaunce” (i.41). Malecasta is a parodic reversal of all that the *Epithalamion*'s bride represents; whereas that blushing virgin's “sad eyes still fastened on the ground, / Are governed with goodly modesty, / That suffers not one looke to glaunce awry, / Which may let in a little thought unsownd,” Malecasta throws the windows of her gaze wide open (*Epith.*, 234–237). She restrains herself only briefly before declaring her longing for her guest, “With sighes, and sobs, and plaints, and piteous grieffe” (*FQ* III.i.53). Dismayed, Britomart at first pretends not to understand. She cannot bring herself to be severe with her hostess, believing her honestly, painfully, and mistakenly in love

rather than angling for a bit of wanton fun. Inclined to pity Malecasta in light of her own painful love for an Artegal whom she has seen only in a crystal ball, Britomart next repels Malecasta politely – too politely, since Malecasta interprets her guest’s kindness as the smoke of a civility that betokens the inward flames of a returned passion.

The stage is set. After Britomart has fallen asleep in a private room, Malecasta creeps into her supposedly male guest’s bed, her heart beating with her desire to embrace him; at the same time, she trembles lest he should wake to find her there. Yet the poem does not grow indignant over her moral error. Students always laugh over the final stanzas of this canto, and rightly so; the poem is poking fun at Britomart when it has her spring out of bed in her nightgown, grab her sword, and continue to threaten Malecasta with the weapon even after the hostess has fainted in terror. Alerted by Malecasta’s initial shrieks, her entire retinue tumbles into the room, one of them scratches Britomart lightly with an arrow, Britomart wrathfully swings her sword “Here, there, and every where,” the whole pack scatters, and then our youthful heroine stalks out (III.i.66). By treating Britomart’s exaggerated fears comically (when she reacts as if Malecasta were truly a monster rather than a misguided and unarmed woman), the poem partly counteracts her efforts to avoid intimacy by drawing a protective circle around herself.

Critics have sometimes seen the comedy proceeding as much from our knowledge of Britomart’s essential difference from Malecasta as from our perspective upon Britomart’s comical naïveté.¹ We will fail to see beyond Britomart’s preoccupations, however, if we compare her to Malecasta only in order to emphasize the distance between them. Why should we take as a given the undesirability of any mutually altering exchange between the monstrous Malecasta and her guest, either within the plot or within our reading of these characters?² Certainly Spenser does employ Malecasta as an inglorious parody of Britomart, and certainly the comedy of Malecasta’s decision to act on her belief that Britomart is a man does register the text’s anxiety about intimacy between women. But because in other passages the poem allows and even sanctions such relationships – to the point of heavily eroticizing the bed scene between Amoret and Britomart in Book IV, as we have seen – it seems only provisionally useful and perhaps misleading to decide that the comedy of this present scene proceeds in an unqualified fashion from our knowledge that Britomart’s innocence foils Malecasta’s error.

Malecasta has no history, and only a few lines in the poem give her any psychological interiority, so it makes little sense to try for a fully developed reading of her motives. What does make sense is to read her as a character who, like Britomart and indeed like most of the characters in

this allegorical poem, represents us to ourselves in more than one way – and beyond this, it is important to recognize that Malecasta’s representations of us interact with the representations provided by Britomart’s character, rather than simply providing a foil for them. It would be foolishly anachronistic to argue that Spenser is making a case for the virtues of sexual intercourse between women; nevertheless, the poem’s comic treatment of Britomart’s aversion to close contact prepares us for her maturation into an intimate – though still highly problematic – friendship with Amoret in Book IV.

Although the poem has asked us earlier to smile at Britomart’s belief that she and Malecasta are fellow sufferers in their frustrated loves, this earlier perception that she and Malecasta have something in common is after all closer to the truth than her subsequent belief that Malecasta is a monster. In fact, the description of Malecasta’s nocturnal expedition resembles Spenser’s description in the following canto (though chronologically earlier in Britomart’s life) of Britomart’s own insomnia when her first sight of Artegall in a crystal ball fills her with a wild and despairing desire:

Sad, solemne, sowre, and full of fancies fraile
 She woxe; yet wist she neither how, nor why,
 She wist not, silly Mayd, what she did aile,
 Yet wist, she was not well at ease perdy,
 Yet thought it was not loue, but some melancholy.

. . .
 She with her Nourse adowne to sleepe did lye;
 But sleepe full farre away from her did fly.

. . .
 Daughter (said [Glauce]) what need ye be dismayd,

Or why make ye such Monster of your mind?
 Of much more vncouth thing I was affrayd;
 Of filthy lust, contrarie vnto kind:
 But this affection nothing straunge I find;
 For who with reason can you aye reprove,
 To loue the semblant pleasing most your mind . . .

(III.ii.27–28, 40; emphasis added)

Canto ii contains ample provocation for our considering that the “semblant” so pleasing to Britomart’s mind is not only a likeness of Artegall wavering in the crystal ball but a projected image that resembles Britomart herself insofar as it bodies forth her most private desires. (Spenser does sometimes use the word “semblant” unambiguously to mean “apparent double,” as in his description of Archimago masquer-

ading as Red Crosse at I.ii.12.) We might say, then, that Spenser uses Malecasta to prepare us for the story of Britomart's first sight of her future husband by first showing us a semblant that definitely does not please Britomart's mind.

Yet Spenser's slippery language introduces figurative possibilities that his narrative denies. Here are the stanzas about Malecasta's invasion of Britomart's bedroom. The pronouns are all feminine, but the narrative has made it clear that Malecasta still believes Britomart a man:³

Then panting soft, and trembling euerie ioynt,
 Her fearfull feete towards the bowre she moued;
 Where she for secret purpose did appoynt
 To lodge the warlike mayd vnwisely loued,
 And to her bed approching, first she prooued,
 Whether she slept or wakt, with her soft hand
 She softly felt, if any member mooued,
 And lent her wary eare to vnderstand,
 If any puffe of breath, or signe of sence she fond.

Which whenas none she fond, with easie shift,
 For feare least her vnwares she should abrayd,
 Th'embroderd quilt she lightly vp did lift,
 And by her side her selfe she softly layd,
 Of euery finest fingers touch affrayd;
 Ne any noise she made, ne word she spake,
 But inly sigh'd.

(III.i.60–61)

The second conditional verb is the most provocative: "She softly felt, if any member mooued." The overt meaning is that Malecasta feels this man's limbs to make sure he is asleep; the condition, from her point of view, is, "What would happen if this man were awake?" The pun on "member" as penis sets up a second condition that is already implicit in Malecasta's half-fearful desires: "What would happen if this man were not only awake but sexually aroused?" The line implies a third condition, as well, one that is hidden from Malecasta: "What if this guest, Britomart, were a man?" With the first meaning of "member," if a member moves, Malecasta will nervously flee the bedroom. With the second meaning of "member," if the member moves, Malecasta will almost certainly stay. But Malecasta is unaware of just how unusual it would be if, in this particular situation, that particular member did indeed move.

Despite Spenser's titillating us with the notion of Britomart having an erection, clearly we are not being asked to consider seriously the possibility of such an occurrence within the narrative action. But if we combine the first three conditions – "if this man were to wake," "if this

man were to wake with an erection,” and “if Britomart were a man” – we will see a fourth condition that, while still denied by the narrative, raises serious considerations: what would happen if not only Malecasta but also Britomart (whose member this is, after all) were moved by desire? What if, that is, Britomart as a woman were feeling desire? – which she is, of course, though for the absent Artegall rather than for Malecasta. It is not that the poem unsubtly asks us to speculate whether Britomart is “really” lesbian. To reduce this passage to that one question would be to tame its sexual politics by making a negative answer seem clear-cut. But we are being asked to consider, more radically, the *issue* of eroticism between women – as well as the issue of an erotic reading pleasure generated in a passage where there are only two female characters.

Even though readers often recognize the humor of Britomart’s exaggerated fear about female contact in this passage, we will in a sense follow Britomart’s naïve lead if we are reluctant to allow any significant exchange – or exchange of significance – between the heroine and the supposedly monstrous woman who end up in bed together. Britomart is so aghast at finding a woman in her bed that she cannot allow the possibility of any sort of development between them, let alone an exchange. Malecasta does want an exchange, but with a man. Only we, the readers, can see how this eroticized encounter with Malecasta might modify the way that Britomart’s particular sexuality serves the poem’s allegorical purposes from here on.

In other similarly charged passages to which I shall turn, as in the Malecasta episode, language that crucially defines what is at stake in the encounter takes a conditional form in order to give female characters hypothetical roles that the characters’ narrative situations or desires within the plot specifically arrest or deny. Conditional language leaves the poem an escape route. At the same time, it conditions us; that is, much as a workout conditions an athlete by approximating the terms of actual competition, Spenser’s conditional language accustoms us to mock events that may have actual results both in and out of the poem. These hypothetical events both are, and are not, *arrested developments* – and it is no accident that many of them have to do with putatively monstrous desires and feared intimacies between women. The fact that medical writers such as Helkiah Croke felt the need to refute Galen suggests that some scholars or lay people still believed that female infants originated biologically in the arrested prenatal development of fetuses which would, if not arrested, have developed into male infants, and certainly many Renaissance pamphleteers thought that women’s minds were much harder to civilize and develop than men’s.⁴ Yet it is precisely

the energies generated by these arrested developments that Spenser finds powerful enough to fear, deride – and woo.

Chapter 1 examined women's friendships in terms of the distinctions that characters like Braggadocchio or moralists like Barnabe Riche want to make between strumpets and hags on the one hand and virginal brides on the other. The chapter argued that the circumscribed but potentially important friendships among female characters who wander from masculine protection or structures realign the categories into which femininity may be organized in Spenser's work. My discussion of the Cave of Lust as both a prison in which women are raped and a protective enclosure for women's friendships suggested that when Spenser's poetry opens up a space for the wanderings of feminine desire, this space may superimpose itself on the textual spaces occupied by violation or by women's self-dispossession: the cave figures not only the stasis of imprisonment but also scope for feminine movement and error. But what happens when virtuous female characters look at this conditional space from outside? Spenser consistently uses monstrosities to ask questions about intimacy (in the characters of Lust, Acrasia, Duessa, and Argante, for example); my interest here is in a few monstrosities that are merely hypothetical or figurative, denied the full movement of narrative development, arrested.

Wooing by proxy: Bluebeard

It will be worthwhile to return to an instance of conditional language under pressure that I have already mentioned briefly in Chapter 1: Spenser's description of Britomart's entrance into the House of Busyrane to rescue Scudamour's abducted bride. When Britomart first enters the torturer's castle, she sees a series of tapestries depicting Jove's rapes of various mortal women. Signs over one interior door urge her, "Be bold, be bold," and a sign over another door warns, "Be not too bold" (III.xi.50–54). Spenser is quoting the folk tale in which Bluebeard's latest wife reads over the door of the forbidden room, "Be bold, be bold – but not too bold"; and the ending of that line, which Spenser does not quote but surely expects us to remember, is, "lest that your heart's blood should run cold."⁵ Bluebeard's secret room is filled with the blood of his former brides, and his conditional verb "lest" obliquely warns his present bride, Lady Mary, that if she looks at his former wives, he will make her blood mingle with theirs in a demonic parody of marriage. In *The Faerie Queene*, Busyrane's allusion to the tale therefore suggests that it could be suicidal for Britomart to join Amoret. Busyrane would like Britomart to think of Amoret as someone completely unlike herself at this point, completely subject to lust.

Mythological scenes in his tapestries reinforce this intention; a list of the gods' rapes that cause fear and resistance in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* are rewritten by Busyrane as the gods' logical responses to women's provocation or to Petrarchan conventions of wooing. Busyrane's Jove rapes because he "felt the point of [Cupid's] hart-percing dart," and his Leda "slept, yet twixt her eyelids closely spyde, / How towards her he rusht, and smiled at his pryde" (III.xi.30, 32). Busyrane's rewriting of Ovid to shift Jove's deceit to his victims is itself deceitful: Neptune, we learn, "turnd him selfe into a Dolphin fayre; / And like a winged horse he tooke his flight, / To snaky-locke *Medusa* to repayre" (III.xi.42). Although Ovid makes it clear that Minerva punishes the lovely Medusa with snaky locks only after Medusa has been raped by Neptune (about which more anon), Busyrane's rewriting makes Medusa already serpent-infested before her rape. If Busyrane can persuade Britomart to believe this – to believe that Amoret is by her own monstrous nature rather than by victimization a participant in his tableau of lust – he will have prepared her either to abandon Amoret or to believe Amoret responsible for the phallic arts that wound her.

Busyrane's allusion to Bluebeard should also remind us, however, that although Bluebeard's conditional language refers grammatically to something terrible that might happen to Lady Mary, we can also read this language as springing from Bluebeard's own fears about certain conditions: if his bride were to prove too curious, she might expose him. One condition implicit in Busyrane's allusion to the Bluebeard story, then, is the possibility that if Britomart and Amoret join forces, they might break the spell of his sexual tyranny – and indeed, this is what does happen. Moreover, although the Busyrane episode does not portray Britomart as lusting after Amoret any more than the book's first canto portrayed her as lusting after Malecasta, Spenser's figurative language again encourages us to think about what it would mean if Britomart did feel such desire. When she first penetrates the ring of fire that surrounds Busyrane's house, she takes up the task only because Scudamour has been unable to achieve that penetration; the bridegroom must remain helplessly outside, waiting for Britomart to return. It is hard to miss the idea that Britomart is symbolically performing the act that Scudamour ought, by all that is heterosexual and holy, to be performing himself – and just in case we do miss it at first, Spenser tells us that when Britomart enters the house, she holds "her swords point directing forward right" and proceeds "as a thunder bolt / Perceth the yielding ayre" (III.xi.25). There is no real ambiguity here, but we are being asked, among other things, to imagine how it would change the social implications of this episode if Britomart were not only Amoret's rescuer but also her lover.

“Mazeful hed”

In both the Malecasta and Busyrane episodes, the poem asks us to form conditional but powerful images of sexual union between a woman who is heroically chaste and one whose sexuality is figuratively, though perhaps falsely, entangled with monstrosity. In the *Epithalamion*, the poem that Spenser wrote to celebrate his second marriage in 1594 and published in 1595, one year before Books IV–VI of *The Faerie Queene* left the press, the political allegiances of conditional language are more complex. In the morning, the bridegroom who narrates the *Epithalamion* is at once buoyant with the success of claiming his bride and anxious about the conditionality of this buoyancy; he petitions the god Phoebus, “Doe not thy servants simple boone refuse, / But let this day let this one day be myne, / Let all the rest be thine” (124–126). When his bride appears, however, he gives himself over to the euphoria of present possession, demanding that everyone within hailing distance admire her. Not content to praise her modesty in the abstract, he uses a Petrarchan blazon to make the intimate objects of her modesty vividly public. He urges the bride’s handmaids to adore her virtues:

Tell me ye merchants daughters did ye see
 So fayre a creature in your towne before,
 So sweet, so louely, and so mild as she,
 Adorned with beautyes grace and vertues store,
 Her goodly eyes lyke Saphyres shining bright,
 Her forehead yuory white,
 Her cheekes lyke apples which the sun hath rudded,
 Her lips lyke cherries charming men to byte,
 Her brest like to a bowle of creame vncruded,
 Her paps lyke lyllies budded,
 Her snowie necke lyke to a marble towre,
 And all her body like a pallace fayre,
 Ascending vppe with many a stately stayre,
 To honors seat and chastities sweet bowre.
 Why stand ye still ye virgins in amaze,
 Vpon her so to gaze,
 Whiles ye forget your former lay to sing,
 To which the woods did answer and your eccho ring.

But if ye saw that which no eyes can see,
 The inward beauty of her liuely spright,
 Garnisht with heauenly guifts of high degree,
 Much more then would ye wonder at that sight,
 And stand astonisht lyke to those which red
 Medusaes mazeful hed.

Medusa comes almost as a relief; after the glut of sweets in the poem thus far, it is invigorating to stumble upon a resistant bit of horror. Under Medusa's gaze, ocular greediness receives its comeuppance, and if only briefly, the blushing virgin appears to have found a bold ally.

Of course the bride's blazon in the *Epithalamion's* tenth stanza may originally have been meant to whet the reader's appetite rather than cause a surfeit – or if a surfeit, then one that the clean chill of “inward beauty” and “heavenly gifts” would cure. And this poem can delight or seduce even those of us who proceed with a modern consciousness of the woman's position. Yet even a cautious reading of these two stanzas addressed to the handmaids must explore the extent to which Medusa appears both as a foil to virtue and as a figure of that same virtue. A less reverent reading will need to consider that the man or woman who reads this passage from a woman's point of view may form markedly different alliances from those which the text seems at first to expect. What happens when Medusa exchanges glances with a woman? Although classical, medieval, and Renaissance mythographers say that Medusa petrifies “all” who look upon her, their references to specific victims are virtually always to men.⁶ At the very least, the mythographical works' silence on the subject of female viewers suggests that these works take it for granted that it would be uninteresting to imagine Medusa looking at a woman, perhaps because such a look would not produce any result significantly different from that of the Gorgon petrifying a man. This view of Medusa's effects would seem, for example, to be the view held by mythographers who allegorize Medusa as gold (because of her initially golden hair) and her victims as misers. But because other mythographers allegorize Medusa as a feminine voluptuousness that paralyzes men, a second assumption – stronger, though tacit – is that if a woman were to look at Medusa, nothing would happen at all.⁷

In Spenser's analogy, the image of handmaids peering into the bride's breast to see her Medusan interiority is made especially powerful by the conditional verb “if,” which puts the sight tantalizingly just out of sight: “if ye saw that which no eyes can see” (185). “That which no eyes can see” is the bride's inner virtue, but its inaccessibility seems to make it into something more than that, as well. For starters, its challenging undertone makes it resemble Busyrane's warning to Britomart not to be “too bold,” albeit in a lighter key. In both passages, “that which no eyes can see” is, among other things, an intimate relationship between two women. Yet in this case, the speaker encourages his female audience to desire the union that the conditionality of his language denies them.

Spenser capitalizes on Ovid's sense that the relationship between Medusa and Minerva is not simply between a monstrous mortal and a

virtuous immortal but also between two women. In Ovid's account, the relationship is antagonistic. When Minerva sees Neptune enter her temple to ravish the lovely Medusa, who is one of Minerva's votaresses, the goddess feels no pity; instead, she resolves to punish the girl by means that symbolically enact another rape – first by turning Medusa's hair into snakes and then by having Perseus cut off Medusa's head. When the speaker of the *Epithalamion* tells his bride's handmaids that if they had access to her inner virtues, they would become as astonished as Medusa's viewers, Spenser questions the standard moral interpretation of Medusa as an errant woman who is condemned forever to seduce unfortunate men into paralysis because of her capitulation to Neptune's lusts. In the *Epithalamion's* picture of Medusan beauty, Spenser allies feminine inconstancy textually with the bride's immovable chastity.⁸ In this, Spenser draws from Ovid's account, which calls our attention at least as powerfully to Medusa's relationship with the goddess who bears her on her breastplate (rather than on her aegis, in this case) as to Medusa's disastrous effect upon the men who succumb to her charms. In putting Medusa not merely upon, but inside of, the bride's breast, the *Epithalamion* makes use of Ovid's emphasis upon Minerva's problematic relationship with Medusa; the bride in Spenser's poem becomes a figure for a goddess who has completely internalized her monster. At the same time, the narrator imagines that if the bride's handmaids could see into the bride's Medusan interior, they might find a pattern for themselves there. This emblem, like several similarly "astonying" moments in *The Faerie Queene*, has overtones of misplaced intimacy that deserve our scrutiny.

In our shift from the Cave of Lust to a Medusan interiority, we have turned from an image ostensibly of a masculine monster who detains women to one ostensibly of a feminine monster who arrests men; but the gendered implications of the latter image, like those of the former, do not always stay put. And if, in Medusa's emblematic tradition, her fixity represents both a mortal woman's sexual error and the immovable strength of a chaste goddess, Spenser uses this tradition in the *Epithalamion* and in *The Faerie Queene* by making Medusa serve his text both as a sign of stability that is maintained by masculine proprietorship (Medusa as the weapon of a masculine goddess born from Zeus's head) and as the space for literary contingency and error.

Renaissance mythographers often describe what Medusa was like before she was turned into a monster, and the brief appearance of her severed head in Spenser's marriage ode acquires resonance from the earlier parts of her story. By making his version of Medusa beautiful as well as transfixing and by making her immediate audience female (the "merchants daughters" of line 167), Spenser aligns her not only with the

ghastly head of snakes on Minerva's breastplate but also with the earlier, live Medusa. It is this lovely Medusa at whom Ovid's Minerva glances in horror, and it is only in this early state that she is described by the ancients as receiving the gaze of any woman. The *Epithalamion's* conflation of the two Medusas can help us understand *The Faerie Queene's* investment in the hypothetical notion of looking directly at a Medusan interiority that promises both wanton instability and chaste stability.

What masculine audience?

Medusa does not seem to belong in a wedding celebration; the fierce chastity that mythographers associate with Minerva would seem more appropriate for a woman resisting assault than for even the most modest bride. The Gorgon's presence becomes particularly grotesque if we remember that in the midst of his wedding feast in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 5, Perseus uses Medusa's severed head, along with even bloodier weapons, to send half a dozen interlopers writhing to their deaths. In one sense, Spenser is merely being witty and following Petrarch's example by using Medusa as a kind of pun, a face that in most contexts would refer to ugliness but that here refers to deeply ingrained beauty. At the same time, we could also argue that the masculine imagination that fears Medusa's beauty and also fears her horror is looking at exactly the same powerful woman at exactly the same moment. Renaissance commentators make explicit the connection between Medusa's beauty and her ability to terrify men, yet their descriptions of Medusa almost never take account of the two very different states in which Minerva's shield serves as a weapon in Ovid's poem: Perseus uses the shield once before Medusa's head is on it, in order to slay Medusa, and many times after her head is on it, in order to conquer other men and monsters. Does Medusa serve as a weapon against unchastity, or is she unchastity itself? She might serve both ways, like heads of criminals displayed on stakes, but as Petrarch's use of Medusan imagery to represent Laura would suggest, Medusa's dual service not only renders the woman's status ambiguous but potentially leaves the male viewer uncertain whether Medusa's retributive gaze brands *him* as unchaste.

This question becomes more urgent in the *Epithalamion*, where Medusa is not simply Chastity's unwilling weapon but the pure dwelling place of chastity. In saying this, I am being perversely literal about the analogy "lyke to those which red / Medusaes mazeful hed" and about the next line: "There dwels sweet loue and constant chastity. . ." (191). Clearly, the word "there" should refer to the bride's inner space filled with spiritual treasure, but the nearest noun reference given us by the

poem is “mazeful hed.” Unlike Petrarch, whose Medusas appear at moments of intense frustration, Spenser uses Medusa’s image primarily to locate his narrator’s source of pride and delight. The narrator attempts to dissociate this delight from erotic desire by separating the catalogue of spiritual treasures from that of physical beauties, but if we read physicality back into the spiritual catalogue, its references to hidden inner spaces imply a rather different sort of poetic inspiration. Medusa’s presence becomes even more curious when one considers that the poem has already foreshadowed her appearance in its description of the bride’s lips, which are “lyke cherryes charming men to byte” (174). The witchy overtones of “charming” promise a delight that could fatally enthrall its takers.

Spenser’s Medusa stanza encodes more than male sexual anxiety; in fact, what interests me most about this passage is that it does not keep gender roles or moral alliances particularly well organized. Thus, on the one hand, Spenser’s Medusa has her greatest potential effect on merchants’ daughters rather than on lustful men, and on the other hand, the male narrator closely allies his own singing with that of the merchants’ daughters. Will he follow his own advice to these virgins by learning humility from his bride? And if the bride resembles a Gorgon, doesn’t her betrothed, as well, since it is he whose narrative astonishes and charms his listeners throughout the poem? Famously, the marriage poem begins with its narrator’s ambitious and risky declaration that his singing will resemble that of Orpheus. Critics have noted mythological connections between Ovid’s Medusa and *his* Orpheus, the type of the male artist who astonishes those around him.⁹ I would argue that in the *Epithalamion*, the snaky-haired monster begins to take over Orpheus’s territory – both by centering astonishment upon herself and by becoming a figure for the narrator’s poetic and rhetorical powers. The latter effect is intensified by the poem’s association of Medusa with an intimate interiority (“vnreuealed pleasures”: 201) to which only the narrator is privy, until he chooses to mediate it to his audience. In this way, the bride’s contemplative interiority merges imperceptibly with the creative interiority of her groom, and it is no priest who unites them.

Hidden monument for women

The narrator of the *Epithalamion* claims intimate ownership of his bride by casting her in what Alexander Dunlop aptly calls a “ritual of subordination”; the groom celebrates in detail the fact that his bride keeps her eyes modestly downcast throughout the processional. Yet the Medusa simile allows the bride’s eyes to rove boldly by proxy, since

painted or sculpted Medusas almost always stare disconcertingly. If the poem further undercuts the groom's sense of ownership by suggesting that his rhetorical power to transfix his listeners is linked to, or even derived from, the bride's monstrously beautiful interiority, what might this interiority mean for Medusa's female audience – for the handmaids or for women who read Spenser's ode? For that matter, what might this interiority mean for a male poet or reader who is not relentlessly masculine? When Boccaccio explains that Orpheus's severed head turning a snake into stone in the *Metamorphoses* signifies the invincibility of the poet, whose works will last forever, Boccaccio implies that Orpheus's creative powers finally transcend his body's victimization at the hands of the Thracian women (Ovid, *Met.*, XI.56–60; Boccaccio, *Genealogie deorum*, V.12). Yet when Medusa's severed head petrifies an onlooker, commentators interpret the act not as the result of her creativity but as evidence of Perseus's or Minerva's power.¹⁰ This difference results partly from the fact that Orpheus is a “good” character while Medusa is a “bad” one, and it would be simplistic in the extreme to argue that authors made her bad simply because she is female. Nevertheless, if we wanted to make Medusa mean what Orpheus means, we would need to start not by changing Medusa herself but by changing the gender of her audience – and this is exactly what the *Epithalamion* does.

The story of Orpheus gives poets who follow his footsteps both a sense of entitlement and a stiff warning. Similarly (and with or without Freud's help), Medusa's story offers men both a weapon and a repository for fears about feminine eroticism. Where does this leave the bride's handmaids? I propose that the *Epithalamion* does suggest sexual fear on their part but that this fear focuses upon a specifically masculine threat of violence to which the poem alludes obliquely in the stanza that follows Medusa's appearance. This is the first of two temple stanzas, in which the wedding party proceeds to the altar attended by admiring *putti*. In the midst of his endearingly exuberant haste, the narrator offers moral instruction:

With trembling steps and humble reuerence,
 She commeth in, before th'almighties vew,
 Of her ye virgins learne obedience,
 When so ye come into those holy places,
 To humble your proud faces . . .

(210–214)

Asked to imitate a modest woman, the merchants' daughters might respond by adjusting their expressions, hoping for their share of either heavenly approval or human praise. We cannot forget so quickly, however, that gazing at the trembling bride has just been compared to

gazing at the monstrous Medusa, and in light of this analogy, imitation of the bride becomes either masochistic or defiant. If it looks as though I am stretching the effect of Spenser's Medusa analogy too far, consider again that the action of the succeeding stanza about virginal humility takes place in what Spenser calls a "temple." In Ovid, when the still-beautiful Medusa comes into the "holy place" of Minerva's temple, it is not a bridegroom who meets her but Neptune, the accomplished rapist. Medusa's visit to the temple does indeed humble her proud face – agonizingly. And because Minerva is never one to sympathize with mortal women, she makes sure that Medusa humbles her proud face twice more, beneath snakes and then beneath Perseus's blade. Despite its brevity, the Medusa simile in the *Epithalamion* is startling enough to open up the question of whether a ravishing woman ravishes or looks ravished.

By allowing room for Medusa to become significant for women in this way, the *Epithalamion* not only questions its narrator's sublimated desires for sexual violence (which break through most strikingly in his romanticization of Jove's rapes) but also establishes *humbling* as an act that may be imposed from without rather than simply impelled from an inner moral goodness. In the general run of things, humility would have been considered appropriate for a new wife, but the particular type of humility represented by Neptune's rape and the vestal virgin's subsequent degradation seems odd enough in a marriage poem to encourage us to question the legitimacy of its being imposed from without. In turn, this gives us room to question the poem's imposition of a more benign humility upon the bride. Whose script does the bride follow when she blushes – or when, as she approaches the marriage bed, she loses the pride that characterized her in the *Amoretti*? We do not know in exactly what year Spenser wrote the *Epithalamion*, but if Elizabeth Boyle read it before her wedding day, did she learn her role from it? The historical question is unanswerable, but the *Epithalamion* itself raises the literary one.

Susanne Wofford argues that Amoret's torment in the House of Busyrene consists of "the forced revelation of the inner self in this abusive world" ("Gendering," 10–11). Like other critics, I believe that Amoret has a more than casual relationship with the bride in the *Epithalamion*, and I would argue that Wofford's argument about Amoret applies to the bride, as well.¹¹ Despite Amoret's apparent passivity, however, she does not submit entirely to the script that Busyrene writes for her, and Medusa offers the bride of the *Epithalamion* an alternative to her poet-husband's script for *her*. Although the groom's conditional address to the handmaids – "if ye saw that which no eyes can see" –

indicates that the handmaids cannot actually see the bride's private interior and hints that only he, as the husband, will have the right to do so, his use of the Medusa simile nevertheless suggests just the opposite. After all, men cannot look at Medusa. The *Epithalamion* alters Medusa's traditionally apotropaic function by making her part of a conditional process rather than simply a display of power; rather than simply warning the handmaids of impending petrification, the narrator imagines what their responses to Medusa would be ("Much more then would ye wonder") and goes on to tell them to model themselves after the bride's interior, as if they had seen it after all. The net result, whether logical or not, is that the poem has it both ways: Medusa is unseeable, yet in some sense the handmaids are being asked to see her and to reexamine and redefine themselves according to that sight. Moreover, because this stanza of invitation obviously parallels the preceding stanza about the bride's sexual charms – her eyes, breasts, nipples, and so on – the conditional language of the Medusa stanza encourages us to imagine an erotic connection between the bride and her handmaids. What would happen if the handmaids, like the groom, could become one flesh with the bride and know her secrets? If in one sense the handmaids are being asked to encounter the bride only in the form of a self-defeating image, in another sense their ability to see themselves in Medusa, however conditionally, means that they have already usurped the bridegroom's claim to a unique position of intimacy.

Medusa's severed head figures not only the sexually errant woman whose body has been laid open and is now displayed (*monstrare*) but also the inward part of a woman which cannot be displayed: by referring both to the bride's "inward beauty" and to Medusa's gaze, the phrase "that which no eyes can see" hints at a feminine reserve that just might conceal more wildness than the narrator bargains for (185). The narrator's restless delivery of the first half of his marriage poem testifies to an erotic anxiety caused by his bride's temporary inaccessibility; when the bride does finally appear, this anxiety is actually intensified rather than dissipated, as if the bride were in some way still inaccessible. One of the most reassuring and humorous passages in the poem, for example, comprises the three benediction stanzas, which welcome the privacy of the "broad wing" of night and then banish from the nuptial chamber all ills such as "deluding dreames," "housefyres," "hob Goblins," and (with reassuring drollery) "th'unpleasant Quayre of Frogs still croking" who "Make us to wish theyr choking." Yet the middle benediction stanza begins with an allusion to troubles that might arise in the marriage bed itself: "Let no lamenting cryes, nor dolefull teares, / Be heard all night within nor yet without" (334–335). Who would be

likely to cry, if not the bride? And who would feel uneasy at her crying, if not the bridegroom? Indeed, considering that the bridegroom ends his marriage poem with prayers to Juno for his bride's future protection during her pregnancy, it makes sense to see not only desire but a profoundly ambivalent uneasiness in his earlier allusions to Jove's rapes: in a world where large numbers of women do not survive childbirth, the tender violence that he and she share on this their wedding night may result in her death nine months from now. Yet the narrator's ritual banishment of the anonymous weeping, both by invoking charms against it and by leaving its agent implicit, makes it a potentially divisive grief rather than a bonding one: how can he explain or ask forgiveness for a guilt that is too hypothetical, too illogical, and too awful to express? This inability to express his fear or to listen to hers leaves part of her inaccessible to him. Just as significantly for her, however, her strength of reserve (which the poem makes much of) calls into question his ability to display her completely, to draw her and to draw her out.¹²

If the benediction stanzas of the *Epithalamion* overtly imagine that the bride and groom have a chance to build a companionate marriage, the Medusa stanzas construct a less orthodox form of social interaction: an exchange of glances between chaste women integrated into their society (the merchants' daughters who wait on the bride) and a marginal woman (Medusa). This means that in addition to being asked to model their own interiority after a Medusan one, these merchants' daughters occupy the place of Medusa's first female audience, of Minerva herself. And this double identification with monster and goddess makes perfect sense if we look back at Ovid's account. Ovid's narrator tells us that while Neptune was corrupting Medusa sexually, Minerva averted her chaste eyes, covering them with her shield. Afterwards, she punished Medusa by changing her beauty into monstrosity, and now, "to frighten her fear-numbed foes, she still wears upon her breast the snakes which she has made" ("ut attonitos formidine terreat hostes, / pectore in adverso, quos fecit, sustinet angues"; *Met.*, IV.802–803). These are the last words in Ovid's fourth book; their prominence makes them quite significant. The deed and doer from which and from whom Minerva hid her eyes now remain constantly before her, not allowing her to forget. Minerva's averted gaze attempts to deny the significance of the *simultaneity* of the violation of her sacred space and of the Gorgon's body; nevertheless, by fashioning and displaying on her breast a gory representation of that sexual invasion, she associates herself irrevocably with Medusa's error. They form an oddly intimate emblem of aversion.

Monstrous contagion

During the course of Britomart's three-book career, *The Faerie Queene* tests many ways of revising the heroine by acknowledging or denying her reflection in female characters whose sexual licentiousness or erotic dilemmas are allegorized as monstrosity. Because one of Spenser's narrative practices is to have the central character of each book go through temptations and setbacks in order to achieve a progressively more subtle identification with his or her trademark virtue as the book proceeds, we might expect that what Spenser is doing with Britomart's story is simply exposing the Knight of Chastity to unchaste roles from which she and we must gradually learn to dissociate her. The problem is that as Britomart's story develops in Books IV and V, the poem intensifies the unsettling implications of a relationship between the heroine and monstrosity rather than resolving such implications.

Such an intensification is not overtly on the poem's agenda, since Britomart's heroism and goodness clearly draw a line between her and malignant characters such as Ate, Mother of Discord. Spenser models Ate on Virgil's horrendous Allecto, with the notable difference that Ate appears beautiful. Yet her beauty, in direct contrast to that of Britomart, is merely a "faire semblance" which masks ugliness and a corrupting influence (IV.i.17). Unlike Britomart, too, Ate remains at a safe distance from harmful strife, even though she frequently causes it. Whereas Britomart induces temporary paralysis in her viewers whenever she takes off her helmet to reveal her astonishing hair and face, this astonification is surely a beneficent form of Ate's penchant for making heroes forget their noble quests and turn to squabbling among themselves.¹³ Although the sad "monuments of times forepast" that Ate has assembled in her castle should rightfully admonish those around her to avoid the wars that cause such destruction, the stories of strife that fill the book in which she appears demonstrate that what Spenser says about Ate's inner ugliness could also apply to her interior collection of war relics: they "mote to none but to the warie wise appear" (IV.i.17). Characters who might profit from seeing Ate's mementos of human folly cannot do so unless they are already "warie wise." Almost no one is able to fulfill this prerequisite; instead of learning to see Ate's relics, most humans throughout history unwittingly contribute to her collection. That this unwariness is due in large part to our having forgotten our relationship to political and literary history becomes even more apparent when we read Spenser's lament over Chaucer's lost works just after his description of Ate's museum of unheeded mementos.

Although the poem contrasts Britomart with Ate, however, it does not fully displace monstrosity onto Ate in the cantos in which Ate appears. Britomart's position in relation to Ate's "riuen walls" is problematic from the start, since Britomart does indeed cause discord among jealous men in other passages of the poem. Furthermore, although her beauty is genuine rather than a deceptive disguise like Ate's, Britomart causes the most discord when she is regulating how much the men around her can see beneath her armor both physically and figuratively. To dwell on these similarities might seem critically indefensible; after all, don't they simply throw the greater differences into relief? Certainly when the poem calls Ate "mother of debate, / And all dissention, which doth dayly grow / Amongst fraile men. . .," the description seems almost wholly inappropriate for Britomart, the Knight of Chastity (IV.i.19). But in Book V, the final cantos of Britomart's story regenerate Ate's disruptive tendencies in the person of Radigund, whose power to derail "fraile men" by making them forget their quests is more explicitly gendered than Ate's was. And it is in juxtaposing Britomart with Radigund that the poem defines its central female character for the last time.

Radigund is a beautiful but monstrous Amazon queen whose erotic passion disables her male targets against their better judgment. Artegall, to whom Britomart is now betrothed, attempts to subdue the wicked Amazon in battle but capitulates "of his owne accord" (V.v.17). The seasoned male warrior pusillanimously yields to the indignity of being dressed in "womans weedes, that is to manhood shame" and does not resist when his captor deposits his armor in "a long large chamber, which was sield / With moniments of many knights decay," recalling Ate's galleries (V.v.20–21). His release from Radigund's despotism and lechery comes only when his bride-to-be dons her armor again, leaves home, searches him out, and heroically frees her now-sheepish man. After Britomart defeats Radigund and temporarily becomes ruler of the Amazons in Radigund's place, she uses this power to repeal "the liberty of women" and restore them "to mens subiection" (V.vii.42). My experience teaching this poem suggests that we twentieth-century readers become so disturbed over the narrator's approval of this move that we tend to ignore the strangeness of what happens four stanzas later, at the beginning of the following canto.

Canto viii begins with a stanza of narrative commentary that seems clearly to chastise Artegall for having allowed the "straunge astonishment" of Radigund's beauty to bring his quest to a standstill (V.v.12). Like the earlier descriptions of Ate, this stanza shows us womankind's fair semblance and power over frail men:

Nought vnder heauen so strongly doth allure
 The sence of man, and all his minde possesse,
 As beauties louely baite, that doth procure
 Great warriors oft their rigour to repressse,
 And mighty hands forget their manlinesse;
 Drawne with the powre of an heart-robbing eye,
 And wrapt in fetters of a golden tresse,
 That can with melting pleasaunce mollifye
 Their hardned hearts, enur'd to bloud and cruelty. (V.viii.1)

On a first reading of this passage, the “man” of line 2 looks like a straightforward reference to Artegall, whose reunion with his beloved rescuer has embarrassed him acutely. As Britomart has already put it, Radigund has made a “May-game” of the knight, causing him to forget his courage in his astonishment over her beauty, holding him prisoner, forcing him to spin for his food, and temporarily robbing him of “manly hew” (V.vii.40).

Bizarrely, however, we discover two stanzas later that the poem is holding Artegall up as an exception to the warriors who are persuaded to give in – and that “beauties louely baite” refers primarily not to Radigund’s charms but to those of Britomart. Although the “wondrous powre” of “wemens faire aspect” has captured many men before Artegall’s time,

Yet could it not sterne *Artegall* retaine,
 Nor hold from suite of his auowed quest,
 Which he had vndertane to *Gloriane*;
 But left his loue, albe her strong request,
 Faire *Britomart* in langour and vnrest,
 And rode him selfe vppon his first intent . . . (V.viii.3)

The oddity of this narrative maneuver intensifies the more one looks at it: if Britomart’s “pleasaunce” (usually a morally negative term for Spenser) has unsuccessfully tempted Artegall to delay his quest, surely this brief temptation pales beside the protracted and dangerous delay occasioned by his giving in to Radigund, whom the poem represents as aggressively lustful. Britomart has been rather more of a help than a hindrance to her beloved’s endeavor, refraining even from speaking about her wish that he would stay with her a while longer. The notion that Artegall’s manly resistance consists in having “left his loue, albe her strong request” simply cancels and writes over the end of the previous canto, which made it clear that Britomart went out of her way to avoid persuading Artegall to forget his quest in the luxury of her presence:

Full sad and sorrowfull was *Britomart*
 For his departure, her new cause of grieffe;

Yet wisely moderated her owne smart,
 Seeing his honor, which she tendred chiefe,
 Consisted much in that aduentures priefe.
 The care whereof, and hope of his successe
 Gaue vnto her great comfort and reliefe,
 That womanish complaints she did repressse,
 And tempred for the time her present heauinesse. (V.vii.44)

This stanza is followed by one describing Britomart's solitary anguish after Artegall's departure; then canto viii begins, with its warning about feminine possessiveness. Nor can we extract the poem from its own cross-purposes by concluding that the stanza that opens canto viii implicates only the man (for being susceptible to a morally neutral beauty), since the second stanza of that canto gives Samson, Antony, and Hercules with his "Lions skin vndight" as examples of men "Drawne with the powre of an heart-robbing eye." Women are the villains of these stories, and the similarity of Hercules' degrading labor with a distaff to the spinning chores that Radigund has assigned her prisoners makes our mental transition from Radigund to Britomart in the third stanza more disconcerting. It is as if we are asked – obviously and awkwardly – to forget Britomart's Minervan heroism in the previous canto altogether, or to think of it as having been merely the feminine subjunctive, now replaced by the masculine indicative. Now we are asked to see her as an enchanting temptation whom Artegall manfully overcomes, a woman whose wandering from the indicative truth makes men wander.

When Artegall leaves her, she leaves the poem. She has nowhere else to go, now that she has averted her gaze from each of two conditional mirrors held up to her: she could have seen herself in Radigund, as an Amazonian usurper of male liberties, or she could have seen herself parodied in Artegall as he looked when she found him grotesquely dressed in a weak woman's weeds. This latter sight was the monstrosity from which, "abasht with secrete shame, / She turnd her head aside" (*FQ* V.vii.38). One thinks of Minerva in her temple, averting her eyes, mortified that Neptune's violation of a mortal woman's bodily space is congruent with his profane violation of Minerva's own holy space. Neither of these two Medusan faces – neither Radigund as the deceptively beautiful monster of lust nor Artegall acting the part of a woman vulnerable to violation – represents a legitimate role for Spenser's Minerva. To paraphrase what Adam Phillips says of Freud's successfully married couples: it is not truth that Spenser gives his heroine but her versionality that he takes from her.¹⁴ But although the poem relinquishes Britomart, it does not relinquish its efforts to develop a way of looking

directly at feminine monstrosity. In fact, as we shall see, Britomart's dilemma sometimes reappears as opportunity.

Arrest the author

After Britomart's exit, the poem continues both to shun and to woo a form of astonishment that Spenser identifies as dangerously feminine – right through the Cantos of Mutabilitie (which I take to be an appendix to the epic rather than a chunk of a projected Book VII, though I follow convention in citing them as the latter.) I want to jump forward in order to look at the titaness Mutabilitie. Latterness does not necessarily guarantee authority, even in a finished work, yet the problematical nature of the Mutabilitie Cantos does in some ways offer us a condensation of *The Faerie Queene's* larger questions, and a brief look at Mutabilitie's astounding powers will help us to reinterpret astonishment in the epic.

As the being who presides over this world's continual decay, Mutabilitie incorporates and extends Ate's talent for inciting war and destruction. The Cantos of Mutabilitie tell the story of that titaness's attempt to usurp the legitimate office of Cynthia, the moon. Striding up to Cynthia's throne, Mutabilitie first demands brazenly that the goddess step down; then she reaches out

To pluck her downe perforce from off her chaire;
 And there-with lifting vp her golden wand,
 Threatned to strike her if she did with-stand.
 Where-at the starres, which round about her blazed,
 And eke the Moones bright wagon, still did stand,
 All beeing with so bold attempt amazed,
 And on her vncouth habit and sterne looke still gazed. (VII.vi.13)

As Mutabilitie and Cynthia lock gazes – and pronouns – each one is looking at a version of herself. At the very moment when Mutabilitie claims power over Cynthia, Cynthia stands immutably still. And it is this very stillness that reminds us of the moon's double nature in astrological lore: she is both changeable and chaste, an inconstant virgin.

Many details in this episode link Mutabilitie with Medusa: Mutabilitie defiles a chaste goddess's sacred space; her beauty and boldness astonish and immobilize everyone who looks at her, including Jove; she is represented as both terrible and vulnerable; etcetera. But I have not brought us to the Mutabilitie Cantos simply to reiterate that Spenser makes Medusa look at Minerva and at other women in order to question the distinction between Medusa's mazelike head and the beneficent effects

of the neoplatonic lady's beauty. If Mutabilitie's face reflects Cynthia's, we will see that it also in some sense reflects that of the poet, and I submit that by allowing the problematic relationship between Minerva and her snaky work of art to inform his own Medusan emblems, Spenser refigures the inconstant desires of his poetic process in specifically feminine terms. Upon receiving word that a stranger to heaven has caused the moon to stand still, Jove first demands to know who has caused this "strange astonishment"; he then commands his servants to "arrest / The Author, and him bring" into the royal presence (VII.vi.16). The masculine pronoun (though logically traceable to the confusing reports that have reached Jove thus far) and the capitalization of "Author" call attention to themselves, begging for a double reading. We might remember that the handmaids in the *Epithalamion* become alternative versions of the author when their song merges with that of the *Epithalamion*'s narrator; the song that they forget to sing is also his song, the poem's refrain. And their song about Medusa – if they could see her – would offer him a way of singing about her, as well. We might also remember that Britomart metaphorically rewrites the tapestries of Bussy-rane, whom many readers have seen as a figure for a nightmarish sort of author when he writes "straunge characters . . . / With liuing blood" (III.xii.31). I suggest that because Britomart, the bride's handmaids, and Mutabilitie all become "authors" at some point, they enable Spenser to confront his own contingencies and dilemmas by participating – insofar as this is possible – in women's efforts either to deny or to come to terms with their capacity for sexual error.

What sort of author is this whose arrest has been ordered? In her aggression, Mutabilitie resembles the armored Minerva, that most masculine of all goddesses – and indeed both the narrator and Jove say that Mutabilitie is the sister of Bellona, an avatar of Minerva in Roman mythology (VII.vi.3, 32). I have been arguing that three things prevent either Minerva or her mythographers from extricating themselves from Medusa's error: the simultaneity of the violation of Minerva's sacred space and of the Gorgon's body, Minerva's female status in combination with her masculine acts, and the coincidence of her and her victim's terrible gazes. But in acknowledging this capacity for error each time he rewrites the Medusa myth, Spenser manages to combine self-implication with something that I can only call a productive loss.

In order to understand this point, we must read Mutabilitie's attempts at authorship back into Spenser's earlier work. Notice, to begin, that Mutabilitie's story recapitulates, feminizes, and renders contingent the poem's much earlier and more sanguine depiction of Prince Arthur-as-Author in Book I. Arthur keeps his shield covered when he is in the

company of friends, yet traitors feel the brunt of its ability to expose their true natures:

No magicke arts hereof had any might,
 Nor bloudie wordes of bold Enchaunters call,
 But all that was not such, as seemd in sight,
 Before that shield did fade, and suddaine fall:
 And when him list the raskall routes appall,
 Men into stones therewith he could transmew,
 And stones to dust, and dust to nought at all;
 And when him list the prouder lookes subdew,
 He would them gazing blind, or turne to other hew. (I.vii.35)

Here in the poem's optimistic beginnings, Medusa's power to appall men, blind them, or turn them into stones, and the power of mutability (the cosmological force that Mutabilitie represents) to reduce men to dust or "nought at all" both reside in the hands of a hero who uses them only through divine guidance, for divine ends. Like Perseus at his wedding feast in the *Metamorphoses*, Arthur uses his Medusan shield to petrify evil men into physical displays of what they have been inside all along.¹⁵

Yet the stanza preceding the one quoted above employs a suspicious analogy to describe the admirable power of Arthur's shield to dismay even monsters:

For so exceeding shone his glistring ray,
 That *Phoebus* golden face it did attaint,
 As when a cloud his beames doth ouer-lay;
 And siluer *Cynthia* wexed pale and faint,
 As when her face is staynd with magicke arts constraint. (I.vii.34)

Paul Alpers comments:

It is puzzling to have the shield's effect compared to disturbing manifestations of magical power, especially since "magicke arts constraint" is the province of Archimago. But the point is precisely that Spenser wants us to feel puzzled, and he is not at all worried by implicit assertions about the nature or source of the shield's power . . . (*Poetry*, 177)

If Spenser is "not at all worried" here, a marked change occurs during his movement from Book I to Book VI, and then in his movement to the Mutabilitie Cantos. Along the way, Spenser's own narrative voices acquire a load of puzzled worry about "the nature or source of" his poetry's power, and there is a loss of Arthurian confidence and control. Even Book I is far from free of these anxieties, but Spenser's opening book does lay claim to an apparently governable form of astonishment when it aligns Arthur with the author by converting the knight's shield

(here presented as one of Arthur's chief instruments of influence in the world) into an emblem of the core of the poem: "But when [Arthur] dyde, the Faerie Queene it brought / To Faerie lond, where yet it may be seene, if sought" (I.vii.36). In today's England, Spenser hints, his prophetic poem is responsible for the work already ascribed to the Faery shield in stanza 35, so that if his readers are wise enough to seek throughout the poem's mazes (a heavily loaded "if"), they will discover that it transforms "all that was not such, as seemd in sight."

There is a great difference between the burden of doubt attached to Arthur's seemingly magical constraint of "siluer Cynthia" and the burden of doubt attached to Mutabilitie's constraint of that same celestial body – even though the latter story, like the former, soon reassures us that the staying of Cynthia's progress actually results from divine influence rather than from witchcraft. Because Mutabilitie herself is a far less heroic figure than Arthur was, the Mutabilitie Cantos can manage this reassuring insistence upon divine control only by first defusing her through Jove's scornful dismissal of her as a "foolish gerle" (once he and his followers have gotten over being "all astonied, like a sort of Steeres" whose "ghastly gaze[s] bewray their hidden feares" at VII.vi.28) and by then turning away from Mutabilitie as a character, focusing on mutability merely as a process under the control of God's larger vision.¹⁶

This abandonment of Mutabilitie as a feminine character, however, means that the Mutabilitie Cantos also abandon Mutabilitie-as-Author, and although there are certainly compensations in the eschatological vision of a unifying "Sabaoths sight" toward which the final two stanzas abruptly strain, Mutabilitie's disappearance in these stanzas signals the end of a long investigation of feminine authority without signaling anything so gratifying as its resolution. Yet the self-implication that attaches to the loss of Arthurian confidence and control as Spenser moves away from *FQI* into the various contingent moments discussed in this chapter has at least been mixed with the sense that authorship can be interactive and mutually altering rather than simply a one-sided demonstration of coercive power.

In order to see how the relinquishing of masculine confidence and control can oddly make greater room for authorial movement, we might return to the metaphor of bodily invasion, which would seem attached to, though not synonymous with, a masculine wish for domination. Spenser often uses the metaphor for male characters, but at other times he assigns the role of penetrator to female characters – often the same ones whom he associates either with monstrosity or with Minervan authority. In fact, it is this role of violator as much as anything else that

points to Medusa and Minerva's inseparability in Spenser's text; the astonying Mutabilitie is both an erring subject whom the gods wish to chastise and an aggressive penetrator of spheres that do not belong to her. Although Mutabilitie as Author clearly differs from Britomart and from the bride's handmaids, she also resembles them in that she trespasses upon a guarded feminine interior. Like Britomart's perforation of the barriers that surround Amoret in the Busyrane episode (with "her swords point directing forward right," III.xi.25), Mutabilitie's entrance into Cynthia's territory becomes intensely eroticized: in order to reach the "Circle of the Moone," Mutabilitie passes through a surrounding region of air and fire, "whose substance thin and slight, / Made no resistance, ne could her contraire, / But ready passage to her pleasure did prepaire" (VII.vi.7). Later, Jove speculates that Mutabilitie's motive is "some vaine error or inducement light, / To see that [that which] mortall eyes haue neuer seene" (VII.vi.32).

In his proem to Book II of *The Faerie Queene*, Spenser has already compared his process of invention to the penetration and insemination of virgin territory by the explorers of the Americas. How do you know that my matter is purely fictional, asks his speaker, when so recently we thought that "fruitfullest *Virginia*" was a myth? "Why then should witlesse man so much misweene / That nothing is, but that which he hath seene? / What if within the Moones faire shining sphere?" (II.pr.3). The speaker goes on to tell his queen that if she looks into the mirroring poem, she will see versions of herself; and he explains that the purpose of his dark allegory is to obscure her dazzling countenance, which might otherwise strike her readers blind. The core of Spenser's poem, in other words – the secret interior of its feminine body – is "that which no eyes can see," a region of mazeful Gorgonian virtue. Like the Medusa of the *Epithalamion*, the beauty of this wandering poem's inaccessible interior would strike us blind – *if* we could see it.¹⁷

I mentioned earlier that Ate's brand of feminine error consists of luring men into an unhelpful form of forgetting. As the agent of social blindness – of discord and historical amnesia – Ate destroys or renders inaccessible all that was good, even while, like Mutabilitie, she constructs historical monuments to herself out of ruins. But when the poem's speaker tells us that Ate's relics "mote to none but to the warie wise appeare," the beautifully crafted phrase admonishes the poet and his readers, as well, and it becomes unclear on which side of Ate's poorly shielding walls we have located ourselves. Epic poets depend upon materials remarkably close to those that fill Ate's Castle of Discord: "Disshiuered speares, and shields ytorne in twaine, / Great cities ransackt, and strong castles rast, / Nations captiued, and huge armies

slaine. . .” (IV.i.21). Both the epic poem and Ate’s castle “hard by the gates of hell” guard mementos, so that in their enclosed spaces, signification depends even more obviously than usual upon the absence of the signified.¹⁸ That is, without wars that destroy people, and without a devouring time that threatens to destroy the memory of wars, there would be no epics. Furthermore, Spenser profits from what he believes to be the loss of the last half of one of Chaucer’s works (by continuing Chaucer’s unfinished “Squire’s Tale” in his own story of Cambell and Triamond in *FQ* IV) even as he mourns the lost work in terms that implicate Ate, that defacer of monuments:

[N]ow their acts be no where to be found,
As that renowned Poet them compyled,
With warlike numbers and Heroicke sound,
Dan *Chaucer*, well of English vndefyled,
On fames eternall beadroll worthie to be fyled.

But wicked Time that all good thoughts doth waste,
And workes of noblest wits to nought out weare,
That famous moniment hath quite defaste,
And robd the world of threasure endless deare,
The which mote haue enriched all vs heare.
O cursed Eld the cankerworme of writs,
How may these rimes, so rude as doth appeare,
Hope to endure, sith workes of heauenly wits
Are quite deuourd, and brought to nought by little bits? (IV.ii.32–33)

Spenser’s speaker makes explicit his fear that his own poems may some day be destroyed, as well. Yet there is another, more subtle, implication of the relationship between Spenser, Chaucer, and Ate. If Ate’s gallery, which feeds monstrously on forgetting, is in some sense like an epic – if, that is, epics form themselves around losses that poets themselves cannot control – this would suggest that the obscure interior of Spenser’s poetry is in part inaccessible to Spenser himself.¹⁹

At this point, I will quote a brief passage from earlier in this chapter, in which I was describing the silent bride of the *Epithalamion*. There will be a few revisions this time around:

Medusa’s severed head figures not only the sexually errant woman [the errant poem] whose body has been laid open and is now displayed (*monstrare*) but also the inward part of a woman [poem] which cannot be displayed: by referring both to the [poem’s] “inward beauty” and to Medusa’s gaze, the phrase “that which no eyes can see” hints at a feminine reserve that just might conceal more wildness than the narrator bargains for (185). The narrator’s restless delivery of the first half of his marriage poem testifies to an erotic anxiety caused by his [poem’s] temporary inaccessibility . . . Just as significantly for [the poem], however, her

strength of reserve . . . calls into question his ability to display her completely, to draw her and to draw her out.

The more I read *The Faerie Queene*, the more I become convinced that Spenser searched for his artistic sources at points of dispersal and deflection. In cantos ix and x of Book VI, which are famous for their treatment of poetic inspiration, we read that Sir Calidore charms people's hearts away from them with his rhetorical powers but forgets his vow to the Faerie Queene when he loses his own heart to Pastorella's benign enchantment. His journey to the center of the pastoral cantos progresses in stages of astonishment, forgetting, and loss of feminine presence, until finally, at the still center on Mount Acidale, loss itself becomes the most tangible thing left. The three Graces have fled, and that is all there is to sing about.

One poetic compensation is that from the center, all thoughts radiate outward, as the fleeing Graces do – or as the snakes on Medusa's head do, straining towards paralysis. Something that looks like stasis and deprivation may actually be the dilemma of an artistic energy that recognizes more potential paths than it can choose to trace (and after all, Medusa's offspring was Pegasus, who became the darling of the muses when he created the fountain of Hippocrene by striking Mount Helicon with his hoof). For the moment of astonishment, all history dissolves and all forward progress ceases; the moment emblemizes an intimate crisis: which way? what ways? Every conceivable action is hypothesis. This moment, however, like Medusa's appearance in the *Epithalamion*, surrounds itself with activity. Indeed, the greater the stasis, the greater the scope for hypothetical movement or fantasy.²⁰ If, as Coluccio Salutati says, Medusa represents artifice, eloquence, and oblivion, then for artists she can pose a genuine crisis that is nevertheless something other than simply threatening (*De laboribus Herculis*, 417). We normally think of memory as both constituting and affirming the self, but Spenser's poetry suggests that our moments of forgetting and doubt may be just as important.²¹

When the narrator of the *Epithalamion* calls the bride's interior "that which no eyes can see," Spenser toys with the question of what happens when a man looks at Medusa: does he see her, or does he see only nothing, since he is already turned to stone? In Spenser's conditional reconstruction of Medusa's story with female viewers who would be astonished by her as Orpheus's listeners are by him, this nothing would *be* the impulse to speak or sing poetry. I began this chapter by saying that when Medusa meets a woman, nothing happens at all. In order to see something in this nothing, we must become like the musical hand-

maids, who are at least provisionally confronted with a mirror that both reflects and questions them.

If Britomart, the handmaids, or we as readers could look straight at Medusa, it would be impossible to distinguish her uncomfortably aggressive questioning of us from her participation in our susceptibility to that questioning. Minerva looks at Medusa and sees herself. Pindar's twelfth Pythian ode, which extols the art of flute-playing, says that Athena (Minerva) invented this beautiful art when "She wove to a tune / The ruthless Gorgon's deathly dirge." "Deathly" cuts both ways, but so do the song's beauty and the credit for its origin. In Pindar, the goddess's and monster's intimacy is complete, albeit only in the song's circumscribed space. When Minerva sings, the Gorgon sings. In Spenser's work, only by becoming like the handmaids could we see ourselves as both Minervan heroine and Medusan monster – which is really the same thing, finally, as saying "both sides of Medusa": both vulnerable gazer and astonying object of gazes.

4 Narrative flirtations

Waging dalliance

Penelope for her *Vlisses* sake,
Deuiz'd a Web her wooers to deceaue:
in which the worke that she all day did make
the same at night she did againe vnreaue.
Such subtile craft my Damzell doth conceaue,
th'importune suit of my desire to shonne:
for all that I in many dayes doo weaue,
in one short houre I find by her vndonne.
So when I thinke to end that I begonne,
I must begin and neuer bring to end:
for with one looke she spills that long I sponne,
and with one word my whole yeares work doth rend.
Such labour like the Spyderys web I fynd,
whose fruitlesse worke is broken with least wynd. (*Amoretti* 23)

The brilliance of the analogy that informs Sonnet 23 of Spenser's *Amoretti* lies partly in its extravagant imprecision. Penelope's relationship to Ulysses ought to parallel that of the damsel to her poet admirer, but when we learn that the damsel conceives her craft in order to shun "th'importune suit of [his] desire," we realize that the speaker is actually analogous to Penelope's suitors – or would be, except that he becomes Penelope herself in the next line when he laments the loss of "all that I in many dayes doo weaue." Ulysses fades quickly from the poem, flickering back into our sight only peripherally when the endless labor mentioned in the third quatrain reminds us of the sailor's wish to bring his voyage to an end. The elaborate system of reciprocity between the words that describe Penelope's actions in the first quatrain (such as "deuiz'd," "deceaue," and "unreaue") and those that describe the lady's actions in the second ("conceaue," "shonne," "vndonne") give a strong impression of one-to-one analogical correspondence, so that the pleasure of finding ourselves outwitted is intensified when we discover that one prominent pair of words turns a woman into a man: Penelope's *making* points to the

poet's art – since poets were called “makers” – as surely as his *weaving* points to hers.¹

Like Penelope's finespun handiwork, the Damzell's “subtile craft” is designed to repel flying insects rather than snare them, but by dividing Penelope's dual labor between two actors, Spenser changes her weaving and unweaving from complementary actions, designed to produce an exactly balanced stasis, into competing actions, one of which ultimately proves the stronger. The speaker designs his own web to catch prey, so either his labor or hers must fail. The poem sets up the contest as a question of sexual potency: after she conceives (line 5), the fruit of that conception is her plan to destroy the thread that begins in him and that has as its end her virginity's end.

Far from denying his lady's ascendancy, the speaker constructs his narration to emphasize the ineffectiveness of his maneuvers.² As the sonnet progresses, less and less of her artillery is required to counteract his increasingly more strenuous labors: his “many dayes” of weaving expand to a “whole yeares work,” while her “one short houre” of undoing shrinks to one invincible word (in line 12). After this struggle, the effect of the sonnet's last two words, “least wynd,” is extraordinary, an instantaneous evaporation of most of the power accumulated by both contestants. The Damzell's craft proves more subtly clever than her lover's, whose weaving gives way because of its more subtle tenuousness. Because the plays on words such as “subtile,” “conceauē,” and “fruitlesse” carry such force, it is almost as if such words had no dominant meanings in the poem; the shifting relativity of their power alerts us to a similar relativity in the relationship between the two lovers and between the two genders that they should by all rights embody in this context. Her strength lies only in his greater weakness, and their mutual frailty enables the sonnet to make its own greatest impact with the words “least wynd.”

Both participants in this linguistic game play at wounding each other, but the complexity of their game makes it difficult to sort out where the relish is mutual and where it works at cross purposes, since clever wordplays, no matter how gentle, not only signify the author's exercise of his literary demesne but also enable him to reserve potentially private sources of pleasure. There is a certain fulfillment of erotic arousal in the lover's spinning, which represents both his artistic stratagem for making a sexual conquest and his fantasized experience of the sexual act itself. When the Damzell “spills” (spoils) his work, his pen converts that frustration into consummation: because a “spill” was also a spindle upon which yarn was wound, the writer makes his beloved save his spinning just as fast as she destroys it.³ A second pun on the same word suggests

that her saving action consists in spilling his spinneret of semen in the one short hour which, by analogy with Penelope's nocturnal unweaving, might just as well take place at night. In the process, the sexual politics of this sonnet traverse the boundary between the actions being narrated (when a mistress unweaves her suitor's efforts as fast as he weaves them) and the action of producing that narration (the writing of a text that does its own linguistic weaving). If the speaker cannot achieve consummation in the former set of actions, he may nevertheless achieve erotic pleasure in the latter.

At the same time, the chiasmus of "So when I thinke to end that I begonne, / I must begin and neuer bring to end" creates a self-referential figure from which there is no linguistic or logical escape. Although the lover's design has matrimony as its end, the sonnet also reflects a wish to end the whole frustrating business by simply quitting. (Relaxation is a temptation, as the flirt Phædria knows when she teases Cymochles with the possibility of abandoning his "fruitlesse labours" and thriving like the lily-of-the-field, who "neither spinnes nor cardes," *FQ* II.vi.16. For extended treatments of the attractions of retreat, see Parker's *Inescapable Romance*, 54–113, and *Literary Fat Ladies*, 54–66.) Behind the sonneteer's desire for erotic union wavers a desire to abandon even the labor that might procure such a union. The rebuffed lover complains that the woman whom he admires has become skilled in a craft that enables her to evade his importunate wooing: "Such subtile craft my Damzell doth conceaue, / th'importune suit of my desire to shonne." But the poem also hints that the mistress's evasion is at least partly projected onto her by her lover: the strongly end-stopped lines of this sonnet have a tendency to separate from one another, in the way they so often do throughout Spenser's poetry; and when experienced as a separate grammatical unit, the line "th'importune suit of my desire to shonne" touches upon a very different undercurrent of longing by changing "my desire" from the grammatical subject of "shonne" into its object: the speaker's urgent need to shun. The line contains no real ambiguity, but it does allow room for an alternative desire to break through the syntax. Something like the teasing retort of an Elizabethan echo-song, the phrase "my desire to shonne" can seem to hold the meaning for the entire line.

Even as the poem allows its eager suitor to become reluctant and inscrutable, Spenser's rewriting of the Penelope myth as a flirtation gently ironizes Penelope's own efforts "to shonne" her suitors' desires for the sake of her honor. In this sonnet, as in the *Odyssey*, Penelope titillates her suitor with glimpses of her loom. But although the Homeric interpretation of this titillation – that Penelope unweaves her work each night in order to buy time for her husband to return and rout the suitors

– seems important at the beginning of the sonnet (“*Penelope* for her *Ulysses* sake”), the rest of the sonnet might lead us to suppose, with its playfully hyperbolic delineation of the lady’s military prowess, that expediency and reluctance motivate *Penelope* less than does her delight in exercising a controlling art. It is difficult, finally, to know which of the several roles in this sonnet we should call *Penelope*’s and which we should call her suitor’s, since the two of them keep changing places.

When the *Amoretti* and *Epithalamion* were published in 1595, Spenser had already used the metaphor of weaving to describe the formidable task of writing an epic. In his seventh dedicatory sonnet to the 1590 edition of *The Faerie Queene*, he had asked Lord Grey de Wilton to accept his “Rude rymes, the which a rustick Muse did weaue / . . . And roughly wrought in an vnlearned Looome.” The past tense of “did weaue” points to a comfortably complete action, but the edition for which Spenser wrote this sonnet was only a first installment, comprising three of the twelve books that the author was planning to write. In the next three books, published in 1596, Spenser’s narrator frequently addresses us in terms that resemble those of the *Penelope* sonnet’s lines, “So when I thinke to end that I begonned, / I must begin and neuer bring to end.” Many cantos end with declarations of weariness or further remarks about the length of his poem. Sometimes the speaker is happy, sometimes ambivalent, but he is always conscious of endless labor.

Weaving and webs are important throughout Spenser’s work as figures for artistry, labor, and power; one thinks, for example, of the wicked *Acrasia*’s web-like garments and of the web that *Guyon* throws over her. Yet the poet seems even more interested in the type of relationship that the alternating movements of weaving and unweaving represent than in figuring his art specifically as a web. That is, *The Faerie Queene* and many of the shorter poems are fascinated with actions, conversations, grammatical structures, and human impulses that at once reinforce and cancel each other. Indeed, Spenser often turns pairs of actions that would seem to represent something like weaving – where an artist alternates movements in two directions in order to complete a task – into pairs of actions that seem, like *Penelope* and her suitor’s weaving and unweaving, to recur without bringing a task any nearer completion. This is true of the metaphors that he uses to describe his narrative process throughout *The Faerie Queene*, such as the tacking of ships and the plowing of fields. Perhaps the most famous stanza in this vein is the one that begins the final canto of Book VI:

Like as a ship, that through the Ocean wyde
Directs her course vnto one certaine cost,

Is met of many a counter winde and tyde,
 With which her winged speed is let and crost,
 And she her selfe in stormie surges tost;
 Yet making many a borde, and many a bay,
 Still winneth way, ne hath her compasse lost:
 Right so it fares with me in this long way,
 Whose course is often stayd, yet neuer is astray. (VI.xii.1)

The ship's indirect progress represents more than simply the prolongation of a task, more than simply deferral, and more, even, than a request for the readers' trust.⁴ With this metaphor, as with other metaphors of alternating movements, Spenser turns the meandering progress of his poem into images that comment upon the writing of poetry in other ways, as well: sailing a tacking ship may involve danger and weariness; it also requires patience, expertise, and the knowledge that in some cases, indirection is direction. Weaving sets up a pattern in cloth that requires artistry, foresight, and, in Penelope's case, strategy. Plowing a field is eventually supposed to yield fruit of indisputable, concrete value. At the same time, all of these results are uncertain. Webs break with puffs of wind; ships receive their orders to leave port almost as soon as they have reached it; the plowman cannot guarantee his yield. In these metaphors, as well as in various grammatical and rhetorical teases that I will address as we go along, Spenser uses the idea of two or more alternating movements that heighten each other, oppose each other, or do both at once (as in the Penelope sonnet) not simply to retard or defeat the forward progress of the poem but, more crucially and purposefully, to develop the simultaneously engaged and aloof relationship between the Petrarchan mistress and her lover into a specifically *epic* technique. Spenser's narrative identity is fraught with sexual intrigue, playfulness, and exasperation.⁵

I call Spenser's oscillating narrative pattern flirtatious not only because it appears in one sonnet that describes a flirtation or because Spenser often uses the pattern teasingly, but because in the epic it enables him to gender various narrative voices and then use the attraction and antagonism among these voices in experimental performances. Like a flirtation between two actual people, which is itself always in some sense staged, these teasing performances allow a serious exploration of the poem's conflicting impulses to pursue and to flee, to merge with and to shun the modes of desire represented by various masculine and feminine narrations.⁶ In the introduction, I outlined some of the ways that flirtation has traditionally made at least conditional room for the woman to enlarge upon her sense of selfhood, but the Penelope sonnet is a perfect example of Spenserian flirtation because

although it identifies flirtation as feminine – like Penelope’s weaving, the chief occupation of women from ancient times until long after the Renaissance – it also paradoxically identifies it as the male narrator’s chief method of constructing a self.

I am arguing, then, that Spenser thoroughly mixes the gender roles traditionally associated with flirtation, even as he keeps us aware of those roles. He does so, first of all, by recognizing that the woman’s flirtation, like Penelope’s weaving and unweaving, may conceal a set of purposes that are not purely defensive; and second, by recognizing that the man’s assertive moves in his courtship may also serve to defend or protect him even while he is complaining about his mistress’s evasiveness. Far from styling the woman as the only flirt, Spenser’s work takes account of the fact that both the lover and his beloved may experience the pleasurable danger that inheres in even the most lighthearted flirtation. Furthermore, although Sonnet 23 seems at first strongly invested in distinguishing its two contestants according to gender, the person traditionally identified as the flirt is in this sonnet the very thing that crosses and recrosses gender boundaries. As the speaker dallies with his beloved in a series of linguistic skirmishes, he sometimes wanders from his properly gendered self into the opposition camp, becoming Penelope instead of a suitor. When we speak about flirtation in Spenser’s work, it is useful sometimes to refer to it as a “feminine” mode, both because coquetry was commonly considered a feminine trait in the sixteenth century and because *The Faerie Queene* itself most often chooses to level explicit charges of coquetry at female characters. Yet the commonplace that women who flirt are wandering across the proper boundaries of personal exposure develops in Spenser’s poetry into an understanding that both men and women who flirt may divagate from gendered positions that might have seemed fixed. These men and women become unfaithful to themselves, as an inconstant woman (always a woman, under the double standard) is unfaithful to her husband. We can use Sonnet 23 as a paradigm for understanding the ways that, in Spenser’s longer poetic works, the various Spenserian narrators’ wandering back and forth between masculine and feminine selves that compete with each other and lead each other on enacts a flirtation with gender itself.

Spenser’s poetry recognizes, then, that although flirtation constitutes an interaction between two participants, it is an enigmatic, masking form of communication that may serve some intensely solitary purposes. One of the most outrageous flirts in *The Faerie Queene* is also in some ways the poem’s consummate loner: Phædría. This unscrupulous woman spends her days enticing men into her “litle Gondelay,” which wanders

over the Idle Lake guided by the whims of its “merry marriner” rather than by skill or effort (II.vi.2, 5, 20):

And all the way, the wanton Damzell found
 New merth, her passenger to entertaine:
 For she in pleasant purpose did abound,
 And greatly ioyed merry tales to faine,
 Of which a store-house did with her remaine,
 Yet seemed, nothing well they her became;
 For all her words she drownd with laughter vaine,
 And wanted grace in vtt'ring of the same,
 That turned all her pleasance to a scoffing game.

And other whiles vaine toyes she would deuize
 As her fantasticke wit did most delight.

. . .

Sometimes to doe him laugh, she would assay
 To laugh at shaking of the leaues light,
 Or to behold the water worke, and play
 About her litle frigot, therein making way.

(II.vi.6–7)

If these stanzas seem like a parody of the woman whose dependence upon men's attention makes her willing to compromise every moral value and to adopt every form of nonsense for the sake of that attention, we should notice that to Phædría, it almost makes no odds whether she is with an admirer or alone. When Cymochles first catches sight of her, she is sitting in her boat at anchor:

And therein sate a Ladie fresh and faire,
 Making sweet solace to her selfe alone;
 Sometimes she sung, as loud as larke in aire,
 Sometimes she laught, that nigh her breth was gone,
 Yet was there not with her else any one,
 That might to her moue cause of meriment:
 Matter of merth enough, though there were none,
 She could deuise, and thousand waies inuent,
 To feede her foolish humour, and vaine iolliment.

(II.vi.3)

With her second passenger, Sir Guyon, Phædría “did of ioy and iollitie deuize, / Her selfe to cherish, and her guest to cheare” (vi.21). It is unnecessary to explain this last line as meaning that Phædría wants Guyon to cherish her and wants also to cheer him; the point of the vague syntax, as well as of the order in which the two phrases appear, is that Phædría cherishes herself first and foremost. If she is a satirical portrait of the coquette whose morals make her a wandering woman, she is at the same time a satirical portrait of the woman who takes pleasure in herself at men's expense or even to their exclusion.

Indeed, Phædria's private, intemperate levity here in the Book of Temperance hints that, within the world of *The Faerie Queene*, a woman wanders or errs when she takes pleasure in herself. Serena is later attacked by the Blatant Beast because she has wandered away from her male protectors while they were absorbed in their own conversation, in order to follow her own desires:

. . . whilst they discoursed both together,
 The faire *Serena* (so his Lady hight)
 Allur'd with myldnesse of the gentle wether,
 And pleasaunce of the place, the which was dight
 With diuers flowres distinct with rare delight,
 Wandred about the fields, as liking led
 Her wauering lust after her wandring sight,
 To make a garland to adorne her hed,
 Without suspect of ill or daungers hidden dred.

All sodainely out of the forrest nere
 The Blatant Beast forth rushing vnaware,
 Caught her thus loosely wandring here and there,
 And in his wide great mouth away her bare. (VI.iii.23–24)

Sometimes the woman's pleasure in herself takes the form of alliance with someone of the same sex, as in Britomart and Amoret's story (see Chapter 1). At other times, it takes the form of licit or illicit flirtation, when a female character playfully refuses to commit herself either to her suitor or to her husband. But Phædria is not the only storytelling mariner with a wandering boat, nor is Serena the only person lured into wandering after a pleasantly erotic novelty; the narrator opens Book VI by confessing that "The waies" of Fairyland "Are so exceeding spacious and wyde, / And sprinkled with such sweet variety," that their ravishing delights make him forget his "tedious trauell" (VI.pr.1). This is a hopeful version of the anxieties expressed elsewhere about the difficulty of making narrative headway; and even here, forgetting one's travel may mean not only that one travels without thinking about it but also that one forgets to keep traveling. If we read Serena's and Phædria's self-indulgence into the narrator's own indirect sailing, we may speculate that his declarations of anxiety about never reaching port are part and parcel with the indirections of Renaissance allegory and with the delight that amorous Renaissance poetry takes in a masked play of identities. We may speculate, in other words, that the anxieties of Spenser's narrator are partly an elaborate flirtation with his readers, designed to create a public, interactive, and ostensibly licit pleasure while at the same time keeping this pleasure in some sense private and protected from censure.

“Uncouth, unkist”

Spenser begins his literary career with a sidelong glance, a coy turning away that teases his onlookers to follow:

Goe little booke: thy selfe present,
 As child whose parent is vnkent:
 To him that is the president
 Of noblesse and of cheualree,
 And if that Enuie barke at thee,
 As sure it will, for succoure flee
 Vnder the shadow of his wing,
 And asked, who thee forth did bring,
 A shepherds swaine saye did thee sing,
 All as his straying flocke he fedde:
 And when his honor has thee redde,
 Craue pardon for my hardyhedde.
 But if that any aske thy name,
 Say thou wert base begot with blame:
 For thy thereof thou takest shame.
 And when thou art past ieopardee,
 Come tell me, what was sayd of mee
 And I will send more after thee.

Immeritô
 (SC, envoy)

In this envoy to his literary debut (an envoy unconventionally printed before, rather than after, the poem), the poet is able to use both his anonymity and the humility topos to create a paradoxically strong public image for himself by playing these retiring gestures against his final line, “And I will send more after thee.”⁷ We are meant to understand by this clause that if Sidney and other readers applaud, the unknown poet will publish more work. At the same time, the line suggests retroactively that when the speaker instructed his book a few lines earlier to “Say thou wert base begot with blame,” he was counting on his readers’ protesting that this poem is not actually illegitimate at all, that its paternal author should be proud.⁸

Yet the envoy’s final line may be read in a third way, as a gleeful indication that Immeritô would like nothing better than to produce more bastards. E. K.’s editorial epistle to Gabriel Harvey, following the envoy, picks up on this joke by using a Chaucerian allusion to change the image of a successful poet being congratulated and kissed by his male friends into the image of a more frankly sexual pandering:

VNCOVTHE VNKISTE, Sayde the olde famous Poete Chaucer . . . Which prouerbe, myne owne good friend Ma. Haruey, as in that good old Poete it serued well Pandares purpose, for the bolstering of his baudy brocage, so very well taketh

place in this our new Poete, who for that he is vncouthe (as said Chaucer) is vnkist, and unknown to most men, is regarded but of few. But I dout not, so soone as his name shall come into the knowledg of men, and his worthines be sounded in the tromp of fame, but that he shall be not onely kiste, but also beloued of all, embraced of the most, and wondred at of the best. (*SC*, epistle)

As well as finding an excuse for ribaldry in the envoy, E. K. takes his Chaucerian cue from there; Immeritô's phrase "Goe little booke" comes from the final passage of *Troilus and Criseyde*, where Chaucer addresses his own work. Though Chaucer's words to his book are asexual, Immeritô's envoy goes out of its way to sexualize Chaucer's phrase by making the apostrophized book into a bastard child. As a result, this very departure from the Chaucerian original makes us think all the more about the sexual predicaments in the rest of the poem from which "Goe little booke" is taken: "Unknowe, unkist" is, after all, the phrase with which Chaucer's Pandarus persuades Troilus to let himself be introduced to Criseyde (*TC* V.1786, I.809).⁹

Through E. K.'s heightened coloring of the envoy – since I take E. K.'s glosses to be a part of Spenser's text, whether Spenser wrote them or whether friends wrote and submitted them for his approval before publication – Spenser makes Immeritô participate in the erotic games that Chaucer's speaker views only from the outside, despite his flashes of sympathy. Although E. K.'s sentence about kissing and embracing ostensibly describes only the poet's hearty reception by friends, this kissing becomes less innocent in combination with the opening "Vncouthe vnkiste" and E. K.'s reference to Pandarus. If we take into account both Immeritô's self-portrait and E. K.'s enthusiastic pandering, what we get is an author who, if he sleeps around with enough of his readers, will be able to sire many more texts.¹⁰

Then towards the end of the epistle, where E. K. dedicates his own editorial efforts as well as the poetry of his anonymous friend to Gabriel Harvey, something odd happens to the metaphor of virile authorship:

These my present paynes if to any they be pleasurable or profitable, be you iudge, mine own good Maister Haruey, to whom I haue . . . vouted this my labour, and the maydenhead of this our commen frends Poetry, himselfe hauing already in the beginning dedicated it to the Noble and worthy Gentleman, the right worshipfull Ma. Phi. Sidney . . . (*SC*, epistle)

The *OED* gives one medieval example of the word *maidenhead* used in a transferred sense to refer to a man's state of virginity, and the word was sometimes used figuratively to refer to the first fruits of any labor, but during the middle ages and Renaissance, the primary and most literal referent of *maidenhead* was always a woman's virginity. Spenser's use of

the term throughout his poetry remains quite literal (including all the references to “Knights of Maidenhead,” since this maidenhead is that of the virgin queen rather than of the knights who protect and serve her).¹¹

There would be nothing strange about the presentation to Harvey of the maidenhead of Immeritô’s poetry, except that this eroticization of the author’s first fruits here at the end of the epistle naturally reminds us of the eroticization at the beginning, and E. K.’s two metaphors – of lost maidenhead and of embraces from many admirers – tend to want to cohere. Because of the admirers’ embraces, this later passage seems to refer not only to the maidenhead of Immeritô’s female poetry but also to Immeritô’s own maidenhead. Indeed, although we could profitably read masculine homoeroticism into E. K.’s “baudy brocage” about the readers’ kisses, I would argue that the bawdiness is strangely effeminizing, insofar as E. K. uses terms that were most often reserved for the purpose of insulting women who dared to speak out in public or, still worse, to publish. Female authors were accused during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries of making themselves metaphorically into whores when they displayed their literary work to strangers’ eyes.¹² A public woman was like a public woman, or so the reasoning ran. It is true that E. K. clearly praises his friend for “worthines” that deserves “fame,” and just as clearly, Chaucer’s Pandarus says “Unknowe, unkist” to Troilus rather than to Criseyde. Nevertheless, Troilus, who remains sorrowfully faithful to his first romantic conquest, does not at all resemble the man whom E. K. describes as moving in dizzy happiness from one pair of arms to the next. It is Criseyde who fits E. K.’s description; she is the one who is “not onely kiste, but also beloued of all” and in some accounts “embraced of the most.” Caxton, for example, has her receiving gifts from many Greeks, and Robert Henryson – whose *Testament of Cresseid* was attributed to Chaucer until the seventeenth century – punishes her whoredom by ironically turning her into a leper who must beg passers-by for coins. No matter how strenuously E. K. extols the poet’s erotic ability to circulate, then, his praise always leaves itself vulnerable to the woman of easy virtue – who is, of course, not simply the female equivalent to the man of easy virtue.¹³

In one sense, the intimation that Immeritô would like to produce more bastards does indeed constitute a celebration of masculine generativity. But although Immeritô’s envoy and E. K.’s laudatory epistle present the new poet as an ambitious shepherd whose bastard children will become legitimate through Philip Sidney’s protection, this portrait also flirts with the idea of a loose woman whose surrender of maidenhead has already resulted in one child and will soon lead to more. The opening pages of *The Shepheardes Calender* are a flirtation not simply because the text

teases us but because that teasing takes the form of an erotic titillation with possibly serious consequences. The envoy speaks less flippantly and more subtly than does the epistle, but both depend upon a light irony; the veiled allusion to fallen women that results from the epistle's rereading of the envoy does not look like an attempt to deal with monstrous female sexuality or to condemn prostitutes and unwed mothers. Instead, Spenser eroticizes his literary debut through the interplay of male and female personae constructed one on top of the other, so to speak. As in the Penelope sonnet, the narrative voice that opens *The Shepheardes Calender* weaves and unweaves itself simultaneously, constructing and deconstructing its own masculine power and identity. Whereas the Penelope sonnet dramatizes direct warfare, however, here the erotic antagonism plays itself out figuratively, in the conflict and attraction between an Immeritô-as-Troilus who would like to keep things together and an Immeritô-as-Criseyde who makes everything that she touches illegitimate.

Courting disaster

In a series of linked passages in Book I of *The Faerie Queene*, the narrative makes illegitimate flirtation part of the plot before using it as a blueprint for its own process. Most of Spenser's major characters are eager to find legitimate modes of behavior in relation to the opposite sex, but the hero of Book I begins his career by being especially edgy about the matter. Red Crosse's uneasiness about his sexuality differs from that of Calidore (Book VI), who is articulate, polite, and a bit sly, or of Artegall (Book V), who becomes violent when he has the upper hand and furiously embarrassed when he does not, or of Guyon (Book II), whose cool assertion of his own propriety almost fools us at times into believing him a St. John Rivers. Red Crosse's naïveté makes him awkward, winsome, and self-righteous by turns, and like Britomart in the House of Malecasta (III.i.31–67; see Chapter 3), Red Crosse overreacts to a woman's flirtatious attempts to share his bed.

Whereas Britomart comically brandishes her sword at Malecasta as if Malecasta were not only a wanton but a monster, Red Crosse recoils from a wanton spirit whom he mistakes for Una, grievously changed from her former chastity and holiness. He first sees the impersonator upon waking guiltily from an erotic dream induced by another of Archimago's spirits:

In this great passion of vnwonted lust,
Or wonted feare of doing ought amis,

He started vp, as seeming to mistrust
 Some secret ill, or hidden foe of his:
 Lo there before his face his Lady is,
 Vnder blake stole hyding her bayted hooke,
 And as halfe blushing offred him to kis,
 With gentle blandishment and louely looke,
 Most like that virgin true, which for her knight him took.

All cleane dismayd to see so vncouth sight,
 And halfe enraged at her shamelesse guise,
 He thought haue slaine her in his fierce despight:
 But hasty heat tempring with sufferance wise,
 He stayde his hand . . .

(I.i.49–50)

Both Britomart and Red Crosse think they are responding to flirtation with righteous anger; both actually respond with an exaggerated horror that suggests the need to avoid implicating themselves at all costs. “All cleane” is their motto of the moment (50.1). (Wofford writes of this incident that Red Crosse “is ‘not himself’ after this episode until he is reunited with Una” – *Choice*, 235.) The comic incident in Britomart’s book soon resolves itself, however, whereas the more serious mistake in Book I has far-reaching consequences. When Red Crosse rushes away from Una’s impersonator in Archimago’s hermitage, “still flying from his thoughts and gealous feare,” he leaves the real Una to wander forlornly, exposing herself to the dangers of the forest for several more cantos while she searches for him (I.ii.12).

Spenser compares Una’s faithful journey to Ulysses’ sea voyages. Una’s pursuit of the man who will eventually wed her, like his experience with the succubus, turns flirtation into nightmare; it seems as though Una must travel forever in this state of incompleteness:

[She travels]

In wayes vnknowne, her wandring knight to seeke,
 With paines farre passing that long wandring *Greeke*,
 That for his loue refused deitie;
 Such were the labours of this Lady meeke,
 Still seeking him, that from her still did flie,
 Then furthest from her hope, when most she weened nie.

(I.iii.21)

Just a few stanzas later, however, the poem compares her to another weary sailor – this time one who has sighted land:

Before her stands her knight, for whom she toyld so sore.

Much like, as when the beaten marinere,
 That long hath wandred in the *Ocean* wide,
 . . .
 Soone as the port from farre he has espide,

His chearefull whistle merrily doth sound,
And *Nereus* crownes with cups; his mates him pledg around.

Such ioy made *Vna*, when her knight she found. (I.iii.30–32)

There is a slight problem in that this knight who makes Una feel so heady with relief is not Red Crosse, but the wicked Archimago in disguise. Una's very innocence of intrigue leaves her unprepared to recognize its subtle shapes. Accustomed to alerting Red Crosse to various moral dangers, Una nevertheless is subject to her own oversimplification of the categories of good and evil. (Prince Arthur eventually chides her for this fault when she launches into an improving lecture for the benefit of an emaciated Red Crosse immediately upon his release from a three-month stay in Orgoglio's stinking dungeon, at I.viii.43–44.) By substituting Archimago for Red Crosse, the poem not only frustrates Una's wish for the calm port of masculine protection but exposes the naïveté of this wish. Port is nowhere near for either her or Red Crosse; after discovering Archimago's perfidy, she passes from his hands into the equally unscrupulous hands of Sansloy, who is contemplating rape when Spenser rings down the curtain at the end of canto iii. We then watch Red Crosse lose his sense of direction and purpose while he flirts with two evil seductresses in succession, Duessa and Lucifera. (This poem, like the *Inferno*, is famous for having its characters commit the same mistake over and over, but in Spenser, it's as if they're fine-tuning it.) Like Archimago, Duessa and Lucifera offer the illusion of anchorage where there is none.

One theme in this succession of passages is the necessity of learning how to recognize the difference between purity and a disguised lewdness. But Spenser complicates the issue three cantos later by using dalliance with the reader as a narrative technique to achieve his own ends. In the process, the narrative shows itself at least as concerned about Red Crosse's original fear of flirtation and seduction as it is about Red Crosse's inability to distinguish the appearance of seduction from its actual occurrence.

Red Crosse's fear that "his manly hart [would] melt away" (I.i.47) through Una's wanton influence – along with all the misadventures that have followed from this fear – comes to bear upon a more explicit inquiry that the poem makes into the seductive charm of quiet waters in canto vi. The rhymed argument for this canto lets us know that at this point, in true Ariostan fashion, the narrative is switching our attention from Red Crosse's story back to Una's. Ever since canto iii left her story dangling, we have been mildly wondering how Una would escape Sansloy's sexually violent designs. Now we are reassured:

*From lawless lust by wondrous grace
fayre Vna is releast:
Whom saluage nation does adore,
and learnes her wise beheast.*

As when a ship, that flies faire vnder saile,
An hidden rocke escaped hath vnwares,
That lay in waite her wrack for to bewaile,
The Marriner yet halfe amazed stares
At perill past, and yet in doubt ne dares
To ioy at his foole-happie ouersight . . .

(I.vi.arg.-1)

But this time it is the reader, rather than Una, who has been led into mistaking one person for another. The stanza ends thus:

So doubly is distrest twixt ioy and cares
The dreadlesse courage of this Elfin knight,
Hauing escapt so sad ensamples in his sight.

No reader can fail to notice Spenser's fascination with ambiguous pronouns; he often uses clusters of same-gender pronouns when describing an encounter between an evil character and an admirable one so as to make us lose track of which clauses refer to which person. In this case, Spenser exhibits poetic *sprezzatura* by his ability to confuse our sense of direction with only two pronouns – of different genders. Primed by the canto's argument, which mentions only Una, we associate her with what follows, and after the feminine pronoun used to describe the ship ("her wrack") has strengthened our belief that we are reading about Una, the male mariner presents no real problem. Una was compared to two male mariners earlier; a third time would seem logical. The threat that Sansloy poses for Una is far too obvious to resemble a hidden rock, but we might easily read into this ship simile an ironic description of Una's having been saved from Archimago's guileful and seductive impersonation of Red Crosse – the subject of the preceding mariner simile in canto iii – only to fall into Sansloy's openly lustful power (I.iii.31–32,40). Not until we read the words "Elfin knight" do we know for certain that the opening stanza of canto vi, about the ship which has escaped being wrecked, refers neither to the canto's argument nor to Una. Instead, the lucky mariner is Red Crosse, who has wised up to Lucifera while remaining fooled by Duessa.

So we readjust ourselves to the idea that we are going to follow Red Crosse for a while longer. As if in pursuit of a tacking ship, we change directions once again. But the focus upon Red Crosse lasts all of four or five more lines; stanza 2 quickly modulates into the knight's troubled thoughts about Una's "treason," and from these thoughts the narration turns, in stanza 3, to Una herself, pursuing her adventures in another

part of the forest. One could say that the lines about Red Crosse thus constitute a transition from his story in the previous canto to Una's story here, and indeed this is partly the case, but the mariner stanza is too striking to have a merely transitional effect. It sets the tone for the entire canto that follows, bringing Una and Red Crosse figuratively back together long before the plot allows their paths actually to merge once more. Furthermore, the mariner and his female ship take to its logical extension Una and Red Crosse's inconvenient propensity for mistaking someone else for each other. At the very moment when Red Crosse is feeling relieved to have escaped Lucifera's beautiful trap, the poem's imagery briefly identifies him with the one other woman from whose charms he has fled in disillusionment and terror.

This stanza is remarkable for the way it toys with deadly serious subjects, turning a potential tragedy into "foole-happie ouersight" and putting Red Crosse's moral anxieties into the service of a coy linguistic duplicity practiced upon the readers: whose story are we about to read? The soul-destroying trickeries wrought by Lucifera, by Duessa, and by the succubus reappear figuratively in the lurking rock, but here the threat loses its force even before the mariner identifies it as a threat, so that fear and relief hit him simultaneously. Nevertheless, Spenser's focus in this stanza is not simply twofold, like a visual teaser that represents either a duck or a rabbit. Instead, the narrator presents us with several very different versions of interactions between the sexes (Una and Sansloy, Una and Red Crosse, Red Crosse and Lucifera, a mariner and his female ship), allowing us to experiment with pairings other than those that the narrative finally selects – or has already selected without our realizing it. The narrative flirts with possibilities, supposing itself into variously gendered modes.

On the one hand, then, we can trace the mariner's oscillating state of mind ("doubly . . . distrest twixt ioy and cares") back to Red Crosse's guilty reaction at having "bathed" in the "wanton blis and wicked ioy" of a wet dream and his projection of this guilt onto Una by allowing himself to be convinced that she has been flirting with him and sleeping with another man. On the other hand, this mariner stanza is itself a linguistic dalliance, as it plays with different relationships among the gendered pronouns and temporarily keeps us from knowing where we stand in relation to the narrative. The half-truths that we are told enable us momentarily to try our hand at adopting various readerly stances, asking ourselves how we should respond to the story we are about to hear. The stanza's third line presents this multiplicity in miniature, showing us a rock that seems fixed but that actually wanders, a rock that should be passive but that instead has agency. Though the line may seem fairly

straightforward at first, it grows progressively stranger the longer one considers it. What does it mean to say that a hidden rock “lay in waite [the ship’s] wrack for to bewaile”? It would make sense to describe the rock as indifferent or spiteful; instead, Spenser uses an apparent contrast between lying in wait and mourning to show us the workings of a malice that is not only guileful before the crime but hypocritical afterwards: the rock plans from the start to mourn what it will have destroyed. Such guile typifies both Archimago, whom Una has escaped, and Duessa, whose flirtation has begun to ensnare Red Crosse without yet betraying her evil nature to him. Equally importantly, however, the word “bewaile” acts illogically to bring bereavement into the stanza. The word’s very presence gives us a brief opportunity to imagine what it would be like to mourn the shipwreck, even though both that mourning and that shipwreck have already been invalidated by the word “escaped” in the second line. Like someone who flirts and is the object of flirtation, the narrator tests out our reaction to situations that would be dangerous or malicious if we agreed to call them real. This is how we would feel if the story about the ship – to whomever it belongs – had an unhappy ending.

It does, of course. Six cantos later, the last word of Book I, except for a concluding metaphor comparing the narrator to a weary but jolly mariner, is “mourne.” Una and Red Crosse have just celebrated their wedding at her parents’ palace:

Yet swimming in that sea of blisfull ioy,
 He nought forgot, how he whilome had sworne,
 In case he could that monstrous beast destroy,
 Vnto his Farie Queene backe to returne:
 The which he shortly did, and *Vna* left to mourne.

Now strike your sailes ye iolly Mariners,
 For we be come vnto a quiet rode,
 Where we must land some of our passengers,
 And light this wearie vessell of her lode.
 Here she a while may make her safe abode,
 Till she repaired haue her tackles spent,
 And wants supplide. And then againe abroad
 On the long voyage whereto she is bent:
 Well may she speede and fairely finish her intent.

(I.xii.41–42)

Given the more hopeful tone of the final stanza, we could almost take the one mournful line that precedes it as comedy, except that this is indeed the end of Una’s story. She is one of the passengers who must disembark to make the narrative ship lighter; we do see Red Crosse now and then in Books II and III, and he and Guyon refer to Una a couple of times – calling her the “Errant damozell” at II.i.19 and III.i.24 – but because she

never reappears within the poem, she and Red Crosse are never reunited. Despite the poem's implicit assurances that there is a time beyond time when this marriage will find fulfillment, our powerful experience within the poem is of Red Crosse and Una's mutual dispossession.

In the two final stanzas quoted above, the pretend-mourning with which the earlier shipwreck stanza only flirted becomes fixed into occurrence. Yet I would argue that the loss here in no way belies the earlier flirtation; instead, it means that the narrative uses flirtation to test its own choices, seeing the brief duration of each of those choices as inherently bound up with questions of erotic union and evasion. This is not the same thing as saying that desire and the fulfillment of desire are mutually exclusive – or that desire is “an intermediate state between having and not-having.” This latter phrase is Georg Simmel's summary of Plato's view of love, with which Simmel opens his essay on the sociology of flirtation (“Flirtation,” 133). From Plato's sense of desire as an intermediate stage, Simmel moves to a less Platonic sense of how flirtation entangles the two extremes of possession and dispossession:

There is a sense in which flirtation lends a positive concreteness to not-having, making it tangible for the first time by means of the playful, suggestive illusion of having, just as, conversely, flirtation intensifies the attraction of having to the most extreme degree by means of the threatening illusion of not-having. (*Ibid.*, 150)

And again, in a discussion of the sidelong glance that both characterizes and emblemizes flirtation, Simmel writes, “Physiologically, this glance cannot last longer than a few seconds, so that the withdrawal of the glance is already prefigured as something unavoidable in the glance itself” (*ibid.*, 134–135). But if the glance is brief, it is also addictive, and it is in the nature of flirtation to reverse its own final gestures. The mournful ending of Book I, which cuts short Una and Red Crosse's joy, does not in itself constitute a flirtation, yet it does continue to play out the poet's intense interest in the inseparability of possession and loss. Spenser moves this set of interests away from the sober context of quest, labor, and battle and back into the equally competitive but more teasingly noncommittal context of dalliance when he turns from the end of Book I, where Gloriana's knight must serve her by deserting his bride, to the beginning of Book II, where the narrator transforms the bride's woeful inaccessibility into Gloriana's provocative inaccessibility.

“Herein most exprest”

In Chapters 2 and 3, I briefly mentioned the proem to *FQ* II, in which the speaker tells Gloriana/Elizabeth that he will veil her dazzling counte-

nance with his allegory in order to protect his readers from being blinded by her direct light. In my discussion of Alma's castle, this proem helped us to see that although Guyon and Arthur must fight Maleger and then obtain Alma's permission in order to enter the seemingly foreign interior of her castle body, that body turns out to be their own. In my discussion of monstrous intimacy and arrested developments, the proem to Book II helped us see that when Spenser's poem experimentally identifies its author with sexually wayward and sexually vulnerable women, the interior of the poem becomes in some sense inaccessible to the poet's control. If, as Stephen Greenblatt has argued, Spenser conceived of the psyche not as the location of private individualism (a modern fiction) but as a microcosm of the social world's contests, negotiations, and intrigues, then the core of Spenser's poem is, like that microcosmic self, "extremely vulnerable to fraud" (Greenblatt, *Learning*, 144). Spenser represents this fraud with monsters like Medusa who are both aggressive and vulnerable to assault, both hidden from our sight and hidden within us.

I want to look at the proem to Book II again, this time in greater detail and along with some of the other proems, because now that we have looked at a number of other examples of conditional erotics in Spenser's poetry, it will be easier to see how Spenser puts political courting in the service of a more general sexual politics. In addition to their function in exploring Spenser's relationship to his royal mistress, in other words, the proems' similarity to flirtations in the poem that do not target Elizabeth suggests that the dangers of courtly flirtation are as genuinely sexual as they are political.

The proem for Book II, with its sober commentary on the essential truth of poetic fictions and on the greatness of the queen herself as a poetic subject, is nonetheless shot through with what Stefano Guazzo calls "intysing trickes" in his warnings against flirtatious women (*Civile Conversation*, 2:33). Comparing the recently discovered "fruitfullest Virginia" and the still-inaccessible regions "within the Moones faire shining spheare" to intellectual worlds colonized by poetry before ordinary people have been able to imagine them, Spenser tells us that readers with blunt senses cannot trace the "fine footing" of his poem without help. ("Why then should witlesse man so much misweene / That nothing is, but that which he hath seene?") Then he addresses himself to Elizabeth:

And thou, O fairest Princesse vnder sky,
 In this faire mirrhour maist behold thy face,
 And thine owne realmes in lond of Faery,
 And in this antique Image thy great auncestry.

The which O pardon me thus to enfold
 In couert vele, and wrap in shadowes light,
 That feeble eyes your glory may behold,
 Which else could not endure those beames bright,
 But would be dazled with exceeding light. (II.pr.4–5)

The “couert vele” metaphor makes Elizabeth into a holy presence; we cannot follow the priest-poet behind the veil that separates the deity’s altar from her outer temple. Even the priest himself must propitiate her with the yielding loveliness of a suddenly anapestic plea for mercy (“The which Ō párdón ĩe thús tō ĩnfold”). At the same time, the eroticism implicit in “fruitfullest *Virginia*” and in the dream of being able to explore the inaccessible regions “within [*Cynthia*’s] faire shining spheare” points toward a different sort of entry and conversation. Even as he makes serious claims for his own inspiration, Spenser’s narrator teases Elizabeth and titillates us by putting himself forward as the man most intimately acquainted with the secrets that lie behind her veil; only he, the persistent explorer, knows the route to that virginal interior and the way to make it fruitful. He implicitly boasts, in other words, that Faerie Land is not the only conquest that he can “vaunt, yet no where show” (II.pr.1).

The expression of such wishful thinking in the form of a boast constitutes a flirtation rather than simply a courtier’s suit insofar as, like the passage about the rock bewailing a nonexistent shipwreck, it toys with interactions and attitudes that would be dangerous if the participants agreed to call them real. Here, there is danger from the start because the two participants are far from equal in status or political power. Renaissance satirists of court life had amply demonstrated long before Elizabeth’s accession to the throne that although flirtation was the rule rather than the exception at court, to flirt was always to flirt with danger, risking the possibility that there might be rocks lying in wait to bewail one’s ruin. And the waters of court intrigue certainly continued to be rocky during Elizabeth’s reign. But although Spenser was one of the queen’s suitors, he never succeeded in finding a place at court, and his proems for *The Faerie Queene* use this very deficiency to heighten pleasure. These proems use the erotic fiction of absolute distance or of not-having (“You are the Queen, and therefore a being altogether different from me”) as a way of bringing in its equally erotic, equally fictional opposite (“You are *my* queen, Gloriana, and I have you exactly where I want you”). At the same time, as will become even clearer when we look at the proems to Books IV and V, the speaker toys with his own accessibility or inaccessibility *to* the queen (“Are you really sure you are in charge of my poem?”). But although the proems are always addressed

to the sovereign, they are not solely *for* her. Even as they court her, they make use of her as a character – as a means of flirting with gender, with the readers, and with narrative and epic conventions. The partial feminization demanded of all courtiers, but especially of those serving Elizabeth, who enjoyed having them treat her both as though she were a male Prince and as though they were her rebuffed but submissive Petrarchan lovers, serves the poem’s speaker as a license to experiment with blurring the opposition between masculine and feminine positions within the poems.

The poem to Book IV constructs a series of interlocking identifications that move from heaven to the poet. Spenser begins by delivering a dangerously pointed satire of “The rugged forehead that with graue foresight / Welds kingdomes causes, and affaires of state,” apparently a reference to Elizabeth’s chief adviser, Lord Burleigh, who may have made disparaging remarks about the first installment of *The Faerie Queene* (IV.pr.1).¹⁴ After ridiculing Burleigh’s inferior talents as a judge of love poetry and accusing him of having a frozen heart, the speaker turns his back with an abruptness that approaches playfulness:

To such therefore I do not sing at all,
 But to that sacred Saint my soueraigne Queene
 In whose chast breast all bountie naturall,
 And treasures of true loue enlocked beene,
 Boue all her sexe that euer yet was seene;
 To her I sing of loue, that loueth best,
 And best is lou’d of all aliue I weene:
 To her this song most fitly is address. (IV.pr.4)

After this tribute to Elizabeth’s superlative powers of love, however, the narrator slides from flattery to blame with an illogic typical of Petrarchan discourse; he indicates that his sovereign has yet to learn how to respond warmly to love:

Which [song] that she may the better deigne to heare,
 Do thou dred infant, *Venus* dearling doue,
 From her high spirit chase imperious feare,
 And vse of awfull Maiestie remoue:
 In sted thereof with drops of melting loue,
 Deawd with ambrosiall kisses, by thee gotten
 From thy sweete smyling mother from aboue,
 Sprinkle her heart, and haughtie courage soften,
 That she may hearke to loue, and reade this lesson often. (IV.pr.5)

Though the speaker exhorts Cupid to be the queen’s tutor, “this lesson” refers not only to Cupid’s counsel but also to the poet’s work. Yet this double reference does not allow the speaker to hoard all of the power

that he has thereby appropriated, since his use of the word “reade” in the proem’s final line – signifying discernment and counsel as well as perusal – enables him to give Elizabeth the power to promulgate the lesson once she learns it.¹⁵ Not surprisingly, this is an ambiguous power, since Elizabeth’s exercise of it would bolster the very position to which the speaker is trying to convert her; his apparent relinquishment of control in the pun that turns her learning into teaching pretends to assume that she has already acquiesced in his argument so completely as to want to convince others of its validity.

The speaker turns this joke around in the following canto by transforming the proem’s teacherly request that Cupid might “soften” Elizabeth’s “haughtie courage” (where the medieval pun on *courage*, meaning heart or sexual vigor as well as bravery or wrath, aligns Elizabeth with the amorous Mars of I.pr.3) into an admission that he himself already suffers the weakness of a “softened heart”:

Of louers sad calamities of old,
 Full many piteous stories doe remaine,
 But none more piteous euer was ytold,
 Then that of *Amorets* hart-binding chaine,
 And this of *Florimels* vnworthie paine:
 The deare compassion of whose bitter fit
 My softened heart so sorely doth constraîne,
 That I with teares full oft doe pittie it,
 And oftentimes doe wish it neuer had bene writ. (IV.i.1)

The droll coquetry of the final line depends upon the way that its passive verb (“bene writ”) pretends to mask a fact that cannot actually be obscure to anyone: the writer who invents Amoret’s and Florimell’s torments is the same person as the reader whose heart so pities the two characters that he weeps over them. That is to say, he lies in wait their “wrack for to bewaile.” If he delegates both of Penelope’s labors to Elizabeth, he also takes both of them into himself when he unweaves what he has woven, and as in the Penelope sonnet, his and the lady’s contest explicitly revolves upon the question of sexual potency: whose version of love will prove more compelling to readers?

In the proem to Book V, the combination of play, warfare, and masquerade that we call flirtation becomes more purely serious – so serious, in fact, that it might not seem like flirtation at all. Yet the proem and first canto’s elegy for things lost (ancient heroes and their “antique world”) couches itself in language that encodes a more specific regret for the gradual ebb of a sexualized potency that once filled the world, and the limited potency that remains becomes a contested ground for the speaker and his queen. The contest is as indirect and guarded as any

flirtation, and despite the solemn tone of this proem, I would like to argue that the speaker's erotic use of ambiguous grammatical constructions as a means of bringing his position closer to that of the queen and of increasing her vulnerability continue the work of the flirtations that he began in the earlier proems.

The proem and first few stanzas of canto i lament the extent to which our world has "degendered" physically and morally since the golden age, a time when heroes "Rose vp, inspired with heroicke heat" to mow down the "fruitfull rancknes" of vice (V.i.1). Since that time, the heroes have ceased to rise up, losing this contest between two forms of potency. Now even the heavens droop, as evidenced by the declining orbits of the planetary bodies, which have wandered from their proper paths since "*Ptolomæ*" took measurements. We live in a rapidly worsening "stonie" age (which seems to call for feminine rhymes):

Right now is wrong, and wrong that was is right,
As all things else in time are chaunged quight.
Ne wonder; for the heauens reuolution
Is wandred farre from where it first was pight,
And so doe make contrarie constitution
Of all this lower world, toward his dissolution.

...

Ne is that same great glorious lampe of light,
That doth enlumine all these lesser fyres,
In better case, ne keeps his course more right,
But is miscaried with the other Spheres. (V.pr.3-7)

After expressing this sorrow over the "glorious lampe of light," an image which cannot be meant to refer to Elizabeth yet strongly recalls the metaphors used to describe her elsewhere in the poem, Spenser introduces *Astraea*, goddess of justice, who last ruled during the golden age.¹⁶ This introduction occurs in stanza 9, which is powerfully and nostalgically in the past tense. Because stanza 10 begins with an implied verb of being followed by a participial phrase, Spenser can move us unawares into the present tense:

Peace vniuersall rayn'd mongst men and beasts,
And all things freely grew out of the ground:
Iustice sate high ador'd with solemne feasts,
And to all people did diuide her dred beheasts.

Most sacred vertue she of all the rest,
Resembling God in his imperiall might;
Whose soueraine powre is herein most exprest. (V.pr.9-10)

This ambiguity of verb tense is an important one, since the difference between past and present is the difference between Astraea and Elizabeth. Unlike many other sixteenth-century poets, Spenser does not say that Elizabeth's reign brings a return of the golden age, though we are free to draw that conclusion.¹⁷ Later in Book V, Spenser identifies Elizabeth with Mercilla, the queen of merciful justice, but here he merely says that the same power manifest in Astraea is also lent to princes by God, and although he goes on to describe England's prince in terms similar to those used for Astraea two stanzas earlier, we do not forget that the poem's first eight stanzas have described an England in which justice is "for most meed outhyred" (V.pr.3).

It would not be particularly helpful to accuse Spenser of accusing Elizabeth, since her subjects are pretty clearly the guilty parties in this story. My point is that whenever we look directly at a particular source of potency in these stanzas, the power sifts away into another receptacle. When one first reads the phrase "whose soueraine powre" (10.3), the urge to attach it to Elizabeth is almost overwhelming. Grammatically, the relative pronoun "whose" can refer equally well to "God" in the preceding line or to "she" in the line before that, and I would venture to guess that I am not the only reader who has ever stopped at line 3, skipped back up to line 1, and tried to make "she" also refer to Elizabeth. But Elizabeth enters only when we are told that God lends the power of justice to princes, and we are given no real license to identify the queen with Astraea until the following stanza, when the word "soueraine" shifts its loyalties from "God" to England's "Goddesse":

Dread Souerayne Goddess, that doest highest sit
 In seate of iudgement, in th'Almighties stead,
 And with magnificke might and wondrous wit
 Doest to thy people righteous doome ahead,
 That furthest Nations filles with awfull dread,
 Pardon the boldnesse of thy basest thrall,
 That dare discourse of so diuine a read,
 As thy great iustice prayed ouer all:

The instrument whereof loe here thy *Artegal*.

(V.pr.11)

Indeed, because the phrase "herein most exprest" could just as well refer to Spenser's poem as to Astraea's person, the poet and his queen once more end up vying for the same position. Her "basest thrall" asks for her judgment at the same time that he judges her, and both of them work with the same materials. On the one hand, his poem is subject to her insofar as when it opens its mouth to speak, it utters her words. On the other hand, her sovereign power is "herein *most* exprest," so that she is more completely herself in his poem than out of it.¹⁸

In part, this sort of word game operates like the lover's word games in the Penelope sonnet, offering a way for Spenser to keep Elizabeth manageable while recouping his own losses. Elizabeth's marital and political besiegers were quite familiar with her finely tuned ability to unravel her adversaries' weavings while shunning "th'importune suit" of her courtiers' desires, and she was also adept at frustrating her Maids of Honor.¹⁹ For Spenser, Elizabeth was the ocean from which all rivers of poetic inspiration sprang, as he explains in the proem to Book VI, but as his often-recurring mariner metaphors show, the ocean also represented to him an endless task (VI.pr.7). Like the woman to whom the *Amoretti* are addressed and whom the bridegroom calls a "mayden Queene" in the *Epithalamion*, Elizabeth calmly beholds her subject playing in pageants, "disguysing diuersly [his] troubled wits" (*Epith.*, 158; *Amor.* 54).

Michael O'Connell has argued that when Spenser chooses to put the rustic bride of the *Epithalamion* into the circle of Graces on Mount Acidale in *FQ* VI, he ousts Elizabeth from the place established for her in the *Calender's* April eclogue (*Mirror*, 181–182). Another way of looking at this, however, is to say that when Queen Elizabeth evades the desires of her courtier-suitors, she becomes like the mistress whom one desires and desires to shun, wishes to approach for personal reward and wishes to remain as unapproachable and arbitrary as a Muse.²⁰ One could complicate Louis Montrose's statement that literary works of the late sixteenth century allow "desires for wealth, status, and power [to] be intentionally disguised or unconsciously displaced in metaphors of erotic and spiritual desire" by noting that Spenser's poetry seems partly to flirt with and desire political nonpreferment ("Celebration," 26). One could even theorize that this oddly playful interest in failure was a logical result of the historical context that Montrose describes, in which the younger generation of Tudor poets found that their plans for advancement clashed with an older ideological system that frowned upon personal ambition. If, as Montrose argues, the younger poets found ways of expressing their ambitions covertly, it would stand to reason that these expressions could have caused enough personal guilt to make them at times subliminally grateful for – or even desirous of – the expiatory punishment of seeing their subtle weaving spoiled.²¹

But the flirtatious competition in *The Faerie Queene's* proems – where the narrator wrests erotic power from his lady with the same gestures that he uses to divest himself of such power – cannot be explained simply as an allegory of political preferment and nonpreferment, since Spenser's narrative finds itself drawn to the oscillating pattern of flirtation in so many passages that do not directly involve the queen. I suggest that it is Spenser's fascination with narrative flirtation that informs his representa-

tions of his interaction with Eliza rather than the other way around. Queen Elizabeth is always behind Gloriana and Eliza, but the proems, which construct a continually precarious and therefore continually exciting exchange between Gloriana and the speaker, participate in, rather than dictate, the poem's more general development of questions about the relationship between narrative and sexual identity. My sense is that the contests in the proems have as much to do with a wish to test various roles for the narrator as with a wish to figure out the narrator's role in its specific relation to Gloriana. Significantly, the feminine position in the proems does not *equal* Elizabeth, though she sometimes occupies that position. The narrator sets her up as an appropriate partner in flirtation because she is a woman, yet their mutual weaving and unweaving leave in doubt which of them is a Penelope figure. His heart is already soft; hers needs softening – and if that aligns her with the Petrarchan mistress, it aligns her specifically with the cruel Petrarchan mistress who is “no woman, but a sencelesse stone” (*Amor.* 54).²² The first canto of Book V continues the proem's sexualizing of the battle between virtue and vice, by saying that in ancient times the malignantly fruitful plant of vice choked out more virtuous plants until Bacchus and Hercules “Rose vp, inspired with heroicke heat” (V.i.1). In this image, the penis serves simultaneously as a destructive weapon against injustice and as the source of life. Significantly, however, this canto's continuation of the proem's sexualized battle does not continue the proem's focus on Elizabeth. Similarly, the first stanza after Book IV's proem (“Of louers sad calamities of old,” etc., quoted above) continues flirtatiously to address the narrator's relationship to feminine pity in the context of Amoret's and Florimell's stories rather than in the context of a sparring match with the queen. Indeed, *The Faerie Queene* seems at least as interested in the ways that the genders negotiate with each other for control and voice as it is in the relationship between queen and poet. In the proems, as in the Penelope sonnet or in the envoy and epistle for *The Shepheardes Calender*, a voice labeled as masculine flirts with, competes against, identifies with, outwits, and loses himself to one labeled as feminine – not necessarily in that order, and with no resolution.

Provisional woman

Because of the pessimistic final stanzas of Book VI and the destruction of the pastoral world in the book's closing cantos, we often think of this part of the poem as becoming progressively weaker or at least less convincing. Yet because the political and economic gloom that presses in upon the poem's borders actually strengthens the poem's need to with-

draw into private pleasures, these pleasures become stronger in their importance to the poem. (As Wofford argues cogently in a discussion of the *Iliad*, pastoral similes “claim, in an attempt to join the two alternatives that the poem has put asunder, a continuity and moral correspondence between heroic and nonheroic life” – *Choice*, 5.) The strength of the connections between flirtatious withdrawal, desire for possession, and private enjoyment is importantly staged on Mount Acidale. After Sir Calidore’s intrusion upon the scene makes the naked Graces vanish and prompts Colin Clout to break his bagpipes in intense frustration, the Graces’ absence then allows that shepherd to share with Calidore a song about the wonder of the erotic beauty that has fled (VI.x.16). It is an intriguingly difficult exercise to try to sort out which erotic pleasures are public and which are private in this passage; when Calidore first spies on Colin, the shepherd is the only man among “an hundred naked maidens lilly white” who dance for his pleasure, and because Calidore has an embarrassing history throughout Book VI of accidentally interrupting couples who are cuddling on the grass, this scene has something of the same voyeuristic feel despite its loftier strain (VI.x.11). Yet the conversation about loss that ensues between Colin and Calidore seems more private still – except that it is also a very public declaration of the narrator’s admiration for his own beloved (“another Grace”) and for Gloriana, whose desire for erotic supremacy requires that the narrator soothe her elaborately in order to prevent her own withdrawal of attention when he elevates his beloved “Mayd” to the position of highest importance in this passage (VI.x.26, 28).

Keeping the elusiveness and deprivation of Mount Acidale’s erotic and literary pleasures in mind, as well as the potential seaminess of voyeurism that this passage keeps forcibly submerged, let us turn to an earlier passage that is less of a centerpiece. This earlier passage, in which the approach or withdrawal of the poem’s characters is at once less obvious and more interestingly linked to the narrative’s own coyness, is the final segment of Serena and Calepine’s story, in the second half of the poem’s final book. In the process of showing how this passage in Book VI not only dramatizes but makes a narrative method of a set of questions about flirtation and possessiveness, I will argue that the narrative first genders our interaction with the characters and then provocatively makes us unsure of our role in that interaction or of what we might gain from it.

We have followed Serena and Sir Calepine off and on for five cantos, ever since Calidore inadvertently interrupted their amorous play “in couert shade,” apologized, and struck up a friendship with Calepine. The men’s conversation left Serena to take pleasure in herself by picking flowers – a pleasure allegorically representative of sexual indiscretions, as

we realized when the flower-picking made her vulnerable to the jaws of the Blatant Beast (VI.iii.23–24). Now, five cantos later, Serena has escaped the beastly jaws of a fallen reputation only to attract the attentions of a band of cannibals. At the moment when the cannibals discover Serena, Spenser delivers one of his most playful spoofs of Petrarchan lovers' possessive desire and of Petrarchan ladies' silent imperviousness to praise. In this case, the lady is not merely aloof; she is fast asleep:

Soone as they spide her, Lord what gladfull glee
 They made amongst them selues; but when her face
 Like the faire yuory shining they did see,
 Each gan his fellow solace and embrace,
 For ioy of such good hap by heauenly grace.
 Then gan they to deuize what course to take:
 Whether to slay her there vpon the place,
 Or suffer her out of her sleepe to wake,
 And then her eate attonce; or many meales to make.

...
 But of her dainty flesh they did deuize
 To make a common feast, and feed with gurmandize.

So round about her they them selues did place
 Vpon the grasse, and diuersely dispose,
 As each thought best to spend the lingring space.
 Some with their eyes the daintest morsels chose;
 Some praise her paps, some praise her lips and nose;
 Some whet their kniues, and strip their elboes bare:
 The Priest him selfe a garland doth compose
 Of finest flowres, and with full busie care
 His bloody vessels wash, and holy fire prepare. (VI.viii.37–39)

This satire of the Petrarchan blazon, in which the lover praises each minute feature of his mistress's body individually, turns upon the humor of the cannibals literalizing the poetry of praise: they hunger for this lady. Subsequently, after Serena has waked and the whooping cannibals have disrobed her, the sight of her naked body does teach them to hunger for sexual possession, but in the above stanzas, what is funny is that they do not. We are asked to laugh at them because they employ Petrarchan terms without really speaking the Petrarchan language. Certainly the cannibals' salivating over Serena's body is likely to make *us* think about the ways that eating can be eroticized, but the point here is that these cannibals are not thinking about their dinner that way; they're simply planning to carve Serena into joints and chow down. And so we can laugh at their simplicity and crudity. If they were subtle and civilized, like us, they would know how to appreciate a woman's body properly by

praising her in poetic terms. To be a Petrarchan poet is to be able to savor the visual, tactile, and moral beauties, rather than the gustatory ones, of a mistress's lips, nose, and breasts.

Yet these phrases in which I am expressing our humor at the distance between ourselves and the cannibals also reveal one axis along which that distance may collapse: although Spenser has not encouraged us to identify with the savages' sexual crudity, and although we have certainly been led to think it is right to sympathize with the gentle Serena, part of the narrative's humor at the savages' expense depends upon our feeling that when they praise Serena's lips, nose, and breasts in terms of food value, they are comical because they do not at first know how to use a woman's body properly. Insofar as the narrative asks us to criticize the savages' ignorance in these terms, it avoids asking us to notice that to think in terms of either negative *or* positive use is to consider Serena's body from the outside. As Heather Dubrow notes, in this passage "Spenser reminds his audience that praise, the activity at the core of Petrarchism, may well be a rhetorical version of whetting one's knife and one's appetite" (*Echoes of Desire*, 260), and Parker links the cannibals' hunger to a kind of "visual gluttony" in poetic vision (*Inescapable*, 104). Whereas the narrative has avoided looking through the eyes of Serena's tormentors, then, it has not necessarily therefore looked through Serena's. My experience in discussing this passage with other readers of Spenser indicates, furthermore, that one need not be male or ignorant of feminist theory to respond to the passage at least initially by finding the savages funny for their failure to understand Serena's aesthetic value.

Spenser's narrative sets up a situation in which the wishes of a female character and of a group of male characters must be strongly opposed for sexual reasons, and this strong opposition pushes us to place our sympathies on one side or the other. Just when we think we are siding against the cannibals, however, our critique of them lands us on the masculine side of another divide. Or at least, it does not land us on Serena's side, despite our conviction that she is the proper character to command our sympathies at this point. Nor do the succeeding stanzas, in which the cannibals become unamusingly lecherous, enable us to understand or feel much more clearly what Serena's position would be, though of course we assume she must be frightened. Our disgust here at the savages' crudity and intended violence must be alloyed with our erotic response – whether we are men or women, homosexual or heterosexual, and whether or not we sublimate this response by aestheticizing it – to the narrator's descriptions of Serena's "goodly thighes, whose glorie did appeare / Like a triumphall Arch, and thereupon / The spoiles of Princes hang'd, which were in battel won" (VI.viii.42). The entire passage urges

us to take some sort of gendered point of view, yet we are not allowed access to any particular viewpoint that could attract us. It is as though the narrative has set up a flirtation (part playful, part serious) between ourselves and its own sidelong glances – or rather, that it is making *us* glance obliquely instead of engaging it more directly.

One might expect the situation to resolve itself when the male hero finally enters the scene; at that point, surely, we will be given access to a less ambiguous point of view, since Calepine's intention of saving the cannibals' victim is one with which we must feel accord. Yet Calepine's position proves no more accessible to us than Serena's has. Calepine catches sight of Serena without recognizing her, when he peers through the darkness toward the throng of savages:

Mongst whom a woman spoyle of all attire
 He spyde, lamenting her vnluckie strife,
 And groning sore from grieved hart entire,
 Eftsoones he saw one with a naked knife
 Readie to launch her brest, and let out loued life. (VI.viii.48)

The placement of “lamenting her vnluckie strife” on the same line with “He spyde” briefly makes Calepine share Serena's lamentation (“He spyde [her while he was] lamenting her vnluckie strife”), before the following line attaches the verb to Serena. (She is the one who groans from a grieved heart.) Still more inclusively, “let out loued life” seems to bring together three disparate points of view: Serena loves her own life enough to fear losing it; Calepine sees the life whom he loves (that is, Serena) about to die; and from our own distance, we naturally feel the phrase as meaning that the savage blade is about to extinguish life, which all of us love. This apparent meeting of three viewpoints in one phrase conceals a slippage: though we see the scene physically from the same position in the woods from which Calepine views it, the poem gives us Calepine's attitude towards this “loued life” only in the form of a narrative maneuver of which Calepine himself remains unaware. He looks at a life about to be lost and knows that any victimized maiden deserves his help; nevertheless, because he cannot recognize Serena in the dark, only the narrator knows enough to use the word “loued” on Calepine's behalf.

Calepine kills some of the savages and scares the rest away, then unties the naked and embarrassed Serena. The darkness continues to prevent his recognizing her:

From them returning to that Ladie backe,
 Whom by the Altar he doth sitting find,
 Yet fearing death, and next to death the lacke

Of clothes to couer, what they ought by kind,
 He first her hands beginneth to vnbind;
 And then to question of her present woe;
 And afterwards to cheare with speaches kind.
 But she for nought that he could say or doe,
 One word durst speake, or answere him a whit thereto.

So inward shame of her vncomely case
 She did conceiue, through care of womanhood,
 That though the night did couer her disgrace,
 Yet she in so vnwomanly a mood,
 Would not bewray the state in which she stood.
 So all that night to him vnknown she past.
 But day, that doth discouer bad and good,
 Ensewing, made her knownen to him at last:
 The end whereof Ile keepe vntill another cast.

(VI.viii.50–51)

Even though these stanzas feelingly describe Serena's shame, they also call her reluctance to speak "vnwomanly." The word not only implies sympathetically that Serena cannot feel like a modest woman while she is naked in public but also suggests less sympathetically that her silence is itself somehow uncivil. A. C. Hamilton glosses the line, "This vision of woman sitting in shamed silence, withdrawn, ungrateful, and unloving is at the opposite pole to the vision of the hundred naked women dancing in delight in Canto x." A third implication, though jocular, is at best a backhanded compliment for Serena: this is the opinion that she is being unlike a woman in that she is not taxing her hearer with excessive talk. The conflict among these three evaluations is so odd that it is tempting to focus solely on one of them. Clearly, these various meanings are gendered, with their differing assumptions about what it means to be womanly. To call Serena ashamed is woman-centered, whereas to call her "ungrateful" or blessedly unlike the run of irritatingly loquacious women would center upon masculine concerns. The evaluations implicit in these terms, as well as in the description of Serena's nakedness, ask us to read from Serena's point of view, Calepine's, or both. But just as we cannot conclusively attribute any of these evaluations to Serena, neither can we conclusively attribute any of them to Calepine. Once again, we do not know where we stand.

Stanza 51 concludes the canto with a coy gesture that reserves the narrator's conclusion and purpose for later: "But day, that doth discouer bad and good, / Ensewing, made her knownen to him at last: / The end whereof Ile keepe vntill another cast." Before we can adjust our gaze to the light of dawn that will reveal Serena and Calepine to one another, the story ends, so that as far as our own ability to see the scene is concerned,

the sun has set again. Nor does Spenser fulfill his promise to finish the story later. Thus he raises a question about two gendered points of view, leads us to expect that the narrative will provide an answer, and abruptly covers the narrative with a veil. The poem's narrator provisionally surrenders himself to us, then provocatively withholds what he has promised.

Spenser's refusal to conclude much of anything in *The Faerie Queene* is notorious, and it is true that this Ariostan romance technique contributes to his ability to hold our interest without passing final judgments. By ending the canto here and switching to another story in the following canto, the narrative tactfully leaves Serena's nakedness invisible; and although this technique is also somewhat coy, given the juicy description of Serena's naked body from the savages' point of view only a few stanzas earlier, the narrator's averting his eyes as soon as Calepine comes on the scene indirectly implies that Calepine observes courtesy as well. Yet the sun's almost concurrent rising and setting does more than create suspense or allow the suspension of two opposites in lieu of forcing a choice. In addition, the tantalizing withdrawal of the narrator's gaze is an act that in itself raises a set of choices about identity and gender that might not otherwise occur to us. Because the narrative prevents our knowing where to direct our own gaze at the end of this canto, it leaves us to wonder what sort of "her" will be "made . . . knowen" to what sort of "him" – an appropriate question in the larger context, given the series of turns that Serena's and Calepine's lives have taken.²³

Although Calepine apparently acts out of perfect courtesy, encouraging the woman whom he still does not recognize "with speaches kind," the narrator's reticence at the end of the canto also teases us to imagine from Calepine's point of view the sensual effect of Serena's white body slowly becoming visible at dawn – a scene more elusive, and therefore more enticing, than the explicitly narrated and straightforwardly lascivious scene earlier of Serena's disrobing at the savages' hands. We would feel less immediately bound to dissociate ourselves from Calepine's mingled courtesy and pleasure than from the savages' lechery. The inducement to imagine the dawn's revelation as also Serena's pleasure is not nearly so great. Whether another of Spenser's female characters could feel aroused by her own exposure is probably beside the point; Serena's sense of personal shame is far too intense here to allow such enjoyment.

If the suggestiveness of the narrator's final silence makes us imagine the eroticism of Serena's exposure, however, and if the logical reasons for attaching this sensual fascination to Calepine are strong, the stanzas that describe Calepine and Serena's vigil by the altar do not actually give any

indication of Calepine's thoughts or feelings except to tell us that he unbinds the stranger's hands and tries to cheer her. The narrator's silence on the subject of Calepine's emotional reactions might almost make us forget that even though Calepine does not recognize Serena, there is enough light for him to see that she is naked. As well as preventing our knowing where to look, then, the narrative prevents our looking *out of* either Calepine's or Serena's eyes, even though the eroticism and shame that color the entire passage would seem to call for some sort of identification on our part.

In Una and Red Crosse's story in Book I, Spenser's shipwreck simile conveys the mariner's divided emotions at the same time that it divides our own responses and sense of identification among Red Crosse, Una, the mariner, his ship, and a rock that takes pleasure from anticipating someone else's sorrow. When Calepine rescues Serena here in Book VI, we are shown his anger at the savages ("Then to the rest his wrathfull hand he bends": VI.viii.49), but the narrator leaves us to imagine what emotions lie behind the veil drawn over Calepine and Serena's more complexly tense relationship. We know what Calepine sees in the obscure night but not what he feels; we know obscurely what Serena feels about the night but not what she sees. Does she, for example, recognize Calepine? The question is impossible to answer but equally necessary to answer if we are to interpret the conflicting anxieties packed into that word "vnwomanly." Spenser is less given to detailing his characters' perceptions and attitudes than Ariosto is, but he is quite capable of such detail when it suits him, and this entire passage centers upon a question of emotional and erotic attitude that the narrator renders quite delicately and then leaves unexplained: what do Serena and Calepine think of each other and of themselves after their long and morally ambiguous separation? Instead of wondering whose story it is we are about to hear, as we did while reading the shipwreck stanza, we wonder whose is the story we have not heard. Whereas the narrative's flirtation with gender in the shipwreck simile enabled us to imagine ourselves by turns into relationships with several characters in several scenarios, the narrator's tantalizing reluctance at the end of Serena and Calepine's story prevents our knowing just how to gender our own responses to the veiled and deferred eroticism of their relationship.

Reaping the fruit

The next canto leads us back to Calidore, the hero of Book VI, whom we last saw chasing the Blatant Beast in an attempt to rescue Serena. The narrator begins by comparing the narrative to a plowed field:

Now turne againe my teme thou iolly swayne,
 Backe to the furrow which I lately left;
 I lately left a furrow, one or twayne
 Vnplough'd, the which my coulter hath not cleft:
 Yet seem'd the soyle both fayre and frutefull eft,
 As I it past, that were too great a shame,
 That so rich frute should be from vs bereft;
 Besides the great dishonour and defame,
 Which should befall to *Calidores* immortall name. (VI.ix.1)

Whereas other oscillating images for Spenserian narration have waged dalliance, enacting conflict and competition, here the narrator's cheerful high-handedness claims all control for himself.²⁴ Unperturbed by his poem's trail of broken hearts and plots cut off in their prime – "a furrow, one or twayne" rather understates the matter – the narrator promises us that he will fulfill his responsibility in Calidore's case. The contrast between Serena's tense expectation in the stanza that ends the previous canto and the easy promise of this opening stanza seems great, but in both, the narrator makes us aware of his powers of choice by being arch with us. Indeed, with this metaphor of a plow's coulter that seems to open and inseminate furrows simultaneously, the poem displaces the sensuality that was implicit in Calepine and Serena's relationship – as well as that in the savage priest's arrested knife – onto the narrative process itself, which is both masculine plow and fruitful earth, both anticipation and sweet yielding.

Spenser's epic voice wanders between genders partly for the same reason that the speaking voice of the Penelope sonnet wanders between the suitor's role and that of Penelope, or for the same reason that Serena wanders away from her male protectors Calepine and Calidore when she is gathering flowers: to construct conditional sources of pleasure. The narrator's flirtation with his own feminine identifications lets him reserve a space for experimentation even in the epic's intensely pessimistic final cantos. Spenser's "iolly teme" of oxen leads us toward these cantos by returning us to Calidore's story, which will take up the rest of the poem, except for the supplement of the Mutabilitie Cantos.

Calidore flirts with Pastorella, with the idea of becoming a shepherd, and indeed with everyone he meets – including those whom he kills – insofar as his courtesy is such that "euery deed and word, that he did say, / Was like enchantment, that through both the eyes, / And both the eares did steale the hart away" (VI.ii.3). Seven cantos before Calidore's meeting with Pastorella, these lines demonstrate the partial feminization necessary to courtiership in that they feminize the poem's description, five books earlier, of Arthur's ability to stun his foes to death by

uncovering his shield: “And when [Arthur] list the prouder looks subdew, / He would them gazing blind, or turne to other hew” (VI.ii.3, I.vii.35; see Chapter 3). Calidore’s entry into the pastoral world entails a more direct entanglement with femininity, however, as the hero temporarily abandons his quest in order to serve and woo Pastorella. Unlike Arthur in Arthur’s usual mode, but very like the narrator, Calidore wages dalliance with graceful words. As in the Penelope sonnet, it is unclear who captures whom: in his contest with the shepherd Coridon to win Pastorella’s love, Calidore “euermore his speach . . . did apply / To th’heards, but meant them to the damzels fantazy” (VI.ix.12). At the same time, despite Pastorella’s innocence, her power to trap her onlookers with the “subtile bands / Of the blynd boy” match Calidore’s own powers of enchantment; when he first sees her, he stands still, “long gazing thereupon, / Ne any will had thence to moue away, / Although his quest were farre afore him gon” (VI.ix.12). Calidore temporarily loses his ability to think rationally while looking at Pastorella and listening to the speech of her father, Meliboeoe: “Twixt his pleasing tongue, and her faire hew, / He lost himselfe, and like one halfe entraunced grew” (ix.26).

Clearly, this flirtation differs from the model of the Penelope sonnet in that the participants’ desires soon agree. “To occasion meanes, to worke his mind, / And to insinuate his harts desire,” Calidore artfully chooses his replies to Pastorella’s father, but the rustic Coridon never really stands a chance with the shepherdess after Calidore’s arrival (ix.27). True to Coridon’s jealous fear that Calidore will “reap the haruest, ere it ripened were” (ix.38), Calidore’s speeches bring to fruition the narrator’s plowed field. His courtesy

surely wrought
 With this faire Mayd, and in her mynde the seeds
 Of perfect loue did sow, that last forth brought
 The fruite of ioy and blisse, though long time dearely bought. (VI.ix.45)

If Pastorella does not interfere strenuously with Calidore’s purposes, however, the poem does. Calidore’s story is famous for its continual postponement, and the harvest season cannot last:

So well he wood her, and so well he wrought her,
 With humble seruice, and with daily sute,
 That at the last vnto his will he brought her;
 Which he so wisely well did prosecute,
 That of his loue he reapt the timely frute,
 And ioyed long in close felicity:
 Till fortune fraught with malice, blinde, and brute,
 That enuies louers long prosperity,
 Blew vp a bitter storme of foule aduersity. (VI.x.38)

The “bitter storme” comes with a band of blackguards who murder Meliboe and turn the tables on the heart-stealing Calidore by stealing away Calidore’s own heart in the form of Pastorella. In a battle with a second band of thieves, they leave the shepherdess for dead under a pile of corpses. After rescuing her from this ghastly scene reminiscent of something out of *A View of the Present State of Ireland*, Calidore takes her to the nearest castle for her recovery, then leaves to continue hunting the Blatant Beast. This episode thus recalls the end of Book I, where Red Crosse leaves Una mournfully alone immediately after their wedding, but whereas Red Crosse goes off on a quest which still has a confidence and purpose about it, Calidore sets out to attempt a hopeless task for which the poem offers no optimism. The blatant beastliness of calumny, arch-enemy of poets, is irrepressible.

In one sense, then, when Calidore leaves Pastorella, Spenser reverses the process I described on p. 119, where the epic’s inability to possess something moves from the sober context of quest, labor, or battle into the still-dangerous but more teasingly noncommittal context of dalliance. Here at the end of Book VI, dalliance makes way for quest, labor, and battle. Pointing out that the pastoral cantos have only apparently led his narrative astray, the narrator tells us that he will now return to the central concern of Book VI, Calidore’s duty to find and destroy the Blatant Beast:

But now I come into my course againe,
 To his atchieuement of the *Blatant beast*;
 Who all this while at will did range and raine,
 Whilst none was him to stop, nor none him to restraine. (VI.xii.2)

Yet the narrator does not fulfill this promise “now,” nor does he do it the next time he promises to do so, eleven stanzas later. In both cases, he puts off talking about Calidore’s conquest of the beast (which in any case lasts for less than one stanza when it finally happens, since the beast escapes again) in order to veer back towards Pastorella.

In its representation of the separation of Calidore’s and Pastorella’s worlds, the epic dramatizes a split between its own “masculine” and “feminine” modes, which have overlapped and informed one another most clearly during the pastoral cantos when Calidore bursts in upon the three Graces’ dance.²⁵ As Calidore leaves the pastoral cantos to resume the harsh risks of his quest, he leaves behind the narrative’s sense of playful and experimental risk; and when the narrator’s descriptions of the Blatant Beast begin to show a loss of confidence in the possibility of snaring the beast’s hundred tongues with a web woven by the narrator’s own words, the descriptions of Calidore’s conflict with that beast lose

their suppleness, acquiring a tone that conveys the force of anger without the poetic strength of negotiation. Even more than the beast's escape at the end of the poem, this rigidifying of narrative is what causes readers to feel that the end of this epic represents Spenser's personal and poetic failure, a poetic narrowing that speaks for the poet's narrowed expectations. As Stephen Orgel puts it, "In the latter books of the *Faerie Queene* Spenser repeatedly confronts the realities of his society with his poetic mythology, and keeps making the same point: it doesn't work" ("Making Greatness," 43). Once pastoral has capitulated to the thieves' violence and Calidore has resumed the masculine duty of his quest, the poem makes little attempt to find strength for song in the rags of that quest.

Nonetheless, although the epic's ostensible purpose lies in Calidore's grimly predetermined path, the narrator continues to experiment with a feminine identity for himself, and the increasingly self-defeating final book leaves one small circle of pleasure intact, almost as an oversight. The desire which the last few cantos defer – from Serena and Calepine to the narrator's plowing, and thence to Calidore's efforts to enjoy his harvest of love – does eventually reach a kind of fulfillment. However, the fulfillment does not occur in Calidore and Pastorella's truncated relationship, but in the moment when Pastorella's mother, Claribel, is reunited with her long-lost daughter. Soon after discovering that the stranger spending the night at their castle is the daughter who has been missing since birth, Claribel runs to tell her husband the good news, but this abstract four-line account has none of the power of the earlier eight-stanza account of the mother and daughter's reunion. That reunion climaxes when Claribel, having heard from her maid that their guest has a birthmark on her "snowy brest" that identifies her as the lost child, runs to Pastorella's room to confirm the report by tearing open Pastorella's bodice:

The matrone stayd no lenger to enquire,
 But forth in hast ran to the straunger Mayd;
 Whom catching greedily for great desire,
 Rent vp her brest, and bosome open layd,
 In which that rose she plainely saw displayd.
 Then her embracing twixt her armes twaine,
 She long so held, and softly weeping sayd;
 And liuest thou my daughter now againe?
 And art thou yet aliuie, whom dead I long did faine?

(VI.xii.19)

The moment entices us with its oddly erotic promise of a joyful ending; at the same time, it excludes us by making the eroticism that we feel upon reading these lines superfluous to Pastorella and Claribel's joy. This

mother and daughter do not experience the rending of Pastorella's smock as a prelude to wild lovemaking – nor do they experience it with the same excited frustration that attends Penelope One's rending of Penelope Two's painstakingly woven spiderweb of flirtation. Parker – one of the few critics to pay careful attention to this episode – writes that the private joy of Pastorella and her mother represents the retreat that romance offers and that Calidore must not accept (*Inescapable*, 111–112). I would expand Parker's sense of Spenser's relationship to this gendered privacy by arguing that here at the end, *The Faerie Queene* finds its greatest power in the very insecurity of its flirtation with femininity rather than in the poem's carefully built quest structure. And again, as in the Penelope sonnet, “her” strength lies partly in “his” greater weakness, given that the gloomy failure of Book VI's masculine quest heightens the brief brightness between these two women.

Calidore, who has already resumed his heroic but useless quest, never learns that his shepherdess bride-to-be is actually an heiress. After the revelatory scene between Pastorella and her mother, what we have left of Calidore and of the poem are 175 lines of slander and bitterness, ending with the speaker's flat declaration of self-defeat. In fact, the poem passes so quickly over the end of Pastorella's story that readers do not easily remember the moment at all. Yet these two women's incidental happiness, a moment set adrift when the main narrative churns by, contains the poem's last representation of authorial initiative. The poet's ability to represent the intensity of human experience is figured in specifically feminine, specifically interactive terms:

A thousand times she her embraced nere,
With many a ioyfull kisse, and many a melting teare.

Who euer is the mother of one chylde,
Which hauing thought long dead, she fyndes alieue,
Let her by proofe of that, which she hath fylde
In her owne breast, this mothers ioy descriue. (VI.xii.20–21)

Although these joyful stanzas provide a haven from the surrounding gloom, however, and although they provide a provisional alternative to authorial failure, their enclosure is not free from worry. Spenser's flirtations with gender are, like all flirtations, hypothetical constructions of real dangers. Even when Spenserian conditional erotics does not involve monsters, it courts defeat (in the Penelope sonnet), entertains disaster (when the narrator lies in wait with his rock), achieves private pleasures at the cost of public respectability (in Phædria's self-absorbed laughter), panders to illegitimacy (in the guise of Cresseid), evades fulfillment (leaving Una to mourn), woos rivals (in the proems), and risks

the embarrassment of exposure (when Serena's nakedness uncovers our aestheticizing of exploitation). Here towards the end of Book VI, the pleasurable torment that Stella once wreaked upon her male host's brain has metamorphosed into a very different image of inspiration: the lost child restored. Yet the limited circle in which the poem allows conditional erotics to unfold figuratively expels the narrator himself at the very moment of this child's restoration, when the narrator cedes the power of authorship to any of a number of hypothetical mothers. Given the pessimism about authorship in the poem's remaining stanzas, we cannot dismiss this gesture as a merely formal instance of the inadequacy *topos*. The poem's speaker has given up his own authorial role to any woman qualified to take it. What more can he do with this role in the Mutabilitie Cantos appended to *The Faerie Queene* – except to have Jove “arrest / The Author” of the poem's “strange astonishment” as a fraud?²⁶

Whether Spenser saw in his self-arrest a defeat or something like the breathing space of Amoret and Æmylia's confinement is an open question. In the final analysis, Spenser's distinction between versionality and fraudulence is itself a conditional one.

Part II

Seventeenth-century refigurations

5 “Who can those vast imaginations feed?” *The Concealed Fancies* and the price of hunger

In about 1645 or 1646, Ladies Jane Cavendish and Elizabeth Cavendish Brackley, sisters in their twenties, wrote a comedy titled *The Concealed Fancies* with perhaps some help from their younger sister, Frances. The play has never received much attention, and until 1996 it was available outside the Bodleian only in the form of an unglossed diplomatic transcript published by Nathan Comfort Starr in 1931 as a journal article, with a brief introduction and afterword that consist mostly of biographical information about the authors. Starr’s comments about the play itself are few but memorable:

As a literary production, *The Concealed Fancies* is practically without value. Its conformity to the Jonsonian comedy of humors, and its specific indebtedness to Jonson are sufficiently obvious without detailed comment, nor is it necessary to dwell upon the resemblance between the brothers in the play and those of *Comus* [fn. omitted]. The chief interest of the work lies in the artless revelation of the activities of seventeenth century ladies of fashion, living in the country. As might be expected, the authors did not hesitate to use material based on the circumstances of their own family. (“*The Concealed Fancies*,” 836)

Admittedly I am taking a cheap shot, given that gender studies were not part of the curriculum in 1931. One could hardly imagine any late twentieth-century literary scholar trivializing Cavendish and Brackley as Starr does, and the play’s recent editors, S. P. Cerasano and Marion Wynne-Davies, have a great deal of respect for the work. But my point is that if one were to set aside all questions relating to the cultural construction of sexual identity, *The Concealed Fancies* might indeed seem an inexpert hodge-podge of Jonsonian topoi. Being aware that gender may be productively questioned is not a late twentieth-century prerogative; it is the single most important idea that Cavendish and Brackley use to give their play coherence and interest. Although the sisters seem to have had a deep and affectionate sense of duty toward their father as the head of their family, their comedy explicitly and unrelentingly ironizes standard cultural constructions of relationships between the sexes.¹

More specifically for my purposes, *The Concealed Fancies* gives us a

complex example of the art and drollery with which seventeenth-century women could respond to sixteenth-century men's versions of conditional erotics. And although this is a play, it foregrounds narration; its main female characters win flirtatious battles and achieve some measure of erotic self-determination chiefly by self-consciously narrating their lives to each other as events occur. It is reasonable to assume that highborn seventeenth-century women who loved to read, as the Cavendish sisters did, would have been well acquainted with Spenser's work, but my intention is not to demonstrate that *The Concealed Fancies* is directly indebted to Spenser. Instead, I will argue that in this play Cavendish and Brackley interpret Petrarchism much as Spenser does, though their responses to the tradition diverge from his. Like Spenser, Cavendish and Brackley take the mistress in the male poet's head to be neither the poet's perception of a "real" woman outside of him nor a purely fictional image invented and owned by the man's imagination.² Instead, the mistress with whom the poet flirts after letting her enter his mind represents an otherness that is conditional and only partly appropriable, threatening him with self-division at the same time that she inspires him to take the risk of experimenting with what Adam Phillips calls the "versionality" of flirtation.³ But whereas, as we have seen in Chapters 1 and 3, Spenser distances his own form of Petrarchan erotics from an unsubtle and formulaic Petrarchism in the House of Busyrane cantos and elsewhere (whether those formulas fairly represent other authors' beliefs or have been constructed only for the sake of argument), Cavendish and Brackley seem at first to scorn Petrarchism altogether. *The Concealed Fancies* stages an irritation with poets who have idolized feminine purity and masochistically fetishized feminine aloofness without fully acknowledging their debt to the less philosophically manageable strengths of the feminine imagination. This irritation manifests itself through parody, in the play's four male suitors who sigh while they compose despairing verses about the women who refuse their attentions. If Spenser's critique of the Petrarchan tradition leads him to emphasize, and make serious use of, certain potentialities in the tradition itself (as in his lady and suitor's mutual unweaving in the Penelope sonnet), Cavendish and Brackley's critique leads them first of all to caricature Petrarchism by squashing it flat.⁴ Specifically, they satirize the male characters' readings of their own literary tradition, having these characters believe they are acting out erotic paradigms that are simple and indicative rather than intricate and conditional. *The Concealed Fancies* does not stop at caricature, however, and the alternatives that the play offers to the suitors' laughably formulaic notions indicate that Cavendish and Brackley do not want to jettison the Petrarchan tradition but (like Spenser) to woo its very

confusions. Given that Cavendish and Brackley are women, one might expect them either to reject the idea of the Petrarchan mistress or to identify so much with her that they would not associate her with otherness and confusion. What happens, instead, is that their play asks us to identify with the Petrarchan mistress at the same time that it asks us to believe that we must search to find her.

Salutary fancies

Cavendish and Brackley's breezy comedy has roles for them and for their younger sister, as well as for other members of their household, and it plainly makes use of the authors' experience, two years earlier, of surrendering to parliamentary forces after their royalist father and brothers had fled to the continent. The Duke of Newcastle's motherless daughters were allowed to remain at his estate, which was turned from a royalist garrison into a parliamentary one, and, despite their fears, they were apparently given protection and were treated extraordinarily well.⁵ The main plot of *The Concealed Fancies* concerns two sisters, Luceny and Tattiney, who are in much the same situation as the Cavendish sisters were, surrounded by enemy forces but safe for the time being. Luceny and Tattiney have two suitors to complicate their lives, men whom the sisters privately intend someday to accept but whom they gleefully torment for the present. Although Luceny and Tattiney yearn for their male relatives' return, they clearly enjoy defining and ruling their own small society within the confines established by the siege – so that like Amoret and Æmylia in Lust's cave, albeit in a comic register, Luceny and Tattiney find feminine community at the center of men's violence.⁶

I will address this main plot later, but I want to begin with a subplot that mirrors Luceny and Tattiney's situation. At one point, three of the sisters' female cousins have been left to their own devices in the besieged house of an absent male friend. Although the friend is not positively identified, various details in the play indicate that he must be Luceny and Tattiney's father, Lord Calsindow, and that the cousins are under siege at another of his estates. The scene in which the cousins first appear begins seriously, with the cousins' servants having abandoned them to the mercy of the enemy forces outside. The cousins ask one another whether they have been maintaining their dignity while negotiating with the parliamentary commanders, and they speculate that they may never be happy again. Yet the scene moves rapidly from these serious concerns to a type of self-indulgence when the cousins decide that instead of occupying their anxious boredom by practicing their French, they will unlock the box of medicinal sweets that belong to their absent host. The

rest of the scene is set up as a roguish invasion of the host's privacy when a cousin designated only as "Is." says, "Truly, if he knew he would wonder how we durst offer to look of them."⁷ More than a third of the scene is taken up by a dialogue that amounts to little more than a list of the host's delectable medicines with their delectable names:

CICILLEY: Now we shall see what rare cordials he hath for restoration of health,
and making one young.

SH: Come let's go open the box; what's this?

CICILLEY: 'Tis quintessence of mint and magisterium of pearl.

SH: Take one of these cakes, and you cousin, they're very good ones.

CICILLEY: We never saw these before, come we'll put them up.

SH: No take another, he'll never want them.

And a bit later:

CICILLEY: Here are pots of []⁸ and accodeshdry.

SH: And pots of preserved nutmegs and morabollans and a whole box of my
Lady Kent's cordials.

CICILLEY: And rather essences of all sorts, cabinets of all matter of spirits,
Gilbert's water, and curious balmsomes. I am weary with repeating, we'll put
them up.

SH: Come, cousin, this place is very cold, and we have seen all his cordials; I'll
take this half pot of morabollans and so quit them.

CICILLEY: No, take a whole one.

SH: No, I'll have no more than this half pot, for you have more need of cordials

... (III.iv.34–67)

What is this scene doing in the play? Why is fully half of the scene devoted to itemization – and to the irritating little disagreements over who should have a whole pot of medicinally sweet plums? One explanation would be that this dialogue is the result of authorial inexperience, perhaps even that it is a section that the two older sisters allowed their younger sister, Frances, to write. One could easily imagine that a teenager sick of war rations might be unwilling to condense her day-dream of marvelous food. But although the play does show evidence of quick construction, the concerns that it encodes are hardly naïve or uncomplicated, and it would be silly to assume that because its authors were less rigorously educated than most male playwrights of the period, their text must directly reflect the particulars of their lives without also participating in larger and more refracted cultural conversations.

In terms of individual motive or character, we can say that the three cousins search the cordial box for restoratives for their war-weariness, compensating for the frustrating passivity of a siege that puts them at the mercy of the soldiers by in turn putting their absent host at their mercy in a relatively benign skirmish between the sexes. There is nothing wrong

with this interpretation, except that it does not fully explain the odd note of greediness when the cousins press restoratives upon one another, deferring the moment when they actually will close the box by continually referring to that moment. The desires that drive this scene seem embarrassingly incongruous with the rest of the play, in which the leading female characters exasperate their cooks by being more interested in books than in dinner.

If we think of conditional erotics rewritten in a comic mode, however, the scene begins to make sense. We will remember that in Spenser's cantos about Alma's confusingly gendered castle, the feminine image is located both in an imaginative space within the male poet's own cranium (allegorized by the wavering feminine wit that swirls illusive images around Phantastes in Alma's turret-brain) and in a teasingly inaccessible space set apart from him (allegorized by Gloriana's "bounteous" interior that forbiddingly arouses Arthur's and Guyon's lust). Like Spenser, the Cavendish sisters and some of their contemporaries situate themselves in relation to two dissimilar types of enclosed Petrarchan spaces, but these are not precisely the same two that we see in Spenser's poetry. The speaker of Spenser's poetry flirts with the feminine imagination that erotically fills what Astrophil would call his "closde up sence." Like Arthur and Guyon, the male speaker sues for entrance into his own secret recesses. I will be arguing that Cavendish and Brackley's play registers a similar but significantly nuanced confusion: these two authors see the Petrarchan imagination as a besieged house from which they would be happy to flee; they see it as a locked box within that house, provisioned with heretofore forbidden delicacies; and they see it as an immense and hungry space inside of them that demands to be filled with something besides a Petrarchan lady or a Gloriana.

Women writing in the seventeenth century make various attempts to inhabit and speak from the imaginative spaces they have inherited. The unsympathetic chorus of Elizabeth Cary's *Tragedy of Mariam, the Fair Queen of Jewry* (1613) chastises Mariam for allowing her mind to wander from its duty toward her husband, Herod, even though he has murdered her innocent brothers. Although Mariam has remained chaste, the chorus accuses her of simply wanting "variety": "Who can those vast imaginations feed, / Where in a property, contempt doth breed?" (I.chor.). The chorus means that anything concrete will make Mariam sufficiently discontented to "breed" imaginary alternatives, but what is more intriguing is the way that the vast hungers enclosed by this womb-like imagination make it into a serious parody of the feminine imagination that tantalizes male poets and the knights who visit Alma's castle. Like the male lover's mind that becomes pregnant with poetry only when

the dream-image of the mistress flees at daybreak, the hungry womb that Cary's chorus gives to Mariam fills itself by spilling itself: the chorus declares that a woman who fills anyone's ear besides her husband's compromises the integrity of "her proper self." If she gives even verbal conversation to another man, she risks becoming metaphorically pregnant.

Trying to find a way out of these narrow ethics, Cary and her contemporaries complicate the issue of women's intellectual freedom by entangling it with the issue of men's intellectual feminization. Cary's Herod orders his wife's execution, sends her from him, and then mournfully extols each part of her body in Petrarchan terms: "Her eyes like stars, her forehead like the sky," and so on (IV.vii.451). His mind begins to wander, and he becomes inconsistent, irrational, and delusive – characteristics that Cary's readers would have considered feminine. Women writing in the seventeenth century sometimes seem to believe that women's immense and unstable imaginations cause men also to suck that vastness into themselves as if it were a disease. Nevertheless, these women search for something to replace their belief that the feminine imagination is blameworthy in this relationship.

The Concealed Fancies participates in this search, and in the cordial-box scene, a complicated interaction between a man's mind and the cousins' feminine imaginations is figured in spatial terms that revise those of Petrarchism. Although the play does use the cordial-box invasion as a metaphor for the Civil War, both the cordial box and the war also serve in this play as metaphors for a set of conundrums that had occupied some people's thoughts long before the war broke out: to what extent does the sweetness of falling in love subvert one's sexual identity? Can such a subversion be medicinal? When one longs to solve the codes of another's body and mind, what role does the imagination play? Why is it that the beloved so often looks like an enemy and that the enemy so often looks like oneself? If we think of flirtation as involving hunger, what complications arise? Under what conditions can flirtation become a type of self-exploration? What, exactly, do flirts withhold from each other? Can a flirt have authority? And I will add another question whose roots in the cordial-box scene will become evident later: what can the negotiations within erotic relationships teach us about the diplomacy, plots, and truces between a masculine literary tradition and the female writers who are among its heirs?⁹

This is a play about civil and sexual conflict. The cordial-box scene implicitly asks us to consider the women's curiosity tantamount to an erotic invasion of the host's mind, as they proceed from exposing the box of sweets to deciding, later in the scene, that they will break open a

cabinet that contains the host's love-letters to his mistress. Patricia Fumerton has shown us that the Elizabethan rage for cabinets centered upon elusive fantasies of secrecy and privacy: the owner of such a cabinet filled it with small, symbolic objects such as miniature portraits or sonnets and allowed only intimate friends to look inside – sometimes with a great deal of conversational foreplay. The cabinets housed not simply secrets but the owners' secret selves:

Having resolved “to open a good part of her inward mind” to Sir James Melville, ambassador from Mary Queen of Scots, and professing “a great desire” to see her “good sister” . . . Queen Elizabeth led Melville into the heart of her labyrinthine state apartments at Whitehall and unveiled to him her collection of miniatures . . . “She took me to her bed-chamber,” he recalled, “and opened a little cabinet, wherein were divers little pictures wrapt within paper, and their names written with her own hand upon the papers. Upon the first that she took up was written, ‘My Lord’s picture.’ I held the candle, and pressed to see that picture so named. She appeared loath to let me see it; yet my importunity prevailed for a sight thereof, and found it to be the Earl of Leicester’s picture.” (Fumerton, *Cultural Aesthetics*, 67)

Melville goes on in the same vein. Fumerton describes the encounter as “an intensely intimate moment in a series of political maneuverings,” and she argues that “the Queen’s interview with Melville is an episode of gift exchange in which the ultimate gift is the Elizabethan self . . .” (*ibid.*, 67, 69). Yet this gift is conditional, because “within the ‘innermost’ recesses of Elizabethan subjectivity . . . further recesses, cabinets, or cases [keep] opening up” (*ibid.*, 69).

Cavendish and Brackley’s seventeenth-century play makes Elizabethan Petrarchism one of its strongest general themes; in the cordial-box scene, the play yokes this general theme with the more specific discourse of personal cabinets, and I would argue that the locked box and cabinet belonging to the cousins’ host emblemize not only his “inward mind” but the Petrarchan poet’s “close up sence,” where these seventeenth-century Stellas break in to steal (Fumerton, *Cultural Aesthetics*, 67; *Astrophil and Stella* 38). The scene demonstrates a fascination with the permutations of the imaginative process: the cousins’ playful enjoyment of trespassing is not predicated simply upon the idea that *if* their host could see them, he would be irritated, but upon the fantasy that somehow he *can* see them without being able to do anything about it. After Is.’s remark that “if he knew, he would wonder how we durst offer to look,” Sh. replies, “I wish he saw us in a prospective” (a crystal ball or telescope; III.iv.44–46). In their fantasy, the host can see them as clearly as if they were inside his own head – and his inability to control their

lock-picking or their appetites makes him resemble the male poets' personae, who cannot control the feminine images inside their minds.

The opening of the host's locked containers is thus represented as a foray into both a feminine and a masculine imagination. The passage begins, after all, with the three women casting about for some way to occupy their *own* minds. Their initial exploration of the medicine box fascinates them, but their particular discoveries are almost moot, because the box interests them only so long as their imaginations can make something of it. They invade their host's supplies in search of something to feed their imaginations; as long as the medicine box is locked, cordials themselves are the goal, but soon after it has been opened and its contents have become concrete fact, Cicilley fancies she has found something even more exciting: "What receipt's this? I swear, 'tis a letter and one of his mistress's seals" (III.iv.49–51). Sh.'s reply tells us that the love letter is purely wishful thinking: "You're mistaken; you judge wrong; 'tis a cordial seal."

It is the process of imagining discoveries rather than actually making them that engrosses Cicilley, and although Sh. corrects her, Sh. is similarly occupied. After more discoveries of sweets, Sh. tells Cicilley that tomorrow, she will invite her to another form of entertainment. Now that the contents of the cordial box have been brought to the light of day, a locked cabinet beckons:

SH: I'll pick his cabinet locks, and there you shall see his magazine of love. I dare swear you shall see locks of all manner of coloured hairs, and favouring ribbons in as many colours as the rainbow.

CICILLEY: How know you that?

SH: 'Tis my strong imagination, and if this fancy of mine should prove true, we shall have rarer recreation to look on them. (III.iv.72–80)

The women search out things unknown that belong to someone else – pursuing the dream of having "keys, and locks, to spy, / And 'scape spies, to good ends," as Donne puts it – but the women also find what their own imaginations have already produced.¹⁰ What evidence does Sh. have that the cabinet contains love letters? "'Tis my strong imagination," she says. Indeed, the whole medicine cabinet is already the product of women; the cousins mention finding "my Lady Kent's cordials" – a reference to the *Choice Manual of Rare and Select Secrets in Physick and Chyrurgery*, by Elizabeth Grey, Countess of Kent, who was related to the Cavendishes.¹¹ Although the manual was not published until 1653, it was originally the Countess's private collection of recipes and would probably have circulated in some form before its publication. Early modern recipe manuals often claim authority by making the public privy to the

medicinal secrets of a great lady: an author named only as “A. M.” published *Queen Elizabeth Closset of Physical Secrets*, and “W. M.” followed suit with *The Queens Closet Opened*, which went through seventeen editions. In some sense, then, the three cousins – great ladies themselves – pry into their host’s mind in search of their own secrets.

This play stages the conflict that occurs when a woman who has been imagined into existence by a man turns out to have an imagining faculty of her own. An author could resolve this conflict by making both male and female characters speak directly to each other, without the mediating fantasies. But in concert with the general Renaissance disinclination to think of a “real” self as always being opposed to a constructed one, this play has a deep investment in the imagination. How, then, is it to respond to those pamphleteers in the English debate over women who say that women’s imaginations are irrational and linked to sexual inconstancy? In Spenser’s work, which is far more flexible and inclusive than the moralists’ tracts, associating the feminine imagination with error and then investing in that error allows the speaker to flirt with a dangerous otherness. But where Spenser takes risks, seventeenth-century women often must go on the defensive. Some of Cavendish and Brackley’s contemporaries use the strategy of denying any connection between the feminine imagination and eroticism while affirming that the feminine imagination is movable.

In 1621, four years after publishing a scathing reply to an antifeminist pamphlet, Rachel Speght published a poem titled “The Dreame” in order to answer some of the pamphlets that had been published in the interim. Speght’s female speaker recounts a dream in which allegorical figures tell her she needs an education. Disswasion tries to persuade her that members of her sex cannot become erudite, but Desire, Truth, and Industrie give encouragement. The speaker is aware that being an uneducated woman has given her grief, making her “differ little from a brute” (“The Dreame,” 44). Like an animal, she has had to depend upon sub-rational thought: “Instinct of nature is my chiefest guide . . . / I hungry am, yet cannot seeke for foode; / Because I know not what is bad or good” (50–54). It is this ignorance, rather than inherent perversity, that causes women’s mental wavering:

Sometimes when I seeke the golden meane,
My weaknesse makes me faile of mine intent,
That suddenly I fall into extremes.

. . .

What is without the compasse of my braine,
My Sicknesse makes me say it cannot bee;
What I conceive not, cannot come to passe;

Because for it I can no reason see.
 I measure all mens feet by mine own shooe,
 And count all well, which I appoint or doe. (55–66)

Like the dreamers and hallucinators of Greville's "In Night when colours all to blacke are cast" (discussed in Chapter 2), this speaker has no true access to the world around her. Yet whereas Greville indicates that the over-active imagination is at fault for usurping the senses and inventing "images of selfe-confusednesse . . . / Which but expressions be of inward evils," Speght implies that the feminine imagination could help give her speaker access to a world of knowledge "without the compasse of [her] braine." Speght does not use the words "imagination" or "fancy," but when she counters the standard denunciations of women's flightiness by saying that women's minds are healthy only if they can conceive of the invisible as well as of the visible, she thereby makes the feminine imagination praiseworthy by redefining it rather than by arguing for its virtuous restraint.

This new definition of the imagination then helps Speght revise the common idea that the inconstancy of women's imaginations makes women morally inconstant, as well. The female figure named Truth speaks:

Let not *Disswasion* alter thy intent;
 'Tis sinne to nippe good motions in the head;
 Take courage, and be constant in thy course,
 Though irksome be the path, which thou must tread. (175–178)

I suppose I will avoid making gratuitous Petrarchan puns on "good motions in the head," but the second two lines in the quotation above clearly metaphorize the acquisition of thought as physical motion. After receiving Truth's advice, the narrator sets off on a journey towards knowledge, "wandering with *Desire*, / To gather that, for which I thither came . . ." (199–200). By arguing that a desire for education will help this woman to be "more constant in [her] course," Speght's poem identifies constancy neither with domestic immobility nor with sexual caution (the standard equations) but with a mind's purposeful yet searching motion away from itself. Imaginative error becomes the very activity that will enable women to avoid the sterile vacillations of ignorance, and their desire for knowledge will prove that women's mental wandering need not lead to wanton erotic desire.

Cavendish and Brackley go one step further, figuring out how to legitimize their desires for mental freedom of movement in the very act of embracing the charge that the feminine imagination is linked to erotic desire. Like Spenser, these two authors apparently believe that however

policed and besieged the conditional space of feminine desire may be, it offers scope of a sort. *The Concealed Fancies* turns upon the relationship between fancy as imagination and fancy as sexual desire: while sometimes seeming to believe that men are the victims of an invasive and capricious femininity, this play nevertheless makes the startling argument that women's sexual constancy and social legitimacy actually depend upon the fluidity of their imaginations. Even when the sisters Luceny and Tattiney are afraid or sorrowful, they are also witty, spirited, and convinced that the reason they are good at making their own decisions is that they are good at imaginative improvisation. When they are imperious or eccentric, the play asks us to applaud them for it, and they engage in many dialogues about how adroitly they will manage their two suitors – named Courtley and Presumption – both before and after marriage. Despite the war that surrounds them, the sisters do not embrace a steely-eyed realism or renounce the mental wandering of which women were so often accused. Instead, Luceny predicates her future chances of being both a happy person and a faithful wife upon her ability “still to imagine him Courtley and I Mistress Luceny” – that is, her ability always to imagine that her husband is still flirting with her and that she has erotic power over him (II.iii.55–56). At the same time, she avers that this flirtation represents a personal steadiness. When Tattiney asks her, “And will you continue this way of discretion with him when you're married?” Luceny responds, “Why do you think ‘I take thee’ shall alter me?” (I.iv.41–43). This paradoxical association of the erotic fancy with personal integrity and sexual constancy allows the authors of this play to reserve private areas of pleasure while they claim their right to public imaginations.

Language arts

Although *The Concealed Fancies* is striking in the degree to which it represents relationships between men and women through the medium of fantasy rather than through encounters between male and female characters onstage, those encounters do also occur. Yet because most of these encounters take the form of seriously ambiguous flirtations, whether between minor characters or between the two heroines and their woe-begone suitors, even these supposedly direct interactions spell out the distance that imagination creates between the characters. At one point, the suitors Courtley and Presumption find that Luceny and Tattiney have taken their vows as nuns in a convent – purely a temporary wrinkle in the plot; the women have sequestered themselves there to mourn the absence of their male relatives during the war. In order to gain access to

the convent, Courtley and Presumption disguise themselves as poor men needing spiritual advice. Once in, they reveal their true identities, praise the two sisters' chastity and beauty in song, and aver that they will never cease to hope for marriage. The stage directions tell us that "Luceny the nun sings" her reply:

LUCENY: I wonder what's the cause about you go
 Thus to profane my sacred priesthood so,
 As to name me wantonly fair,
 Chaste that I am; and it shall be my care
 Your stealing language further shall not creep
 Into my sacred church, where I will weep . . . (IV.i.44–49)

Undaunted, Presumption decides that if the two sisters now have a sacred calling, he will remain in the convent to worship. He sings his intentions to Tattiney:

PRESUMP: And I have found thy most sacred self here,
 Whose presence turns all sex to joy, not fear.
 So I'll kneel with adoration to thee
 And never think the time too long, to see
 Thy purer face, of angel beauty fair,
 But look and imagine what piece you are
 So stands with admiration that a she
 Should thus so like a pure just goddess be.
TATTINEY: Bless me what spirit possesses you
 To speak to me as if I were not true?
 But I am just and will be just to grief
 And now without my friends have no relief. (IV.i.57–68)

When Tattiney reproves Presumption for acting "as if I were not true," she is asking him why he is speaking to her as if she were unfaithful to her conventual vows, but her phrase also means, "You speak to me as if I were only a piece of goods to be imagined by you" rather than someone in mourning. Luceny's and Tattiney's reproofs indicate that the sisters experience the men's songs as an invasion of their meditations. Rape is perhaps too strong a concept for this chiefly comic play, but the sense of some sort of violation clearly informs this scene. The play suggests here that the sisters think the men want to steal into them; "stealing language" refers not only to the lies that the disguised men have told to gain entrance but to the wooing language they use in their frequent attempts to pierce the sisters' defenses. At the same time, Luceny's and Tattiney's reproofs indicate that they suspect the men of trying to steal some part of them; "stealing language" is that which robs one of one's true self. Given the sisters' regular habit of making derisive remarks about their suitors' presumptuous love songs, there is also the strong suggestion here that

one way the men's language could make Luceny and Tattiney into something "not true" would be for the men to take the material they have stolen and put it into Petrarchan songs. But like the first Penelope, who spends her time unweaving the second Penelope's web of wooing language in Spenser's sonnet, Luceny and Tattiney have no intention of allowing language to steal them from themselves. Instead, they intend to spin language for their own purposes.

In one of their lighter moments, before the war's burden of anxiety has become so great as to send them to the convent, the sisters make it plain that they consider language both the central problem in their relationships with their suitors and the central truth in their lives. Although they will not give their suitors any hope until almost the end of the play, the sisters assume they will eventually marry the men. Here and elsewhere, they promise each other to use their verbal skills in order to prevent those marriages from robbing them of themselves:

TATTINEY: Why, as I hope to continue Tattiney, I long to see thee married, but I'm so feared you will prove a fool.¹²

LUCENY: Do you not doubt Luceny, but mind Tattiney. For my observation is that Presumption doth throw his cloak as if he intended to govern you.

TATTINEY: Aye, but as I hope to continue my own, I will make him lay his cloak off, if his carriage be to slight me . . .

. . .

LUCENY: Aye, but Tattiney shall show obedient when my Lady Knowall visits her.

TATTINEY: And so I believe will you be when Mistress Courtley, your mother-in-law, sees you.

LUCENY: Yes, faith, will I; but though I look obedient and civil to her, I will let her discretion understand in silence, that I know myself, and that I deserve thanks for coming into her family. Therefore I will not lessen my conversation for her piece of sobriety. (II.iii.102-28)

Tattiney playfully but significantly misconstrues the word "conversation" to mean "sexual liaisons":

TATTINEY: Aye, sister, but I do not like that word some ladies here in town are much acquainted with, the language of friendship and conversation, as they will think.

LUCENY: What, for as I hope for happiness I will continue my innocent freedom with Courtley, and he shall have a true piece of virtue of Luceny; and you need not be more jealous, sister, of Luceny's language, than you are of yourself, of making who I please believe I am an obedient fool.

Whereupon Tattiney merrily gets down to brass tacks:

TATTINEY: Do you not wonder that Courtley and Presumption are held wits? For methinks there is no such miracles in their language.¹³

LUCENY: Why, that's because we have been brought up in the creation of good languages, which will make us ever ourselves. (II.iii.129–144)

This last declaration is a striking one to appear in a play by two young women who do not live at court. Although the mid-sixteenth-century ideal of silence for women had relaxed somewhat by the mid-seventeenth century, few men or women would have thought to say that it was women's language that gave women their integrity. Distinctively feminine language was the unbridled language of scolds and gossips. Here, Luceny says not merely that she can be both talkative and virtuous but that her virtue is linguistic. Moreover, if the "innocent freedom" that she intends to continue with Courtley consists of the sort of conversation she has had with him so far in the play, she is declaring here that she will remain "a true piece of virtue" by continuing to practice verbal sleights and teasing.

One of the sisters' implicit but crucial objections to their suitors' methods of wooing is that the suitors rob them of their authorial rights by retreating into an uninspired notion of Petrarchism in which the male poet treats his lady's words only as raw material for his own work. Although Courtley and Presumption start out seeming quite dissimilar, with Courtley planning to give his wife her way in all things and Presumption planning to break his wife's will systematically in the manner of Shakespeare's Petruchio, the play demonstrates that Luceny and Tattiney consider both men dependent upon outmoded literary devices. A scene that appears early on in the play sets up the authorial problem in lively terms. Given that this scene is central to my discussion and that, in any case, it makes good reading, we should look at a good chunk of it:

LUCENY: When he made his approaches of love, by speaking in a formal way, I answered him: I could not love so dull a brain as he had, always to repeat he loved me. I had rather have him say he hated me, for that would be some variety!

TATTINEY: But what said you, when he expressed himself by oaths and execrations?

LUCENY: I told him I wondered he had the confidence, seeing I kept my chamber, to trouble me with his impertinent language, which ever produceth my vexation. For I will tell you sister, *it is impossible to answer him to what he speaks, but he will catch some handle to blow up his ambitious wishes.* Therefore I put him off with a sharp reply, as I have told you before; and then said, my face could be no ways inevitable for his affection; therefore I did not desire to be his courting-stock to practise with, against he comes to his mistress . . . (I.iv.8–27; emphasis added)

Soon afterwards, Courtley enters to try his luck:

COURTLEY: Madam, your admirer attends you.

LUCENY: And thinks to be accepted for your new suit.

COURTLEY: Still in your insulting way.

LUCENY: 'Tis tyranny indeed. To tell you truth, you are so conscious to yourself, as you think you are the only object of perfection.

...

COURTLEY: Madam, it is your sweeter face of innocence that converts the rudest peasant even into modesty.

LUCENY: Aye, but when the species returns back, my face methinks should be converted into debaseness. Now will not your next posture be to stand with folded arms? But that posture now grows much out of fashion. That's altered to a serious look of admiration, as if your face was so terrible as to turn men to statues.

COURTLEY: I wish damnation, madam, rather than thus to be tormented by your unkind love.

LUCENY: Away! Away, with your hypocritical language, for I am not yet so vain as to believe your dissembling romances. (I.iv.46-76)

Luceny's indignation is mixed with humor, but it has deep roots. She is plainly irritated not simply at Courtley's individual actions and attempts at persuasion but at his unthinkingly buying into the longstanding literary traditions of "dissembling romances" and Petrarchan sighing. Iconographically, poetically frustrated lovers were supposed to stand with folded arms and disconsolate faces, as illustrated on the title page of the 1628 edition of Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. Luceny's accusing Courtley of being so self-conscious that he thinks he is "the only object of perfection" and believes she will accept him "for [his] new suit" not only conveys the idea that his wardrobe is more exciting than his wooing but also, given Luceny's subsequent digs at the formulaic nature of his love, implies that this is the self-absorption of one whose mistress is merely an idea in his head.

Luceny uses flirtation to express her fears that she is not the real object of Courtley's affection. Most overtly, her comments to Tattiney about being Courtley's "courting-stock" suggest that he is merely practicing his wooing skills on her before courting another unspecified woman in earnest. Yet Luceny does not really believe that there is another woman, and because of the scorn that she later expresses for his romances and for his languishing affectations, the strong implication is that the other mistress to whom she refers is the literary other, the listening ear upon which sonnets depend and which sonnets therefore invent. This sense becomes even stronger two scenes later, when Presumption complains to Tattiney that he has not known "whether you would suffer your lover of admiration to express himself your perpetual servant" and Tattiney replies, "Oh, sir, now I understand you: you spoke this yesterday to your mistress, and think to confer the same upon me, and I to believe so

foolish a romance” (II.ii.4–10). Luceny’s and Tattiney’s fictional resentment seems, then, to develop from Cavendish and Brackley’s historical sense that romance literature of praise has stolen women’s complex integrity.

Luceny’s complaint about Courtley’s catching at her words represents something like the woman’s side of Donne’s “Flea” (not to mention a woman’s reply to Freud’s assertion that Dora’s “no” means “yes”), where the man interprets everything the woman says according to his own game plan. Luceny believes that this process debases the woman, making her into a mirroring “species” of him, even while he claims to be remaking himself in her image. According to what Luceny tells Tattiney in this scene, she has sometimes met Courtley’s appropriative aggression with silence, keeping to her room. Although Luceny cannot tailor her relationship with Courtley exactly to her liking, her silence has been her strategic choice rather than a fulfillment of Courtley’s desires or requirements. He desperately wants a word from her so he can hang his day upon it – and presumably compose his romances on the strength of it. But Luceny has read romances, and she knows that if she says anything, it will become a “handle to blow up [his] ambitious wishes.” The play emphasizes the potential comedy of Courtley’s dependence upon Luceny’s words with a scene just before this one, in which Luceny and Tattiney’s male cook complains to the kitchen boy that he never hears a word from the mistresses of the house about his elaborate dinners because the ladies are too interested in reading books to bother with the mundane details of huswifery. The cook says in despair, “Nothing angers me, but they’ll neither chide nor commend” (I.iii.9–10). Transferring his frustrations, he proceeds to badger the tongue-tied kitchen boy to remember the name of the last guest who praised his meals, telling the boy repeatedly to speak, speak. The scene ends with the cook grumbling, “I’ll be sent up as a Friday dinner! For, God knows, I can pretend to nothing but a lean pike, and were that of a poet’s dressing, the ladies would like me” (41–44). Courtley, like the cook, seems to think that the only chance he has of getting an encouraging word out of Luceny is to dress and garnish his own speech as a poet would. His poetizing does not have the effect he intends, because his and Luceny’s poetic tastes differ. His poetry demands that she *inspire* him – a demand that she satirically concretizes with her image of Courtley using her words as the handle of a bellows that will puff him up with air.¹⁴ To put it another way, more along the lines of Parolles’s punning conversation with Helena in *All’s Well* about virgins being “blown up,” when Luceny refuses to give Courtley words, she is refusing to impregnate him. Or more precisely, she believes he is deluded in his belief that she can impregnate him in the way

he wishes, and her silence before this scene has been designed as a refusal to participate in his delusion. Luceny's description of Courtley's efforts to blow himself up with her words comically parodies the anxiety that surfaces in Cary's *Mariam* when Herod's feminine insanity seems to proceed from the "vast" hungers of Mariam's imagination. If Cary's play registers a fear that women's chaotic imaginations may cause male poets to bloat themselves on a femininity that will make them go mad, Luceny wryly repaints that fear as a nonsensically grotesque attempt on the part of the male poet to inseminate himself by means of a feminine bellows. In the first sonnet of *Astrophil and Stella*, Astrophil thinks of himself as "great with child to speak," a condition inspired by Stella, who is also the only person who can ensure a safe delivery. As if in response to this sort of imagery – which is of course common imagery in one form or another in Renaissance poetry – the Cavendish sisters have their character Courtley fill with air rather than with a pregnancy because he is sucking in his fantasies about Luceny rather than the meaning behind her words.

Female authors of this period often make fun of the Petrarchan lover's ignorance of what goes on in his lady's mind – and even of what occurs in his own mind. While Luceny's and Tattiney's suitors live within a Petrarchan system, performing the requisite sighs, praises, and avowals, the two sisters read these performances with critical awareness, laughing at their suitors' lack of perspicacity. After Luceny has told her sister about her former silence, Luceny changes tactics and talks to Courtley more than he would really like her to do. Instead of allowing Courtley to catch her words, she catches his, counteracting her fears of becoming the phantasmagorical mistress in his head not by avoiding this image but by wittily transforming it. After Courtley acts like a sonneteer by Platonizing Luceny's face, she responds by demonstrating that although he cannot see beyond her face, she can see beyond his: he is playing out a Petrarchan script that only she knows how to interpret. Courtley's own face has no real power, she implies; he makes a poor sort of male Medusa, unable to turn his viewer into a statue, for the very good reason that his viewer has already imagined herself into a position behind his face, looking out.¹⁵

Luceny's ridicule of Courtley's "hypocritical language" and of his concern with faces and appearances is not designed so much to lead the two of them into greater immediacy as to demonstrate that she has every intention of outfacing him. She neither asks, nor attempts to tell him, what he is feeling beneath his melodramatic mannerisms; instead, she tells the story of their courtship her way, providing a running commentary that turns his movements and expressions instantly into narrative. In

a *tour de force*, she even narrates some of his actions a split second before he performs them. When she says, “Now will not your next posture be to stand with folded arms?” it is difficult to imagine the scene played in any way except with Courtley proceeding for a split second under the momentum of his already-formed intention, arresting himself in the act of starting to fold his arms as he wonders uncomfortably whether to complete the action as narrated or to invent something else on the spot. It is as though she wants to force him to understand that if he employs the gestures of Petrarchism without acknowledging that his animus is not a compliant False Florimel but a dangerous feminine resident with authorial ideas of her own, his authorial efforts will produce mere silliness.

What this flirtatious textualizing does for Luceny is to provide her with a fantasy of self-narrative, rather than leaving her to be a literary character in Courtley’s “dissembling romances.” The space opened up by the indeterminacy of coy aloofness is the space in which Luceny can contradict everything Courtley says about her, no matter what it is, and substitute her own definitions. Thus the wish fulfillment of this scene allows Luceny to complete two apparently contradictory but actually complementary actions: first, she uses her running narrative to reduce Courtley’s courtship of her to a questionable sartorial preoccupation and to marry him off to the lady in his head. By doing this, she leaves herself room to move around unimpeded by his encircling attentions. Second, she demonstrates that she, rather than Courtley, holds the title to his mind, understanding and choreographing what goes on in his thoughts. It is no wonder that the scene ends with Courtley saying ruefully to himself, “What a misfortune’s this to me, / To court a wench that doth so truly see” (I.iv.110–111).

The play hints, then, that the suitors dimly understand their comical peril; while fastening their desires on feminine perfection, they have left themselves open to invasion by a more complicated and more willful femininity. The play gives us additional hints about this peril through phrases the suitors utter without seeming aware of their possibilities for inflection – as in a speech Presumption delivers after discovering that his beloved, like Courtley’s, has unnerving powers of observation. Considering Courtley too soft-hearted, Presumption initially makes plans for his own marriage that are reminiscent of *The Taming of the Shrew*:

PRESUMP: As soon as I am married I will let her know I am her husband.

COURTLEY: How do you mean? She knows that.

PRESUMP: Aye, but I mean to follifie her all I can, and let her know that garb, that doth best become her, is most ill-favoured. So she shall neither look, walk, or speak, but I will be her perpetual vexation . . . [W]hoever my wife

fancies I will not esteem of, though a female; for men servants she shall neither dare to speak to them, nor so much as to employ them. . . .

COURTLEY: You'll be over-jealous.

PRESUMP: 'Tis but careful . . . If she do but behave herself ugly, then I'll tell her that was like a good wife and an honourable stock to bear children on withal. *I would have her take the week books, which is the only way to make her incapable of discourse or entertainment* . . . (III.iii.6–39; emphasis added)

As a suitor, Presumption has begged a few precious words from his lady here and there. As a husband, he intends to control her words in the same way that he intends to control his finances: through her dutiful management of them. Moments later, however, he receives a letter from Tattiney, and although we are not told the contents of the letter, the messenger's comments and Presumption's despairing reaction indicate that Tattiney is refusing to marry him because she has seen through his professions of adoration to the dictator beneath. He tells Courtley of his newly humble – and newly insecure – philosophy:

PRESUMP: I doubt I never shall enjoy my dear,
 For she my rigid thoughts certain did hear,
 Could she be mine I'd dedicated be
 To her and give her leave for to be free.
 Can any wench enter into my head
 If ever have her once into my bed?
 When married, my soul shall not think of wife,
 For she shall be my mistress, joy of life.

COURTLEY: A sudden change.

PRESUMP: A sudden change indeed.

(III.iii.112–121)

Presumption is saying that if fortune brings Tattiney to agree to the marriage after all, he will never again think about another woman – and that indeed, he will treat Tattiney as reverently as if he were still courting her. Yet the various meanings of “wench” and “mistress,” along with the confusion of pronouns, also allow us to hear Presumption asking, “Can any woman enter into my head if I get that same woman into my bed? Can she take over my brain after marriage, given that she seems to have read my mind already before marriage?” Sidney's *Astrophil* laments his inability to keep Stella's dream-image in his head, but in the Cavendish sisters' drama of feminine wish fulfillment, suitors find that it is not always easy to keep the wenches *out*.

Trafficking in fantasies

When Luceny asks Tattiney, “Why do you think ‘I take thee’ shall alter me?” she uses the phrase “I take thee” as a synecdoche for the marriage

ceremony which, in turn, serves metonymically for the shared life of a married couple (I.iv.43). Luceny's sentence asks two questions: "Why do you think the phrase 'I take thee' will change me?" and "Why do you think that my taking Courtley will change me?" The doubleness of Luceny's question emphasizes a close connection between, on the one hand, the potential dangers of pronouncing a certain linguistic formula inherited from a venerable institution and, on the other hand, the potential dangers of accepting another person into oneself. On some level this play stages the larger historical form of this connection between language and the body; that is, Cavendish and Brackley often imagine their relationship to inherited literary patterns of language in terms of the body, as though they were ingesting genres at the same time that the men are ingesting their mistresses. When the "lady cousins" eat the contents of their host's mind, they are in some sense swallowing literature that has already swallowed them.

There is a significant connection between this metaphor of ingestion and Luceny's angry assertion in the convent that Courtley's "stealing language further shall not creep / Into my sacred church" (IV.i.48–49). Her assertion, we recall, makes stealing both an act of criminal ingress (an invasion of her church as though it were her body) and an act of plundering (robbing her from herself). If the Petrarchan poet circulates images of his mistress's eyebrows, breasts, and white hands among his friends as currency in the form of sonnets, Cavendish and Brackley recognize and parody this tradition by having their heroines' suitors attempt to steal body parts. Early in the play, Courtley agrees to leave the room in defeat if only Luceny will give him one of her ribbons for him to sigh over. After Luceny scornfully rejects his "offer to plunder me of my favors," Courtley makes one last bid:

COURTLEY: Give me leave, then, passionately to beg a salute, and I will never see you more . . . [T]herefore give me one more leave to beg the favour of your lips.¹⁶

LUCENY: When did you hear my lips were so rude as to come within distance of your sex? And to confirm you there is nothing I hate more then a country gentleman, who must ever salute coming and going or else he will whisper to his next neighbor, I am proud and, I swear, I would rather cut my lips off than suffer you a salute! (I.iv.96–108)

Her lips become one more favor that he begs to plunder; she fears he would whisper his acquisition among his neighbors. She does not want to be his "courting stock" – as though her body were an inanimate object for his use – or to have her face "converted into debaseness" by him (I.iv.66–67). To summarize the interplay of metaphor: her thoughts and body become both food for his nourishment and stolen currency for him

to circulate. In the middle of her sharp-edged badinage about Courtley's self-conscious posturing, Luceny tells him, "I should think myself debased should I lend you a thought, for as I hear you are the only libertine in the town" (I.iv.56–58). In addition to accusing him of being morally too loose to deserve her, she is imagining her thoughts being spent prodigally by someone who does not truly value them. And because the term "libertine" commonly designates someone who not only spends money carelessly but spends his and other people's bodies, as well, Luceny's assessment of Courtley's poor economy implies that if she lends him her thoughts, he will take the opportunity to embezzle and squander her body.

When Luceny reminds her sister, "We have been brought up in the creation of good languages, which will make us ever ourselves," her point is not only that their virtues are linguistic but that they define these virtues themselves (II.iii.142–144). At the same time, her phrasing reveals a paradox: they "have been brought up" this way. Their mother has died long ago; it is their father, Monsieur Calsindow, who has educated them, and the authors of *The Concealed Fancies* dedicate their play to their own father, also a widower. Seventeenth-century women must figure out ways to "create" a literature even when their educations have incorporated the scattered limbs of their own bodies. It is true that the "good languages" that will maintain Luceny's and Tattiney's identities are "good" partly because they are grammatically correct, thereby attesting to Luceny's and Tattiney's status as educated noblewomen who can reproduce the English and French bequeathed to them, but insofar as "languages" may also refer to the women's ways of speaking, Luceny and Tattiney value them for nearly the opposite reason: because these modes of speaking are idiosyncratic. The sisters pride themselves on speaking both unpredictably and arbitrarily, and they most often speak about what they fantasize: what may happen after the war, what they want to be like after they marry, how they may treat their suitors five minutes from now, what their suitors might be thinking even as they speak. Like children imagining themselves into adulthood, they invent verbal formulas whose power lies purely in the fact that Luceny and Tattiney, rather than someone in authority, have invented them. The analogy with childhood is appropriate; the war's demands on their male relatives leave these two female characters unsupervised, and they must find their own genres in which to move.

A minor dialogue between two stewards of the besieged house in which Luceny and Tattiney's cousins are staying gives some idea of the bewilderment that the imperious and arbitrary language of women in this play can produce – and of the way that their verbal power over men is

grounded in their internal negotiations with the power of father-figures over them:

DISCRETION: Did our ladies chide you today? Come let's walk.

CAUTION: No faith, I value no chiding by them, but to say truth they gave me sharp apprehension and, stately, gave me a little no respect; and when we talked, they spoke of some designs against them, and so put a dislike upon me; and in good faith, I said I knew of no design, nor had design against them, but I would serve Monsieur Calsindow the best I could. They said I might very well study and plead that pretence, as being the only handle I had and so convert them to a belief: 'since we honour him as our father, we can say nothing to you in that concern.' Then they swore my wisdom should not alter their resolution, and in good faith, I know not their resolutions, neither can I imagine. (IV.vi.1–17)

In the context of the play as a whole, scenes like this or the one between the cook and kitchen boy indicate that women have good reason to exhibit the famously feminine characteristics of which so many moralists and poets complain: fickleness, changeableness, and seeming lack of reason. Here, the cousins' vagueness is tactical, and we are also asked simply to take pleasure in their ability to make Caution and Discretion dizzy with incomprehension. But the cousins' teasing acquires deeper resonance if we think about the implications of their telling the stewards that they honor Lord Calsindow as their father. This is the same Lord Calsindow with whom these cousins symbolically flirted in the cordial-box scene. I suggest that by supplementing the story of Luceny and Tattiney's siege with the story of the cousins' siege, the play asks us to consider the tangled erotics of the relationship between women writers and their male forebears. At the same time that Luceny and Tattiney use their "languages" in their bid for self-determination, they also hunger for some sort of intimacy, both with men and with the body of male-authored literature.

Luceny and Tattiney flirt in order to give themselves room to invent themselves, but all the way through the play they privately admit to one another their intention to marry Courtley and Presumption sooner or later. The marriages themselves do not exactly bring intimacy, a point that I will discuss presently. Nonetheless, Cavendish and Brackley fashion a conditional intimacy for their heroines before the two couples are married – an intimacy that exists only in figures of speech. This occurs after Luceny and Tattiney have made their suitors leave them alone in the convent to mourn the absence of their male relatives. With the objects of their love now completely inaccessible, Courtley and Presumption feel even more than usually poetically inspired, sharing their frustrations with each other in song. Yet Courtley's song, an

address to the absent women, gives the dismembering technique of the blazon an odd twist:

COURTLEY: Being in Shops of sadness now I cry:
 Ladies, what lack you? Pray you of me buy
 Melancholy hoods, or pendant tears of pearl,
 Which if condensed will wash each finer girl;
 Or fine sweet water sighs, for to perfume
 your closet chamber, or so any room;
 If like a fucus, take my crimson heart
 'Twill finely red your cheeks before you part,
 And when you please, it will you panting tell
 How it doth pray for you and wish you well;
 And if doubt's multiplying glass you'll have,
 I've one that adds, most rarely brave;
 Besides a prospective, wherein you'll see
 My griefs of fuller moan, like rocks to be.
 What, will you nothing of me buy?
 Truly sweet ladies, you are very shy.
 But I do hope, ere long, that Fortune's cap
 Will turn about, and hug me in her lap.
 Then do not doubt, but have great store
 Of lady customers to haunt my door.

(IV.iv.1–20)

Courtley's song neatly puns on the customary peddler's cry to buy something "of me," normally indicating possession (something from me), here indicating also composition (some part of me). Courtley fantasizes being intimate with the body of his beloved much as the speaker of Shakespeare's Sonnet 128 fantasizes that the jacks of a virginal must be happy because they are allowed to play with his mistress's hands. Here, Courtley's profession of desire for the lap of a feminine fortune is transparently a displacement; he pants and moans for the opportunity to "red" his beloved's cheeks. Although it is interesting enough that two pre-Restoration noblewomen, one of them unmarried, would be having such unapologetic fun with these puns, the representation of desire in Courtley's song would seem otherwise straightforward and not particularly remarkable; other writers have certainly managed more powerfully erotic titillations. But to the degree that this fantasy belongs not only to Courtley but also to the female authors, its wish fulfillment is more complex.

Cavendish and Brackley steal back and partly reassemble the scattered Petrarchan mistress by separating her suitor's body into a set of tropes that compose a female body.¹⁷ Courtley asks to become his lady's toilette; his body supplies all of the paints and glasses for which she is usually criticized (in this play as elsewhere; one of the contemptible

minor characters is an older woman who spends too much time painting her face). Although this song paints no more complete a picture of a woman than many Petrarchan sonnets do, it alters the significance of the sexual relationship between that woman and the man who constructs her. By giving Courtley the desire to convert himself into toiletries, Cavendish and Brackley rewrite not only the standard Petrarchan dismembering of the mistress but more specifically the phenomenon of conditional erotics. Here, instead of a man invaded, inhabited, and haunted by a wench in his head, we see a fantasy of a woman overlaid cosmetically with masculinity. The difference between these two images lies not in which sex is associated with the interior but in which sex seems most fundamental to the sexual identity of the self that is being fashioned. In Courtley's song, the man's identity becomes conditional; his parts achieve definition only when reassembled on the surface of the woman's body.

Like the image of a man invaded by femininity, this image of a woman overlaid by masculinity has erotic potential; there is a submerged pun on a stallion "covering" a mare.¹⁸ But we might also remember that this is the same play that enjoys the fantasy of Luceny and Tattiney invading their lovers' minds with their self-creating imaginations. When we take both fantasies into account, the mistress taking up residence inside her suitor's head becomes a kind of Klein bottle trick, where inner and outer are amusingly the same surface and transparency only sends one skidding back outside. In a play in which precious little physical contact between male and female characters takes place, the interpenetration of imaginations is the authors' comedic version of lust in action, th'expense of spirit in an utter absence of shame.

The song achieves this conditional intimacy for women only by imagining a union in which women are not robbed. If the pun on "customer" raises the possibility that the ladies will act shamelessly, the overt and supposedly unexceptionable meaning of the word ("purchaser") also becomes unladylike in this context. These "ladies" are not, after all, buying cherries, but a man's body. The implications of this transaction extend beyond its pleasant impropriety: Courtley's song allows a woman who picks up a pen not simply to rebel against the body of masculine literature or, conversely, to receive it with a sense of passive indebtedness, but to be a choosy customer who pays for what she gets and influences the market. If men's speech has stolen into women's private lives, demanding that the women render up their own speech in their roles as muses, the women may respond, as we have seen, by performing a type of anthropological analysis, as when Luceny associates Courtley's postures with a culturally imbedded discourse rather than

with individual passion or inspiration. Another response, represented by the vendor's song, is to transform the men's language and literature into a commodity that can be inserted into a system of trade, where it circulates.

We can define this circulation more precisely if we return briefly to Luceny's criticisms of Courtley's use of language. Luceny objects both to the content of the genres upon which Courtley bases his wooing and to the fact that Courtley uses the tradition as a substitute for more interesting thought fashioned for the present occasion. The two sisters often use the word "formality" scathingly to describe the men's language. From this we might expect that the desired alternative would be natural, simple speech that conveyed unvarnished truths. Luceny's language does indeed cut unsentimentally through Courtley's trellis-work, and we recall that the scene ends with Courtley telling himself ruefully, "What a misfortune's this to me, / To court a wench that doth so truly see" (I.iv.110–111). Moreover, we recall, Luceny and Tattiney's later reproof of their suitors in the convent suggests that the sisters believe Courtley and Presumption have been robbing them of something that the men want to transform into that which is "not true" (IV.i.66). It would seem logical to conclude that what the women in this play want most is the opportunity to circulate language that represents them and their suitors "truly." Yet Luceny's irritation with Petrarchan formalities does not lead her to jettison "literary" conversations – that is to say, self-consciously artful and self-fashioning language – in favor of something supposedly more honest or natural; instead, she and her sister delight in mentally composing dramatic scripts for themselves. When Luceny appears on stage for the first time, she asks Tattiney, "Sister, pray tell me in what humour thou wert with thy servant [i.e. suitor] yesterday? Prithee, tell me how you acted your scene?" (I.iv.1–3). Throughout the play, the sisters comment often and gleefully upon how they have acted their scenes, and their conversations with each other identify the "scenes" as calculated self-presentations full of subterfuge and bids for power. (The play opens with Presumption grumbling to Courtley that Tattiney "knows her scene-self too well": I.i.3–4.) What they seem to want from the men is not transparency but the ability to play speech games with freshness and subtlety. They want to be acknowledged as co-authors of imaginary worlds. After all, it is hardly interesting to participate in a conversational battle when all one's opponent can do is to catch at the "handle" of every phrase one utters with the same inevitable interpretation: that one is about to capitulate to his desires.

The female characters in *The Concealed Fancies* value language games aesthetically and because these games afford them a merry reprieve from

the war that surrounds them, but they also value such games because of their utility. Indeed, the play demonstrates that the women use fantasies as currency among themselves – that is, as a symbolic system for assessing and transferring from one woman to another the most seriously useful ideas to which they lay claim.¹⁹ One of the dialogues in which the useful circulation of fantasy becomes most evident is the exchange between the “lady cousins” Sh. and Cicilley at the beginning of the cordial-box scene, just before the itemization of sweets. Their conversation indicates that they have recently had a trying interview with the parliamentary officers whose regiment is holding them under siege:

SH: Pray, how did I look in the posture of a delinquent?

CICILLEY: You mean how did you behave yourself in the posture of a delinquent? Faith, as though you thought the scene would change again, and you would be happy though you suffered misery for a time. And how did I look?

SH: As yourself; that’s great, though in misfortune.

CICILLEY: So did you.

SH: How should I do otherwise, for I practised Cleopatra when she was in her captivity, and could they have thought me worthy to have adorned their triumphs, I would have performed his gallant tragedy, and so have made myself glorious for time to come.²⁰ (III.iv.1–21)

The cousins’ delinquency – their giving material aid to Charles I – is anything but a posture in the sense that their royalist sympathies are genuine rather than feigned. Yet the word “delinquent” was a pejorative term used by parliamentarians to devalue their enemies’ efforts by declaring those efforts illegal, so the cousins think of themselves as posturing when they imagine themselves through their besiegers’ eyes as deserving that label. Unless we go beyond this latter sense of posturing, however, we will miss much of the significance of the dialogue. Sh. does not stop at imagining herself in her captors’ terms; she engages in a more elaborate posturing for Cicilley’s and her own benefit, rewriting her interview with the enemy commanders in fictional terms in order to convert it to her own system of value. At the same time, she and Cicilley augment each other’s stock of courage by exchanging their fantasies, drawing comfort from them. Cicilley’s observation that Sh. behaved “as though [she] thought the scene would change again” is praise rather than a reprimand.

In fact, Cavendish and Brackley’s female lead characters – the sisters and cousins – pose and perform just as much as their Petrarchan suitors do. Their aim is not to banish the imaginary Stella in favor of a “real” one but to put Stella to their own uses. The authors see the potential humor in this idea that fancies are useful, poking fun at their lead

characters in the scene in which the cook despairs of getting his mistresses to turn away from reading poetry long enough to give his dinners a word of appreciation, much less to take part in planning the household's meals: "As I am an honest man those wits will ne'er be housewives" (I.iii.8–9). The humor becomes still more delicious later in the play when the authors caricature the poetry-reading Luceny and Tattiney in a housemaid named Pretty who resents having burned her fingers while ironing and believes she ought to be allowed to skip the practical matters of housework in order to concentrate on flirtation, at which she is more adept. The parody reaches outward to the authors of *The Concealed Fancies*, of course; they rewrite themselves into their marvelously witty heroines, presumably intending to act these parts if conditions are ever right for a household performance.²¹

Strikingly, however, the role that Sh. imagines for herself is not an original one; she plainly refers not to a general impression of Cleopatra gleaned from various histories but specifically to the Cleopatra of Shakespeare's "gallant tragedy," in the scene in which the queen explains to Iras that she will kill herself rather than be taken prisoner by Octavius and forced to watch triumphal Roman celebrations of her own defeat:

Nay, 'tis most certain, Iras: saucy lictors
 Will catch at us like strumpets, and scald rhymers
 Ballad us out o' tune. The quick comedians
 Extemporally will stage us, and present
 Our Alexandrian revels: Antony
 Shall be brought drunken forth, and I shall see
 Some squeaking Cleopatra boy my greatness
 I' the posture of a whore. (Ant., 5.2.213–220 [*Riverside Shakespeare*])

Sh.'s interpretation of her role-playing and her fantasy of continuing that role are strange for at least three reasons: she imagines herself gaining dignity from a public exposure that Shakespeare's Cleopatra dreads for its indignities; she believes she has reinforced her integrity (behaving "as [her]self") by playing an elaborate role; and she defines that role by alluding to the now-famous moment when Shakespeare asks us simultaneously to take Cleopatra as a larger-than-life tragic figure and to recollect that although Cleopatra dreads being parodied by a boy acting in the Roman triumphal shows, "she" is really a squeaking boy actor on a London stage rather than a woman.

Shakespeare's Cleopatra has a boy inside of her, and since Sh. writes a role for herself to play in front of the enemy, Sh. has a Shakespeare inside of her. Yet Cicilley and Sh.'s conversation about acting Cleopatra's part is flanked by two passages that represent men who have been invaded by women: the scene that ends with Presumption's apprehensive

speculation, “I doubt I never shall enjoy my dear / For she my rigid thoughts certain did hear . . . / Can any wench enter into my head / If ever have her once into my bed?” and the scene in which the three “lady cousins” imagine breaking into their host’s mind in the same way that they have broken into his cabinet of cordials. Together, these three sections of the play capture the feel of an historical confusion: whereas in the sixteenth-century’s varieties of conditional erotics, men had women in their heads, seventeenth-century women have the sixteenth-century literature in their own heads. This is not a simple reversal; both inspiration and sexual identity circulate.

Stephen Greenblatt has said that it is partly Enobarbus’s enchanting description of Cleopatra on her barge that keeps her from being a squeaking boy actor; it is the “power of the word to make flesh.”²² But if Enobarbus stands in for the male author who creates Cleopatra, Cavendish and Brackley pointedly amend his handiwork. Cousin Sh. fantasizes a test of masculine control – of the parliamentary commanders who want, like Octavius, to triumph over their female captive; of her male relatives and suitor, whose absence, however virtuous, contributes both to her present plight and to her sense of freedom in dealing with that plight; and of Shakespeare, whose script she imagines rewriting so that Cleopatra is too brave to kill herself, choosing instead to endure her captors’ revilement. In arguing against the hegemony of the one-sex Galenic model, Janet Adelman writes that Shakespeare’s Cleopatra “is so sure of the power of her femininity that she can dismiss the underlying actor’s body as a poor imitation of her: in her own mind at least, she is the perfection of which he is the defect” (“Making Defect,” ms. 3). In Cavendish and Brackley’s play, when Sh. describes herself rather than letting an Enobarbus do so, she makes Shakespeare’s words into her own flesh.

Throughout *The Concealed Fancies*, Cavendish and Brackley associate the power of wielding words with a conditional erotics, not only in what I have called the interpenetration of imaginations but in particular figures of speech, as when Luceny declares that marriage will not make her lessen her conversation and Tattiney responds by pretending to be concerned that her sister intends adultery. It is a commonplace by now that sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century women who made their writings public were often accused of being public women in all respects. Although *The Concealed Fancies* never seems to have been intended for publication, many of its scenes register a defiant attitude about women’s public self-exposure. Although clearly we are not to think of Sh. as anything but chaste, when she seizes Cleopatra’s role she imagines herself bolder even than Shakespeare’s Cleopatra, looking forward to proving

that she is strong enough to endure men's public triumphs over her. In playing Cleopatra this way, she is more like the maid Diana in *All's Well* than like Cleopatra herself. At the end of *All's Well*, when Diana publicly accuses Bertram of promising to marry her only to desert her, he deprecates her testimony by telling the king that she is a camp follower, a whore whose body is as loose as her tongue. Instead of contradicting Bertram, Diana takes on the role of prostitute with a vengeance, making rudely bawdy jokes at the king's expense and refusing to obey anyone's orders. She claims the power to narrate Bertram's real wife miraculously back into existence ("behold the meaning") precisely by acting out Bertram's narrative of herself as though it were true (V.iii.294). The story that Cousin Sh. writes in her head about bravely withstanding public ridicule for whoredom (not something of which the parliamentary commanders have accused her, but certainly the part of Cleopatra's story that fascinates her) is the fiction that maintains her integrity.

Time and again, Luceny and Tattiney assure one another that after they are married, they intend to continue switching from role to role as their fancies take them – or, as the lady's-maid Toy puts it, with something between sarcasm and envy, "This lady that I mean will have her several scenes, now wife, then mistress, then my sweet Platonic soul" (IV.v.55–57). The real wrinkle, then, is that although Tattiney and Luceny do want the men around them to see them as they truly are, they also demonstrate time and again that what they truly are is Protean, fanciful, and role-playing.

One of the roles that the Cavendish and Brackley's female characters play truly is that of the powerful feminine imagination inside her suitor's head. In this mode, they explore new-found treasure troves of restoratives, confident that their own inventiveness will make the supply both unlimited and sweet. Their imaginative enclosure is surrounded by besiegers – parliamentary troops, suitors, and poets – who threaten to cut off their food supply, yet it is only because of the besiegers that the garrison, which would normally be run by their male relatives, has become at least temporarily a feminine space.

The price of versionality

If there are any squeaking boy actors to be found in *The Concealed Fancies*, they are not Luceny, Tattiney, or the lady cousins, but Courtley and Presumption. Although the play uses the conditional power of the sisters' fantasies and of the authors' own duplicitous figures of speech to reform these two sighing lovers into intellectually flexible partners for Luceny and Tattiney, the authors do not finally depict such a complete

reformation actually taking place. The last scene of the play consists of a conversation between Tattiney and Luceny after they have been married for an indeterminate length of time – long enough to speak of various types of days spent with their husbands, short enough that this is apparently their first meeting since their marriages. Tattiney begins the scene, “As you love me, Sister, now you are married, tell me how you agree. Did you never fall out?” (Epil.1–2). Luceny’s impish response indicates that she does not believe marriage has tamed her: “As I hope to continue my own, thou’rt grown a fool. Did not we resolve to fall out with our husbands?” This sounds as though her marriage has developed as both she and Courtley had hoped, forming itself around a mutually high-spirited teasing. But as the sisters’ conversation progresses, it becomes apparent that Courtley has responded more sullenly to Luceny’s refusals to dress or act as he wants her to:

LUCENY: Well, I’ll trust you. Faith, all that day he was in a conflict, betwixt anger and melancholy, not knowing whether my behaviour proceeded from neglect or ignorance. Then he declared himself by allegory, and praised a lady, obedient fool, in town, and swore her husband was the happiest man in the world. I replied, she was a very good lady, and I accounted him happy that was her husband, that he could content himself with such a mechanic wife.²³ (Epil.31–40)

By these sisters’ standards, Courtley has much to learn. Although as a husband he no longer folds his arms and sighs with Petrarchan sentimentality, he continues to retire into predictable and unsophisticated language games; in the context, Luceny’s ironic use of the word “allegory” strongly suggests that she is hooting at the transparency of Courtley’s attempts to sway her with subtle language. What she wants him to learn, I take it, is that she is not mechanical like the demure and brainless woman in town, but a witty person hungry for the give-and-take of challenging conversation.

In the introduction to this book, I discussed Adam Phillips’s theory that couples who accept Freud’s definition of marriage as putting a healthy end to the dysfunctional fantasies and evasions of flirtation may be setting themselves up to lose what Phillips calls “versionality” (the exploration of various possible selves) rather than to gain the stability that Freud calls “truth.” Phillips asks, in other words, what the costs of stability are. While I find Phillips’s alignment of flirtation with versionality a great deal more attractive than Freud’s alignment of flirtation with illness, it seems to me that we should ask the same question of flirtation that we do of its cessation: what is the *price* of versionality? The final scene of Cavendish and Brackley’s play struggles with this conundrum, complicating it by putting flirtation in the context of marriage

itself. If a man wants to own his flirtatious mistress's versionality for himself, how much must he pay to marry her? If a woman wants to keep her versionality after marriage, what are the personal and mutual costs? As a suitor, Courtley thinks he wants a wife "fraught with wit" who will command and tease him, but the fulfillment of his wish turns out to be more than he can tolerate (I.i.70). Now that he is married, the obedient lady in town seems the perfect wife to him, and he attempts to make her obedience palatable to his own wife by invoking a value that is the antithesis to individual expression. Luceny tells Tattiney about her and Courtley's heated discussion:

I wish, said he, she might be your example, and you have no reason to slight her, for she is of a noble family. I know that, said I, and do the more admire why she will contract her family, nobleness and birth, to the servitude of her husband, as if he had bought her his slave, and I'm sure her father bought him for her, for he gave a good portion, and now in sense who should obey? Then he came with his old proverb and said he would teach me another lesson, and so with a forced kind of mirth, went out of the room, and I understood he had nothing else to say so was never angry. (40–53)

Courtley's frame of reference is a system of value in which noble blood functions as earnest money for a happy marriage. Luceny neatly steps outside this frame in order to show that one could just as easily describe the system to which Courtley subscribes as the selling of women into slavery; she implicitly indicts the dowry tradition as one that helps everyone except the women involved. Behind her acerbity about the compliant lady's father and husband lie the well known social facts: when a noble woman marries advantageously, the dowry system ensures that her father establishes an advantageous social contract with another noble family; meanwhile, the new husband gets a dowry and a helpmeet. The wife may or may not see her dowry again if her husband dies or deserts her. In her own willful formulation, however, Luceny makes the ordinary traffic in women contingent upon the woman's will rather than upon the wills of the men involved, thereby rendering it absurd: "I . . . admire why she will contract her family . . . to the servitude of her husband, *as if* he had bought her his slave." Luceny inserts women into the picture as participants in their own right, describing the marriage contract as one that the woman herself makes – albeit foolishly in the case of the compliant woman in town. And if women are players, they must receive something from the transaction. Logically, they should receive compensation for their servitude – or, Luceny archly concludes, if they do the paying, they should receive the husband's servitude.

Luceny thus turns to her own rhetorical advantage Courtley's earlier Petrarchan invitation to buy him, using ordinary market logic to remind

him that the buyer is in charge. Indeed, all of the terms normally used to describe the conventional dowry system could apply equally well to the Petrarchan arrangement whereby a male poet receives inspiration from a woman in order to profit by it and to establish alliances with male readers. I would argue that in this and many other scenes, *The Concealed Fancies* performs exactly this transfer of terms, revealing Courtley's brand of Petrarchan literary practice as a pattern of transactions resulting more from the desire for profit than from moral idealization. But what I find particularly intriguing is that Luceny is not arguing in favor of moral idealization nor, indeed, for expunging the desire for profit from her culture's sexual games. In this final scene, Luceny articulates what has been the play's covert project all along: to experiment with what happens when women become literary profiteers alongside the men. It is as though Luceny is saying, "We've given you your poetic inspiration for centuries; 'now in sense who should obey?'"

Nevertheless, the final scene and Luceny's attitude within it are less than triumphant. Although Luceny certainly rejects Courtley's prescriptions, neither is she satisfied with the stratagems of reversed control to which she has resorted. Her ironic description to Tattiney of her unconcern with her husband's swift exit after their fight ("I understood he had nothing else to say so was never angry") suggests that her victory in this particular skirmish is Pyrrhic. Tattiney's analysis of her own husband's moods hints at the sisters' problem:

TATTINEY: Ha, ha, ha! How I am pleased to see Courtley become Presumption after marriage.

LUCENY: And Presumption, Courtley?

TATTINEY: No, faith, he gently sleights as being mad in love.

LUCENY: How, prithee? Let me hear!

TATTINEY: Why thus, when I am in company with him he becomes a compound of he-knows-not-what, that is, he doth not appear my husband; neither is his garb my servant.

LUCENY: Now I wonder sister, how you can call this a sleight, for in this he appears himself. But I see you would have him fond in company.

TATTINEY: By wit, I hate [to] see a fond fool, let it be he or she. But in a word I knew I had angered him, therefore took this, his silence, as a neglect, yet I swear, by you, I was myself, and held my petulant garb. Once he spoke in company according to a discreet husband, then I gave him a modest return of wife, and yet appeared his mistress.

LUCENY: How write you to him?

TATTINEY: In as several humours as I will dress myself. His mistress, this you may see, is an equal marriage, and I hate those people that will not understand matrimony is to join lovers.

LUCENY: But thinks husbands are the rod of authority!

TATTINEY: Or a marriage clog!

Presumption's being "mad in love" is more than a dead metaphor, though less than literal. His behavior strikes Tattiney as bordering on lunacy, because instead of being the amalgam of husband and suitor that she had hoped for, he now acts neither lovingly familiar nor ardently wooing. Tattiney believes that Presumption has yet to learn how to manage his "several humours" so that he, like her, is ever himself. Yet his behavior resembles nothing so much as hers; all the way through the play, she and Luceny have declared their intentions to remain changeable, purposely ambiguous, and complex after their marriages. When Luceny speculates that Presumption's having become what Tattiney calls "a compound of he knows not what" means that he "appears himself," two interpretations are possible: either Luceny is making a joke at Presumption's expense, suggesting that his lack of self-knowledge forms the core of his character, or Luceny is teasing Tattiney for not recognizing that Presumption has just as much a right to arbitrary behavior as his wife does.

Inasmuch as this play addresses the interactions between seventeenth-century literary women and the literary tradition of male poets taking a problematically feminine imagination into themselves, the two interpretations of Luceny's remark are not incompatible. Once they are married, Tattiney and Presumption act similarly, and neither of them yet knows quite how to handle this uneasy parity. Before their marriages, the sisters were anxious to insure that the temporary ambiguities and instabilities of flirtation would not disappear into the stable, predictable inequity of marriages ruled by their husbands. What proves difficult is the task of shaping the techniques of flirtation into forms compatible with daily living – and although the play never makes explicit its use of marriage as a metaphor for women's joining men in the literary market during the seventeenth century, this metaphor subtly infuses the entire play. If women's increasing access to authorship enables spirited women like Tattiney to begin defining their own roles as never before (through the "creation of good languages"), it also leaves poets like Presumption somewhat at loose ends, now that they cannot encapsulate their Tattineys within their "closde up sence" (*Astrophil and Stella* 38). This marriage of authors, then, becomes problematic for both parties.

Much earlier in the play, soon after Luceny has tormented Courtley by predicting and deriding his every Petrarchan move, he melodramatically threatens suicide before tempering the threat:

COURTLEY: Ho! I'll love myself better than to die for one that hates me! But I could be a willing martyr to her that loves me.

LUCENY: Ha, ha, ha! I think so! You would be a willing martyr to her that loves you? And do you think that is a high expression of love? This shows how

much you hated her, that would quit her so soon, besides leaving her this legacy: to die of a consumption for your sake!

COURTLEY: Madam, am not I worth that ribbon you hate worst, and that will I contemplate upon with adoration?

LUCENY: I thought you had learned better manners than to offer to plunder me of my favours. (I.iv.82–95)

Courtley begs Luceny to give him one of her ribbons so that if he cannot enjoy the favor of her company and goodwill, he can at least moon over her ribbon-favor. But the pun on “favor” has wider implications. Despite the fact that Luceny is half-joking in this case, her and Tattiney’s flirtations proceed from their serious desire to invent a new sort of relationship with their suitors that would not involve ceding their favors to them without a fair return. At the same time, the play indicates that men like Courtley should realize their own right to a fairer return than they have been seeking for themselves. In a scene that begins with the stage direction “Enter the two Stellow brothers, the eldest passionate,” Luceny and Tattiney’s brothers (Elder Stellow and Young Stellow) discuss the eldest’s intention to fight his way single-handed into the house where their mistresses (two of the “lady cousins”) are besieged by parliamentary forces:

YOUNG S.: But how can you, brother?

ELDER S.: Name ‘how’? And thy mistress in the like condition!

YOUNG S.: But though I’m in love, I am not out of sense.

ELDER S.: By God, thou art out of sense, if thou canst think any impossibility an impossibility to gain your mistress’ liberty, though at the rate of your life!

YOUNG S.: I am resolved to hazard myself would that relieve her, but to die and not to release her, and then my corpse can have no possibility of enjoying her, and what doth that profit me?

ELDER S.: Why, it doth profit me if she could see me blown in a thousand pieces to show I die her martyr, and in that piece of service I shall account my grave my eternal happiness.²⁴

YOUNG S.: By God, brother, I should rather account her bed of love eternal happiness.

ELDER S.: Thou art all for thyself.

YOUNG S.: But methinks, you neither for yourself, nor her. (IV.ii.3–21)

This passage is even more clear-eyed than Sidney’s Sonnet 71, in which Astrophil rhapsodizes over Stella’s inspirational virtue for thirteen lines before breaking down in the fourteenth: “But ah, Desire still cries, give me some food.” In the Stellow brothers’ dialogue, Cavendish and Brackley take into account not only the friction between a poet’s idealism and his bodily imperatives but also the tangle that results when *both* participants in a relationship are negotiating within themselves between

the flexibility of fantasy and the insistent pressure of all that is unconditional in the besieging world.

In Beaumont and Fletcher's play *A Scornful Lady*, the Lady's sister describes her disparagingly: "She's onely wedded to herselfe, lies with herselfe, and loves herselfe; and for an other husband then herselfe, he may knock at the gate, but nere come in . . ." (II.i.73–75). There is an element of this self-absorption in the Cavendish sisters' female characters, who trespass upon men's minds in order to annex territory for their own imaginations. Yet we should notice that the play's revisions of the feminine imagination can also help us to reassess the male characters who inhabit women's textual worlds. Neither Luceny nor Tattiney wants her lover to demonstrate his love by erasing her – worshipping a ribbon and an idea rather than joining her in challenging conversation – but neither does she want him to erase himself by making his life tediously dependent upon her every small gesture. Although Luceny's mockery of Courtley's Petrarchan wooing enables her provisionally to claim room for herself, it also suggests that she wants Courtley to learn how to be Protean without working himself into a formulaic role that calls for the grand gesture of complete self-destruction ("to show I die her martyr"). Luceny wants Courtley to quit imitating her and Tattiney's humors or writing his "scene" according to a diminished form of Petrarchism in which poet-suitors appropriate femininity without having to reckon with internal division; she wants him to acknowledge and engage the formidable risks of making his erotic selfhood conditional.

In confronting the complexities of a masculine literary tradition that at odd moments suddenly seems derived from the women's own strengths, Jane Cavendish and Elizabeth Brackley construct two female characters whose vast imaginations hunger for lovers who are more than parodies of feminine power. This comedy ends with a display of that feminine power when Luceny and Tattiney agree insouciantly that they have the upper hand. Yet their final conversation about uneasy marital contingencies suggests that these sisters are beginning to learn something, as well: that they, like the men, cannot expect to claim a safe or easy versionality.

6 Caught in the act at Nun Appleton

Andrew Marvell offers us one version of what it means for a male writer of the seventeenth century to look back at the sixteenth-century “feminine” imagination. If Spenser recognizes that one subtext of the sonnet tradition is a complex desire to flee the femininity that one has taken into oneself, Marvell makes this subtext hilariously overt.¹ Whereas the Petrarchan sonneteer is most eloquent when he is bewailing his lady’s inaccessibility, and therefore in some guilty sense most fulfilled when he is most frustrated, Marvell cheerfully trots this libidinal paradox into the light of day and grooms it for show, saying to his Petrarchan predecessors, in effect, “Fine, let’s not even lament the woman’s absence; let’s just be eloquent. In fact, let’s do whatever we can to avoid women altogether.” Marvell uses this ironic stance most obviously when the speaker of “The Garden” claims airily that gardens without women have always been better than gardens with them. With cheerful malice, he tells us that only if Adam had been a god could he have been lucky enough to keep the perfection of his initial solitude; the speaker adds that the real motivation for Apollo’s pursuit of Daphne was his desire for a green laurel wreath.

“Upon Appleton House,” while not as succinctly funny with the issue, develops it more subtly and fully. The poem’s speaker – whose situation is that of Marvell himself during the years when he tutored Lord General Fairfax’s daughter at Nun Appleton (c. 1650–1652) – walks into the gardens, fields, and woods of his employer’s estate to get away from quite a lot of things, most of them linked to the upheavals of the war and interregnum. He imagines himself into an alternative world; wandering alone across Lord Fairfax’s property, he self-indulgently explores, charts, and plants England’s flag upon the exotic regions of his own wit. We have seen in Chapters 1 and 5 how Spenser surrounds his brief moments of conditional eroticism with protective and restricting layers of text and how the Cavendish sisters’ comedy makes the locked cabinets within a besieged house a metaphor for women’s literary fantasies. Marvell, too, fantasizes about gendered enclosures that are both limiting and enabling.

“Upon Appleton House” is consumingly interested in conditional boundaries – as when the speaker imagines that “all things” look at their reflections in a river and “doubt / If they be in it or without,” or when he wishes that he could stay in the woods’ enclosure forever instead of having to emerge into the larger world’s less delightful complexities (stanza 80).²

But although it has always been clear that the poem’s two main female characters, Lord Fairfax’s ancestor Isabel Thwaites and his daughter Maria Fairfax, comment importantly upon the speaker’s concerns with political and personal boundaries, it is also important to consider the gendering of the boundaries themselves. Some of the chief problems that the narrator wants to escape are those posed by the women’s dangerous charms. Using military metaphors, the narrator says that his woodland retreat allows him to indulge the whims of his imagination without women’s interference:

How safe, methinks, and strong, behind
 These Trees have I incamp’d my Mind;
 Where Beauty, aiming at the Heart,
 Bends in some Tree its useless Dart;
 And where the World no certain Shot
 Can make, or me it toucheth not. (76)

The poem as a whole shapes itself into a secure encampment for the masculine mind, a barrier against problematical sexuality and femininity. After the opening stanzas praise the estate’s modest sufficiency in contrast to the immense civic stature of its owner, the story of Lord Fairfax’s ancestors rephrases the Appleton estate’s protective enclosure in terms of the convent that charms Isabel Thwaites away from her suitor, the sixteenth-century William Fairfax, and surrounds her with its virginal walls.

This virginity is coy; the nuns woo Thwaites with descriptions of chastity that are delectably homoerotic:³

Each Night among us to your side
 Appoint a fresh and Virgin Bride;
 Whom if *our Lord* at midnight find,
 Yet Neither should be left behind.
 Where you may lye as chaste in Bed,
 As Pearls together billeted.
 All Night embracing Arm in Arm,
 Like Chrystal pure with Cotton warm. (24)

The story makes fun of the nuns’ improperly militant devotion to the wall that protects them only temporarily from men’s properly invasive sexuality – asking us to laugh, for example, at the “chain-shot” of their

rosary beads when William Fairfax breaches their wall in order to remove Isabel by force – but this very derision of their protective schemes also enables the poem to set up a more abstract sort of wall for the speaker’s own protection. Critics have often seen in the convent an analogy to Lord Fairfax’s decision to retire early from his position as commander of the parliamentary forces, sometimes concluding that this analogy is designed to show a crucial moral difference in Fairfax’s type of retreat, at other times concluding that the analogy implicitly criticizes Fairfax.⁴ In terms of Marvell’s abiding interest in the problematic tension between classical *otium* and postwar politics, comparing the nuns’ enclave to Fairfax’s self-rustication makes sense. But when we divide the world along gendered lines – which this poem, like “The Garden,” certainly also does – the wall around the nuns’ improprieties operates somewhat differently. Readers have long noticed, of course, that the story of the nuns conveys an anti-Catholic attitude toward conventual virginity, but when the poem belittles the nuns by showing us that what they want to enclose within their convent is not really chastity but the freedom to substitute sex with each other for sex with men, it creates an additional object of derision: ungoverned feminine sexuality. John Rogers argues that Marvell is not against virginity *per se*; rather, “Upon Appleton House” uses the nuns’ story to criticize a specifically Catholic virginity, given the idealization of young Maria Fairfax’s Protestant, pre-marital virginity toward the end of the poem (“Enclosure,” 242). But however divided the sixteenth-century nuns are from the seventeenth-century girl, Maria, along religious lines, their fierce seclusion joins hers in representing the poem’s fascination with the ways that women’s erotic force may call men into question. The poem’s laughter at the nuns’ expense isolates their militant sexuality at the beginning of the poem, sheltering both Lord Fairfax and his daughter’s tutor from their contamination. In this sense, then, the historical separation of the nuns’ story from the rest of the poem represents a demarcation between troublesome feminine sexuality and admirable masculine prudence, demonstrating that the present Appleton estate – built upon land torn from the nuns by William Fairfax at the time of Henry VIII’s dissolution of the monasteries – is founded upon all that is precisely not what the nuns’ feminine community once represented. The Fairfaxes use the decadent convent’s rubble to construct a dignified, austere, and peaceful home that is appropriate for the Lord General’s retirement from his distinguished leadership of the parliamentary forces.

If the poem draws emphatic lines between the sixteenth-century convent’s feminine aggressiveness and the present Appleton estate upon which the speaker projects his imagination, it also would seem to exclude

even benign female sexuality from that seventeenth-century present until almost the end of the poem. The Lord General's wife is quite briefly mentioned four times in 776 lines, three times by her family name and once in the word "parents," but she has no contact with the speaker as a character, and the poem makes only dutiful gestures toward using her as a symbol of chaste maternity. By far the more important character is the twelve-year-old Maria, the Fairfax heiress whom Marvell tutored and who appears like an *Astraea* toward the end of the poem after having been mentioned briefly earlier. The poem quickly raises her to the eminence of the central figure for its questions about gendered boundaries, and the speaker represents her as the quintessence of youthful purity. It is partly understandable, then, that she is one of the few figures in the poem whom recent critics have tended to interpret without irony or humor. To Patsy Griffin, for example, Maria is a "shrine of order and beauty" ("*Religious House*," 63). Robert Wilcher writes, "The young Maria' is to carry the central significance of this supreme example of the country house poem." Rogers does point out the unsettling values implicit in the Fairfaxes' willingness to perform a type of child sacrifice in cutting the "bud" of their daughter's virginity in the name of duty rather than of happiness, and R. I. V. Hodge perceptively notices that although "Maria's modesty and innocence must exist in a field of hostile forces," her virtue "is itself a powerful and potentially destructive force," yet these critics do not read Maria's presence in the poem as realizing these potential disturbances. Even a reader as habitually attuned to irony and suggestion as Harry Berger can write of Maria that she is "an epitome of the domestic order around her" (Wilcher, *Marvell*, 162; Rogers, "Great Work," 218–220; Hodge, *Foreshortened Time*, 94; Berger, *Second World*, 314).⁵

Laden as she is with symbolic responsibilities, Maria can serve as a focal point from which we can reach backward to earlier sections of the poem and forward to its conclusion. Maria's function, at least overtly, is to reform the speaker and his poem with her innocent prepubescence, while her bittersweet duty to leave her parents some day in order to become a wife demonstrates the moral undesirability of staying within the estate's protective world forever.⁶ Maria rehabilitates the sixteenth-century nuns' unholy logic by echoing it in a more socially acceptable context; whereas the nuns argued that their walls enclosed a feminine liberty by paradoxically confining the men outside, Maria's duty to leave her parents' house for her husband's implicitly shows the speaker that it will be his duty to leave the imaginative vastness of the Appleton gardens for a paradoxically more confining set of problems in the physically larger world outside.

Critics have usually taken this process of reformation more or less at face value, yet to reduce the poem to a moral statement – whether a convincing or an unconvincing one – is to ignore the implications of its tone, which is often playful or admmissive of deep uncertainty. At the same time, Maria’s entrance is much more than simply a representation of an immaculate innocence asserting itself. Although the almost formal deference with which the poem treats her austerity and her girlhood keeps us from making her into an enticing cherub or believing that the poem wants us to imagine sexual complications between tutor and pupil, the figure of Maria nevertheless disturbs the narrative in conditional ways that her construction as a prepubescent character would seem to prevent. Instead of underscoring the speaker’s success in barricading himself against sexual aggression, Maria’s entrance itself constitutes an invasion that the speaker experiences as not only gendered but potentially (and inappropriately) erotic. When the speaker notices that Maria has come out for a walk, he is lazily fishing in the river:

See in what wanton harmless folds
 It ev’ry where the Meadow holds;
 And its yet muddy back doth lick,
 Till as a *Chrystal Mirrou* slick;
 Where all things gaze themselves, and doubt
 If they be in it or without.
 And for his shade which therein shines,
Narcissus like, the *Sun* too pines.

Oh what a Pleasure ’tis to hedge
 My Temples here with heavy sedge;
 Abandoning my lazy Side,
 Stretcht as a Bank unto the Tide;
 Or to suspend my sliding Foot
 On the Osiers undermined Root,
 And in its Branches tough to hang,
 While at my Lines the Fishes twang!

But now away my Hooks, my Quills,
 And Angles, idle Utensils.
 The *young Maria* walks to night:
 Hide trifling Youth thy Pleasures slight.
 ’Twere shame that such judicious Eyes
 Should with such Toyes a Man surprize;
She that already is the *Law*
 Of all her *Sex*, her *Ages Aw*.

(80–82)

What happens at the literal level of language, inasmuch as Marvell can ever be said to have a literal level, is that the speaker is ashamed of being caught goofing off; his fishing rods and hooks are the “toyos” that Maria

catches him with. Yet Marvell's puns are full of his speaker's embarrassment – and amusement – at having been caught playing Narcissus with his toy while in an angling mood next to the wanton river. The appearance of Narcissus in stanza 80 is far from a reductive figuring of auto-eroticism, of course, and I will discuss that stanza later. But the titillation of stanza 82 lies precisely in the stanza's poker-faced reinterpretation of Narcissus's complex story as one of indulgent self-satisfaction. This is a conditional erotic; we are not asked to believe that Maria has actually caught her tutor with his pants down, only to experience the small, pleasurable shiver of *as if*.

Although Rosalie Colie led the way in recognizing this poem's ambivalent attitude towards the *value* of its speaker's desire for retreat, the tendency has been to accept the *temporary fact* of the retreat itself – at least of the speaker's flight from femininity. But surely, in light of Maria's ability to induce a pleasurable sexual embarrassment, the speaker's earlier declaration of immunity is ironic. "How safe, methinks, and strong, behind / These Trees have I incamp'd my Mind" is an example of typical Marvellian wit, tossing the word "methinks" into the air for us to fumble or catch. Just how safely is this mind encamped, how protected from women's amorous darts?

The sexual embarrassment of being caught in self-absorbed sensuality is not the only unsettling result of Maria's entrance. The speaker's encomium to Maria recognizes her as a supernatural force that freezes the entire landscape over which he has wandered freely in the poem's long middle section:

The *Sun* himself, of *Her* aware,
Seems to descend with greater Care;
And lest *She* see him go to Bed;
In blushing Clouds conceales his Head.

. . .

The modest *Halcyon* comes in sight,
Flying betwixt the Day and Night;
And such an horror calm and dumb,
Admiring Nature does benum.

The viscous Air, wheres'ere *She* fly,
Follows and sucks her Azure dy;
The gelling Stream compacts below,
If it might fix her shadow so;
The stupid Fishes hang, as plain
As *Flies* in *Chrystal* overt'ane;
And Men the silent *Scene* assist,
Charm'd with the *Saphir-winged Mist*.

Maria such, and so doth hush
The *World*, and through the *Ev'ning* rush. (83–86)

Maria's supernatural influence is almost always read as beneficent, and understandably so; Marvell compares the girl to a halcyon who brings peace not only to the waters but to all the landscape and its inhabitants. Kathleen Kelly is representative in reading in the halcyon passage a promise that "in the mirror of Maria's beauty, all things find perfection and repose, and an escape from the ruin of time"; similarly, Rosalie Colie argues that "all chaos, all disturbance are brought to a halt with the entry of the bird and the girl" (Kelly, "Narcissus," 209; Colie, "Ecchoing," 246).⁷ Yet there are Medusan overtones to all of this stilling and numbing, despite the whimsy – or rather, by means of it, since this is a Britomartian sort of Medusa, whose ability to stonify her viewers is closely allied to her ability to charm and embarrass them. The setting sun blushes presumably because the idea of his bed raises associative ideas in his mind that are inappropriate for a little girl to guess at, and the air sucks at the female halcyon as intimately – though not as lengthily – as Christopher Marlowe's waves caress his Leander.

More importantly, Maria's influence is not simply temporary; her entrance retroactively refocuses the narrator's experience of the Appleton estate, thereby redefining what he had thought was intensely private imaginative play:

'Tis *She* that to these Gardens gave
That wondrous Beauty which they have;
She streightness on the Woods bestows;
To *Her* the Meadow sweetness owes;
Nothing could make the River be
So Chrystal-pure but only *She*;
She yet more Pure, Sweet, Streight, and Fair,
Then Gardens, Woods, Meads, Rivers are. (87)

Here towards the end of the poem, the woods that the speaker believed would afford him protection from women turn out to be feminine themselves; they are suffused with a femininity, charmed by it, held into their very forms by it. The poem's first and middle sections have shown the speaker's attempts to render the potentially dangerous convent harmless by transforming its sixteenth-century female community into a seventeenth-century male community of one. The moment in which he most contentedly asserts his oneness with his natural surroundings is also the moment in which he claims he has the power to bring feminine language, inspiration, and imagination under his masculine control, yet there is a fine line between controlling this femininity and making it part of him:

Thus I, *easie Philosopher*,
 Among the *Birds* and *Trees* confer:
 And little now to make me, wants
 Or of the *Fowles*, or of the *Plants* . . .

Already I begin to call
 In their most learned Original:
 And where I Language want, my Signs
 The Bird upon the Bough divines;
 And more attentive there doth sit
 Then if She were with Lime-twigs knit.
 No Leaf does tremble in the Wind
 Which I returning cannot find.

Out of these scatter'd *Sibyls* Leaves
 Strange *Prophecies* my Phancy weaves . . .

(71–73)

The attentive female bird immobilized by her fascination with the speaker's lime-twig language represents a fantasy of taming the long-vanished convent choir, which has already been implicitly compared to the present forest's "winged Quires" eight stanzas earlier (where trees are likened to the arches and columns of an unidentified building that recalls the former convent).

These moments when the speaker lounges under trees onto which he projects his fancies are this long poem's cameo version of the much shorter lyric "The Garden," with its dream of male self-sufficiency and avian brilliance in a garden from which women are excluded and in which the man's teeming mind becomes an everywhere. "The Garden" ironizes its speaker's pretensions by having him depend upon feminine imagery to delineate his imaginative bliss and to make it attractive to us: the sexy melons over which he stumbles and the peaches that reach out to him owe their existence to the ripe cherries and round apples of Petrarchan blazons. Similarly, it is not only the explicit statements about feminine influence, made when Maria enters, that tell us in "Upon Appleton House" that the narrator's retreat itself depends upon the feminine sexuality from which he claims to be retreating. Long before Maria's transformative entrance, the poem's imagery gives us hints. The leaves that spell out the speaker's musings turn out to belong to the Sibyl, who is famous for her ability to frustrate men's desire to use her disorderly sign system as a means of satisfying their own "Phanc[ies]" (stanza 73). And in the stanza that immediately follows the narrator's declaration of immunity ("How safe, methinks"), his illustration of his complete devotion to the woods depends upon metaphors and puns of feminine eroticism:

Bind me ye *Woodbines* in your 'twines,
 Curle me about ye gadding *Vines*,
 And Oh so close your Circles lace,
 That I may never leave this Place:
 But, lest your Fetters prove too weak,
 Ere I your Silken Bondage break,
 Do you, *O Brambles*, chain me too,
 And courteous *Briars* nail me through.

(77)

Who would lace him about with silken bonds if not women? “An erring Lace, which here and there / Enthralls the Crimson Stomacher” could well have been on Marvell’s mind.⁸ It is true that Marvell’s metaphors and puns in the briar stanza work both ways, so that we could say the speaker uses this stanza to emphasize the fortunate difference between cruel women and courteous briars – as when, in “The Garden,” we read that “No white nor red was ever seen / So am’rous as this lovely green” (stanza 3). Yet the fact remains that the description of the briars depends upon a specifically erotic set of energies to move us and to make us slightly uneasy. The forest’s delicious danger here, however much it serves the social, religious, or political allegory, is sexual.⁹ Like Guyon and Arthur in Alma’s castle, the speaker of “Upon Appleton House” finds himself penned somewhat disconcertingly in the recesses that he had thought he was penetrating and claiming for his own kind. Like Lust’s cave, but with the sexes reversed, the Appleton enclosure both is, and is not, a masculine space.

This is, after all, a poem in commemoration of a brave general’s decision to *domesticate* himself. Although Marvell’s patron had led the parliamentary forces on the battlefield, he was dismayed by the beheading of Charles I, and his decision to resign his post earned him the respect neither of his own side nor of the royalists. Hodge describes Fairfax’s position: “The architect of Parliament’s victory had come to see it as an assault on ‘Justice’, a betrayal of the ‘Ancient Rights’ that reached their roots back into the past and sustained the family whose name he bore, and whose history he traced so carefully” (*Foreshortened Time*, 140). We might speculate, then, that Marvell has a model for using national concerns as metaphors for gendered concerns (in this case, Fairfax’s perpetuating of his name and “Ancient Rights” through his progeny, while Parliament attempts to cut off the king’s ability to do so) in addition to using gender as a metaphor for the nation. But notice that while “Upon Appleton House” certainly addresses the general’s concern with his family history in the story of Thwaites’s abduction by a sixteenth-century Fairfax, and while the present house bears the stamp of its owner’s manly personality, Marvell also describes Appleton House as

if it were a pregnant female body ready either to eject or to smother its male child:

Yet thus the laden House does sweat,
 And scarce induces the *Master* great:
 But where he comes the swelling Hall
 Stirs, and the *Square* grows *Spherical*;
 More by his *Magnitude* distrest,
 Then he is by its straitness prest:
 And too officiously it slights
 That in it self which him delights.

So Honour better Lowness bears,
 Then That unwonted Greatness wears.

(7–8)

The almost Rabelaisian description sympathizes with the sweating house, which undergoes grotesque pain in attempting to give birth to a grown man, while at the same time the description registers a masculine distaste at the womb's claustrophobic closeness and its notoriously animal-like tendency to "stir." The latter image brings in a whole complicated tradition of wombs that wander throughout not only female but male bodies, threatening to rise toward the throat and suffocate the host.¹⁰ The tradition was so well known in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that it is plainly a strong subtext here rather than a distant influence. Whether the house "indures" Fairfax in its womb or whether he punningly "bears" its womb-like crudeness within the circle of his honor, it has the potential to suffocate him.

Despite the light touch here, and despite the comedy that also attends the poem's making its narrator retreat from femininity into a feminine wood, these versions of retreat must complicate the common critical notion that in this poem Marvell tries to figure out how to handle his partly laudable, partly culpable nostalgia for an unproblematic prewar England or that Marvell finds the idea of a peaceful withdrawal from the buffets of the outside world so alluring that only towards the end of the poem does he allow duty to assert itself.¹¹ The poem goes to great lengths to show that the insularity of the narrator's circles of retreat exists wholly in his mind. Or actually, the narrator knows that the safety exists wholly in his mind; where he goes wrong is in thinking that this mind is large enough to afford its own safety. The poem's playful irony against him is to construct him as believing that his mind encompasses and owns a great deal of territory that it turns out only to rent. If Appleton House itself is in some sense a womb, we may do well to remember that to the Renaissance husband, at least as he is represented in countless works of literature, his wife's womb was both the repository of his seed ("That's

for thy selfe to breed an other thee”) and the place where his ownership was least certain, most other, most contingent upon that slipperiest of all guarantees, a woman’s word: “Thy mother was a piece of virtue, and / She said thou wast my daughter” (*Son.* 6; *Tmp.* I.ii.56–57).

Marvellians do tend to notice that “Upon Appleton House” tempers or discards the Golden Age nostalgia expressed in its stanzas about a prewar time when England was a “dear and happy Isle / The Garden of the World ere while, / Thou *Paradise* of four Seas” and when “Gardens only had their Towrs, / And all the Garrisons were Flowrs” (stanzas 41–42). That is, readers often theorize that the poem argues for the necessity of resisting the twin lures of retreat and nostalgia. Wilcher argues, for example, that the speaker “fantasizes about escaping forever from the dangers of sexual and military warfare beyond the protective screen of the trees” but that this fantasy is a “truancy from the responsibilities of adult life” (*Marvell*, 161). Leah Marcus explains in fine and convincing detail how Marvell countervails his own attraction to a “vanished order” when he “redeems’ Royalist motifs by wresting them out of their Caroline context” (*Politics*, 258, 261). Marcus’s chapter constitutes the most important account to date of the workings of recuperative national politics in this poem, but when we consider sexual politics, our coördinates for both nostalgia and violence must shift.

I suggest that “Upon Appleton House” is indeed in some sense a nostalgic poem but that Marvell’s relationship to the past is more complex than a guilty longing for what seems in retrospect an unproblematic and insulated moment. We will understand the quality of Marvell’s nostalgia and his relationship to it more fully if we first recognize that it is Spenser, especially in *The Faerie Queene*, who most powerfully represents the nostalgic moment for Marvell. Little has been done with the Marvell–Spenser connection aside from Patrick Cullen’s *Spenser, Marvell, and Renaissance Pastoral*, which does not mention “Upon Appleton House,” but the indebtedness is quite strong. And if Marvell recognizes in Spenser, as I believe he does, any of the literary complexities that I have discussed in earlier chapters, then Spenser cannot function for him as the scribe of a golden age. Marvell toys with the idea of a return, but not to simplicity. Indeed, the pastoral mode of “Upon Appleton House” domesticates not only Lord General Fairfax but also Spenser’s *Errour*, with her winding wood.¹² No one who reads “Upon Appleton House” can fail to notice its fascination with the disorienting manipulation of sensory data, its clever confusion of up and down, light and dark, in and out. Like *Errour*’s wood, though humorously domesticated, Marvell’s Appleton goes to the Latin root of *implication*, folding moral directions back upon themselves as though they were purely visual

or geographic phenomena.¹³ Are the loathsome books and papers that spew from Errour's mouth masculine speech, like the poet's work, or a feminine murmuring, like the gnats, linking Errour to Maleager's murmuring shades and Alma's buzzing chamber of feminine fantasies? Does Marvell's bird speak the "learned Original" of Moses, or of the subtle nuns – and does the narrator control her, or she him (stanza 72)? Who makes Errour's wood a "wandering" one, the feminine presence at its center or the masculine consciousness that traces an uncertain path inward? Does it make any moral difference? These dilemmas are what it means to let one's mind err; and both Spenser and Marvell are interested in gendering the cultural and personal limits that they must place upon mental wandering.

Maria's femininity hardly equals that of Errour, of course, or of the lewd nun who "suckt" Isabel into the convent with her "smooth Tongue" (stanza 25). Yet Maria is in some ways a controlled and domesticated version of both Spenser's Errour and the nuns; it is she who represents the process of taming and pastoralizing Spenser's wandering wood so that it turns into the landscape of her tutor's mind. Through her, and through this domestication, "Upon Appleton House" reduces to a small and potent circle Spenser's gendering of the relationship between conflict and identity, as well as Spenser's teasing relationship with a pervasive feminine influence that has little to do with virginal or royal purity.

Indeed, I would suggest that when Red Crosse's dangerous digression into Errour's wood reappears sixty years later in the form of the Appleton speaker projecting his digressive fantasies upon a wood that only seems to protect him from feminine artillery, Marvell is willfully misreading Spenser's Errour – or perhaps reading her with more than common subtlety – as a flirtatious figure. Although Marvell's wood of error is less solemn and forbidding than Errour's wood, this is not simply because Marvell writes with levity while Spenser writes a high-minded epic. "Upon Appleton House" does not have the weight of an epic, but it does allude strongly to the grim state of national affairs outside Lord Fairfax's gates. Marvell's wood of error is a pleasantly dangerous place rather than a dangerously pleasant one not simply because of Marvell's pastoral mode but because it is this blend of uneasiness and safety, of invitation and attack, that focuses Marvell's nostalgia for him. This, and not a golden age where the lion lies with the lamb, is the object of desire. Sexual encampment is no good if it is really bulletproof. What Marvell's poetry longs for, in other words, is not a prewar time when civic and domestic life was peaceful, but a time when the leveling miseries of civil war had not yet made sexual wars seem like contemptible trifles. I do not

mean, of course, that flirtation actually stopped during the war, but that the idea of its doing so hovers mournfully on the periphery of many of Marvell's poems.

In "The Nymph complaining for the death of her Faun," soldiers have put an end to a nymph's erotic and teasing relationship with her pet faun by shooting it. In "To his Noble Friend Mr. Richard Lovelace," the Civil War generates social divisions and spite that change the poem's hints of erotic sparring between the speaker and a group of women first into something more grimly contentious and then into a bland peace devoid of sexual excitement. The speaker of "The Picture of little T. C. in a Prospect of Flowers" lies in the shade watching a toddler-nymph play, and although he professes a desire to befriend her before she becomes old enough to use her chaste martial arts, the excitement of the present relationship he wants to have with her lies in her erotic potential for aggression: "O then let me in time compound, / And partly with those conquering Eyes; / Ere they have try'd their force to wound, / Ere, with their glancing wheels, they drive / In Triumph over Hearts that strive . . ." (stanza 3). The companion poem "Young Love" begins, "Come little Infant, Love me now, / While thine unsuspected years / Clear thine aged Fathers brow / From cold Jealousie and Fears." As in "T. C.," this speaker fears that time will rob him of the opportunity to sport in love with the girl, either because she will grow past puberty or because she will die young. But the latter fear finds an odd echo in the poem's final four lines: "So, to make all Rivals vain, / Now I crown thee with my Love: / Crown me with thy Love again, / And we both shall Monarchs prove." Given that both of these poems seem to date from the 1650s, the reference to monarchs seems melancholy, at best. The "time" that "may take / Thee before thy time away," robbing the speaker of his chance at flirtation, turns out to look suspiciously like the Civil War.

Only perhaps in "To His Coy Mistress" does Marvell fully dramatize the possibility of the Civil War obliterating the pleasure of flirtatious wars as an event within the world of a poem, but he does often represent the possibility indirectly, nevertheless, by combining military metaphors or allusions to the Civil War with his own version of Spenserian conditional erotics. "To His Noble Friend Mr. Richard Lovelace" makes us think about flirtation without allowing us to say that it actually depicts flirtation, and at the same time sublimates that eroticism to stern – one wants to say Puritan – conditions that the poem asks us to *believe* are superior to playful eroticism without, however, making us *feel* that this is so.

I suggest that for Marvell the erotic thing, the chancy thing, is having a sexual self that is engaged in war, but that this association between eros

and war does not take the usual forms. Marvell's poetry does not particularly eroticize the violence of actual soldiers' combat, for example, nor do his most erotic passages tend to relish the violence of rape. One might contrast Spenser's sensual hints about rape in the *Epithalamion* with the marked absence of sensuality in Marvell's description of Fairfax's ancestor breaching the convent wall and carrying off the virgin Thwaites:

[W]aving [the nuns] aside like Flies,
 Young *Fairfax* through the Wall does rise.
 Then th' unfrequented Vault appear'd,
 And superstitions vainly fear'd.
 The *Relicks false* were set to view;
 Only the Jewels there were true.
 But truly bright and holy *Thwaites*
 That weeping at the *Altar* waites.

But the glad Youth away her bears,
 And to the *Nuns* bequeaths her Tears.

(33–34)

Fairfax rises and Thwaites weeps, but the passage does not take its pleasures from the excitement of bodily violation, and the ironic military images are a long way from the gory celebrations of battle in the epics of Spenser or his forbears.

In what sense, then, is the sexual self in Marvell's poetry at war? I want to argue that Marvellian sexual conflict has to do with the boundaries of the self being invaded – or at least prodded, stroked, tickled, and exposed to gazes. “The Nymph complaining for the death of her Faun” generates eroticism not by exposing the nymph's body to our gaze but by exposing her naïvely conceived desires to us at the same time that we are asked to place ourselves in her position. Reading this poem is an embarrassing experience, as though we must blush for the nymph's lack of awareness that she has been caught gazing at and stroking her own body – in the form of the delicate white faun with its red lips – in public. “Upon Appleton House” makes use of a similar vulnerability in the stanza quoted above in which the speaker asks woodbines to fetter him and the briars to nail him, followed by a set of images that Marcus has identified with violent Druidic rites:

Here in the Morning tye my Chain,
 Where the two Woods have made a Lane;

. . .

But, where the Floods did lately drown,
 There at the Ev'ning stake me down.

(78; Marcus, *Politics*, 259)

It is true that in the context of the poem's humor, these images of nailing,

binding, and staking look less masochistic than playfully relinquishing, like the narrator's earlier fantasy of being fondled by ivy:

The Oak-Leaves me embroyder all,
Between which Caterpillars crawl:
And Ivy, with familiar trails,
Me licks, and clasps, and curles, and hailes. (74)

Marvell defines his delights in the bondage stanzas by opposing them, through the irony of the metaphors' extravagance, to the real bloodiness of real wars. That is, at the simplest level these stanzas say, "My mind can escape the fatigues and anxieties of real wars in these woods, and while thus escaping real war, I can play delightfully at war, pretending I'm a prisoner of the woodbines." What complicates this simplicity, however, is that metaphorical wars of flirtation disturb one's peace quite literally. When war becomes a trope for love, it does not change from a real danger to a pretend one. In the Appleton woods, flirtation is in turn a trope, representing the relationship between the speaker and some of the plants around him, so we might ask the same question about Marvell's Edenic retreat that readers often ask about Spenser's Garden of Adonis, with its figure of Time as a mower, and about Milton's Eden, in which Eve becomes restless and Adam inattentive: are strife, pain, and imperfection to be found here, or is it only that postlapsarian language cannot avoid representing prelapsarian pleasures in terms of strife, pain, and imperfection?

Certainly if the perfection we are looking for is perfect psychic integrity, we will not find much of it in "Upon Appleton House." The speaker's ending up in a feminine wood does not simply mean that he becomes surrounded by femininity; this wood is where he fashions himself, the place where he finds materials for that fashioning. His experience of his supposedly private retreat from civil war unfolds in a series of vignettes that often consist of exchanges between himself and various feminine entities: the bird, the sibyl, the vines' silken fetters that make him a willing prisoner of an erotic war. If the vertigo of these exchanges represents the dangers of sexual interaction, the emphasis is nevertheless not on physical violation; instead, the speaker toys with the question of how much of his identity he can risk surrendering to the feminine woods. Whether we call this masochism or an extraordinarily flexible relationship to gender depends upon our own politics and desires.

It is significant that until the child Maria enters towards the end of the poem, the one interaction that the speaker has with a human female figure is charged with aggression that the poem implicitly attributes to national politics but that quickly becomes domestic and intimate:

The tawny Mowers enter next;
Who seem like *Israelites* to be . . .

With whistling Sithe, and Elbow strong,
These Massacre the Grass along:
While one, unknowing, carves the *Rail*,
Whose yet unfeather'd Quils her fail.
The Edge all bloody from its Breast
He draws, and does his stroke detest;
Fearing the Flesh untimely mow'd
To him a Fate as black forebode.

But bloody *Thestylis*, that waits
To bring the mowing Camp their Cates,
Greedy as Kites has trust it up,
And forthwith means on it to sup:
When on another quick She lights,
And cries, he call'd us *Israelites*;
But now, to make his saying true,
Rails rain for Quails, for Manna Dew.

(49–51)

With very few exceptions, critics who mention Thestylis treat the epithet “bloody” as the poem’s straightforward indictment of her, and there are grounds for such an interpretation. Cristina Malcolmson’s analysis is unusually sensitive to the importance of Thestylis’s sex, but otherwise her sense of the violent threat that Thestylis poses is representative of most treatments of Thestylis in the literature: “Thestylis’ callousness is nothing to her real disruptive power: to justify her actions by quoting Scripture . . . Such a biblical sanction for violence is more threatening because it is a woman who constructs it” (“The Garden Enclosed,” 262). On a different tack, but still with an eye for this episode’s violence, John Wallace argues that the unfledged rail is an anticipatory avatar of Maria, whose “bud” will be “cut” from the Fairfax oak in the future when she marries.¹⁴

But the wince that the poem induces with its description of the dismayed mower sliding his blade out of the rail is retroactively tempered with comic exaggeration, rather than intensified, when the cook Thestylis is called bloody and predatory for deciding to serve wildfowl for dinner out of season. Although there is a powerful suggestion of sexual violation in the mower’s unhappy withdrawal of his blade from the female bird’s breast, the poem’s focus here is not really on the bloodiness *per se* so much as on Thestylis’s aggression towards the speaker, which is comic in its flouting of literary convention. (That is, Thestylis turns out to have heard the speaker’s description to us of the pastoral scene in which she is a conventional figure: it is the speaker who used the Israelites as an

analogy for the mowers.) The overtones of sexual violation are displaced onto Thestylis's adversarial interaction with the speaker, informing that interaction with an eroticism that is conditional inasmuch as none of the language in the stanza about Thestylis seems either literally or figuratively suggestive of sexuality.

The sexual charge does not come solely from the context established by the images in the previous stanza; whatever the national politics of the passage, with its allegory of Charles I, the sexual politics are that the speaker enjoys Thestylis's sparring with him.¹⁵ Though he does not make his enjoyment explicit, the poem makes us feel this pleasure by giving to Thestylis the witty role of a character who challenges the speaker-as-poet by refusing to do his bidding at the same time that she affirms the poet-as-speaker by displaying his ability to violate our literary expectations cleverly. Thestylis is a compelling figure despite the brevity of her appearance, because of her impudence in challenging the speaker's control of the poem. When she talks about her narrator, she temporarily destroys his fiction that the Appleton grounds concretize the lushness of his own thought processes, by intersecting it abruptly with another plane of fiction, in which her existence separates itself antagonistically from his.

It is primarily this sense of the provisionality of sensual experience, rather than a fantasy of physical violation, that excites the speaker. Indeed, the encounter with Thestylis sexualizes the poem's general preoccupation with the risks of perspectival fluidity, of the speaker's exuberant ability to make shifts in viewpoint and scale when he sees the cattle one moment like fleas and the next moment like constellations, imagines the squeaking grasshoppers towering above him on blades of grass, and so on. If we think of Marvell's speaker as in some sense a seventeenth-century development of Spenser's and Sidney's speakers, who themselves grew from Petrarch, we can say that he is both at home and not at home in a space that he and his precursors have helped to construct *for women*: the space of wandering minds, of retreat, of radical contingency (Lust's cave; Stella's coyness behind Astrophil's closed eyes), of not knowing whether one is within or without (the bride's relationship to Medusa), of illusory and fragile defenses (Alma's castle). But if this speaker, like his Spenserian precursors, flirts with feminine positions for himself, Marvell privileges what Spenser usually keeps wrapped in protective layers of narrative: whereas *The Faerie Queene* fences into little spaces its risky urges to capitulate to various forms of femininity – urges that work against the poem's major objectives even while providing strength – Marvell foregrounds this dalliance.

He does it partly at the humorous expense of his alter-ego narrator, or perhaps we could say that the speaker ironizes at his own expense. The

poem begins with the speaker trying to convince us that the convent that once stood on the present Appleton estate contained a completely despicable and risible femininity, yet he goes on throughout the poem to use the energy generated in the convent passage. That is, the poem continues to explore the eroticism of enclosed spaces that shut out sexual difference (the convent's virgin brides billeted like pearls, the speaker playing Narcissus) as well as the eroticism of having that space broken into (by Fairfax's male ancestor, by Maria) and the eroticism of discovering that the space has been informed by otherness all along (the nuns' masculine aggression, the discovery that the wood-as-mind is feminine).

Yet the poem does not end with the brief exchange of identity between the narrator's conception of himself as a dilettante who fishes for sensual pleasures and his conception of Maria as an innocent bud. No sooner does the poem raise the conditional possibility of sparring between the narrator and the pupil who embarrasses him than it sublimates the virgin's disturbance of Narcissus's solitude to a discussion of higher relationships: those between Maria and her parents, between Maria and her future husband, between all three Fairfaxes and a divine social and political order. What remains of the poem after it turns away from its praise of the admirably severe discipline practiced by Maria's parents and from the girl's bittersweet duty to marry one day seems largely asexual:

'Tis not, what once it was, the *World*;
 But a rude heap together hurl'd;
 All negligently overthrown,
 Gulfes, Deserts, Precipices, Stone.
 Your lesser *World* contains the same.
 But in more decent Order tame;
You Heaven's Center, Nature's Lap.
And Paradise's only Map.

But now the *Salmon-Fishers* moist
 Their *Leathern Boats* begin to hoist;
 And, like *Antipodes* in Shoes,
 Have shod their *Heads* in their *Canoos*.
 How *Tortoise like*, but not so slow,
 These rational *Amphibii* go?
 Let's in: for the dark *Hemisphere*
 Does now like one of them appear.

(96-97)

"Nature's Lap," however, is the sort of image that Marvell's contemporaries often made highly suggestive. In Herrick's "Apron of Flowers," a blushing girl has gathered so many flowers in her apron that she looks

enticingly, virginally pregnant; as she passes, her apron sends out “An Odor more divine, / More pleasing too, then ever was / The lap of *Proserpine*.”¹⁶ Marvell’s reference to “Nature’s Lap” thus resuscitates some of the sexual associations of the two preceding stanzas, which address the “Fields, Springs, Bushes, Flow’rs” of the estate directly in order to instruct them how to conduct themselves during the time that remains for Maria to live there. Just as Maria surpasses all other virgins, says the narrator, so her presence at Nun Appleton makes the estate’s woods and streams surpass those of all other gardens:

For you *Thessalian Tempe’s Seat*
 Shall now be scorn’d as obsolete;
Aranjuez, as less, disdain’d;
 The *Bel-Retiro* as constrain’d;
 But name not the *Idalian Grove*,
 For ’twas the Seat of wanton Love;
 Much less the Dead’s *Elysian Fields*,
 Yet nor to them your Beauty yields. (95)

The *occupatio* of “name not the *Idalian Grove*” would be mild and hardly worth mentioning except that its being in the poem’s antepenultimate stanza gives it an importance that seems incommensurate with its content. Why does this *occupatio* appear in the last stanza through which Maria’s direct influence spreads? The other bit of *occupatio* in stanza 95 interacts with stanzas 96–97 to give us a clue: the Elysian fields, supposedly unnameable in this context because they are for dead people rather than for the blooming Maria, nevertheless represent, as stanza 96 reminds us, one of the poem’s central concerns. Marvell’s paradise of the mind has been constructed precisely as a way of imagining, and of acknowledging the futility of imagining, that the Fairfax gates can shut out a massive fear of death; the “rude heap” of the decayed world outside has been “hurl’d” about by war (stanza 95). I want to argue that the other unnameable-yet-named garden, the *Idalian grove*, is reinforced in the two tortoise stanzas that end the poem just as significantly as the Elysian fields are, though more obliquely, thus reintroducing some of the wantonness that the narrator has claimed to exclude in his description of the marriage he imagines for Maria.

Although Marvell scholars have consistently been fascinated by the tortoises in “Upon Appleton House,” they have never shown an interest in asking whether this imagery has any gendered implications. Marvellians have usually taken Marvell’s tortoises as emblems for unpretentious self-sufficiency and self-governance, even while recognizing that the “rude heap” of disorder in stanza 96 and the whimsical topsy-turviness

of the Antipodean fishers in stanza 97 ironize that emblem. So, for example, in a fine meditation on Marvell's pastoral awareness of the strength that lies in limitation, and vice versa, Harry Berger comments on the fishers shod in their canoes:

A world view or world order is the only magnitude sufficient to contain the wanton mote of dust; it is as natural to man to create, clothe himself in, and inhabit a cosmos as it is for a turtle to secrete a shell, and in fact the image suggests that this alone can preserve man on the flood or chaos of his historico-natural environment. Such a *cope*, embracing the universe, occupies very little space.¹⁷ (*Second World*, 315)

Such an interpretation makes excellent sense; after all, the poem begins by using the tortoise as a figure for the modest, virtuous, and yet imaginative containment offered by the house at Appleton: "Why should of all things man unrul'd / Such unproportion'd dwellings build? / . . . The low roof'd Tortoises do dwell / In cases fit of Tortoise-shell" (stanza 2). Nevertheless, the fact that the poem goes on to make both house and estate feminine – the first maternally and the second erotically – should remind us of additional ways in which tortoises were emblemized. The fact is that although sixteenth- and seventeenth-century emblem books did often make tortoises male or neuter, using them to represent self-sufficiency and rational, deliberative caution because tortoises carry their homes slowly and carefully on their backs, emblem-tortoises much more frequently were female and were made to represent chastity because (no surprise) tortoises carry their homes slowly and carefully on their backs. The latter emblems took one of two forms: the female tortoise was pictured alone, carrying her shell-home, or more often, following Pliny and Phidias, Venus was pictured with her foot on a tortoise. According to William Painter, whose interpretation is typical, this image signified "the duety of a chaste Woman . . . her feete not straying or wandering . . . , to keepe hir selfe within the limits of hir owne house" (*Palace of Pleasure*, III.160).¹⁸

If Marvell's tortoise imagery is gendered, then we should pay close attention, given that this is the imagery with which Marvell begins and ends his poem – indeed, the imagery that his speaker uses to represent the containment of all he holds dear. I suggest that the seventeenth-century popularity of the emblem of Venus with her foot upon a tortoise and the tendency to explain that emblem in terms of women's responsibilities rather than in terms of generic love would have made it difficult for Marvell's contemporaries to shut out the image of Venus while reading a stanza that closely follows a long passage about a young girl's sexual purity – and even more closely follows a stanza that features Idalium, the

grove where Venus entertains her lovers. Maria's entrance while the narrator is lazily fishing threatens his playfulness by reminding him of duty and virtue; in this sense, she is consonant with the tortoises' common function as reminders of women's domestic duty and virtue. Yet the prim admonishment of Maria's presence contrasts with what the tortoise stanza is doing, since it is one of the most playful in the poem. It is true that the tortoise-like fishers are examples of "rational *Amphibii*," returning homeward after a day spent fishing for their livelihood rather than dallying with rods or with their own reflections the way the narrator was doing earlier. These amphibious tortoises thus bring into the poem the notions of prudent caution that some emblem books associate with male tortoises, but Marvell's sobriety is considerably lightened by his imagining that the fishers' heads are "shod" in their tortoise-canoes as they portage them, making them look like the people on the other side of the globe, who naturally must walk on their heads. Rationality is at least partly an ironic concept here – as, of course, it has been throughout this self-amused and willfully confused poem.

It would take a grim reader to miss the playfulness in the tortoise stanza, but to connect this play with specifically erotic games might seem at first to pile more on these creatures' backs than they can carry. Who would associate tortoises with flirtation or with desire? Only D. H. Lawrence in our time has been able to imagine into existence poems like "Tortoise Gallantry" or "Tortoise Shout"; who else would ever think about tortoise passion? The answer, as any well-read Englishman in the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries would have known, was Pliny, as well as the whole troupe of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century mythographers and naturalists who imitated, translated, and elaborated upon him. In fact, far from continuing to shut eroticism out of the poem by reinforcing the notion of a chastity so pure that it avoids desire, Marvell's tortoise imagery actually calls his readers' attention to the wanton element at the heart of his entire poem's discussion of chastity. Where tortoises were concerned, naturalists and iconographers had joined forces to show that sexual purity defined itself in the context of sexually arousing battles. Edward Topsell's *History of Four-Footed Beasts and Serpents and Insects* (1658), a highly popular translation and expansion of Konrad Gesner's *Historia animalium* (1551), describes the mating habits of tortoises twice within three pages. First, the sea-tortoise:

The male is very salacious and given to carnal copulation, but the female is not so; for when she is attempted by the male, they fight it out by the teeth, and at last the male overcometh, whereat he rejoyceth as much as one that in a hard conflict, fight, or battail, hath won a fair Woman; the reason of this unwilling-

ness is, because it is exceeding painful to the female. They engender by riding or covering one another. (Topsell, *History*, II.795)

Next, the land-tortoise of Africa:

The males are more venereous then the females, because the female must needs be turned upon her back, and she cannot rise again without help : wherefore many times the male after his lust is satisfied, goeth away, and leaveth the poor female to be destroyed of Kites, or other adversaries : their natural wisdom therefore hath taught them to prefer life and safety before lust and pleasure. Yet *Theocritus* writeth of a certain herb, that the male Tortoise getteth into his mouth, and at the time of lust turneth the same to his female, who presently upon the smell thereof, is more enraged for copulation then is the male, and so giveth up her self to his pleasure without all fear of evil, or providence against future danger : but this herb neither he nor any other can name. (*Ibid.*, 797)

In *Le Imagini de i dei de gli Antichi*, which was popular enough to go through numerous editions and translations, Vincenzo Cartari turns the naturalists' observations about the female tortoise's self-protective fighting instinct into an explicitly cautionary tale for human women:

And in reading about the nature of that animal in Pliny (and in Elianus as well) I find that the ancient sculptors gave a lovely and holy admonition to women, by placing the tortoise beneath the feet of Venus. For the tortoise knows the danger that she faces, when she joins herself with the male; she must turn herself upside down with her belly on top and the male, after completing the sex act, goes his own way and leaves her there. She cannot turn herself upright by herself, and is left a prey for other animals, the eagle in particular. That is why, with a consummate degree of continence, she abstains from the sex act, and fleeing from the male, puts her health before lustful pleasure. But she is later constrained to consent to it all the same, after being affected by a herb, which fires her up completely to lust, so that she doesn't fear a thing after that. In the same way, women also have to think about the danger they put themselves into when they lose their chastity; thus they ought to flee libidinous appetites, unless they are forced into those by the debt of matrimony, to insure the succession of offspring.¹⁹

This beast-fable variant of Lucrece's story, in which the reptilian heroine falls short of achieving tragic pathos, struggles to maintain didactic clarity. The idea is supposed to be that marriage rewrites the rule that inhibits unmarried women from having sexual contact, but this interpretation of Pliny lists bizarrely towards the idea that the institution of matrimony is a pernicious charm that makes erstwhile prudent women give up not merely their virginity but also their chastity, allowing themselves to be devoured by "other animals" while their husbands unconcernedly wander off in search of pastures new.²⁰

Yet the awkward splicing of the "lovely and holy admonition" of the sculptures of Venus with the story of tortoises being inflamed by lust

suggests that Cartari, like Topsell, is thoroughly invested in a titillating mental picture which does not appear in emblem books: that of a female tortoise on her back, waving her legs in an attempt to avoid – or invite? – further assaults. “Drug me and I’ll do *anything*, even if it hurts.” Damn; if only Theocritus had written down the name of the herb. The idea is still current in 1610 when Webster has Flamineo give advice to Brachiano about forcing the reluctant Vittoria to surrender: “Women are caught as you take tortoises, / She must be turned on her back” (*White Devil*, IV.ii.151–152). The “hard conflict, fight, or battail” that Topsell describes between the male and female tortoises before the herb removes her inhibitions seems nearly of a piece with the struggle that later awaits her against a marauding eagle; both make her tantalizingly vulnerable, deliciously immoral. It is as though the regrettable tendency of early modern women to wander into the woods and fall in with aggressive satyrs has transferred itself to the seaside.

It is not as far-fetched as it might seem to read flirtation into the female tortoise’s waving legs. If Cartari’s grafting the emblem of chastity onto a story of reptiles in heat generates at least erotic ambiguity, other sixteenth-century authors are more explicit about flirtation. Because a tortoise does cover ground, despite being slow, the image of Venus with her foot upon a tortoise leaves itself open to interpretation as an emblem not of immovable chastity but of sweet, reluctant, amorous delay. In John Lyly’s *Euphues and His England* (1580), Euphues chastises his friend Philautus for hypocritically professing a high-minded aversion to love:

Then as one pleasing thy selfe in thine owne humour, or playing with others for thine owne pleasure, thou rollest all thy wits to sifte Loue from Lust, as the Baker doth the branne from his flower, bringing in *Venus* with a Torteyse vnder hir foote, as slowe to harmes: hir Chariot drawen with white Swannes, as the cognisance of *Vesta*, hir birds to be Pigeons, noting pietie: with as many inuentions to make *Venus* currant, as the Ladies vse slights in *Italy* to make themselues counterfaite. Thus with the *Aegyptian* thou playest fast or loose, so that there is nothing more certeine, then that thou wilt loue. (Lyly, *Euphues and His England*, 326)

Philautus’s pious references to Venus on a tortoise remind Euphues of the Italian women’s use of makeup to deceive and seduce men, and although Euphues’s central point is that Philautus himself is counterfeiting, Euphues is also demonstrating that Philautus will fail “to sifte Loue from Lust” because these two states are sometimes intertwined; a woman’s being “slowe to harmes” has the same effect on Philautus as would her being coy, though he denies it. Being slow and playing at fast-and-loose are not mutually exclusive.

Next to *Euphues*, we could set John Grange's *Golden Aphroditis* (1577), which is about the unchaste flirtations of supposedly virtuous Venuses, as the dedicatory epistle explains: "Oftentimes vyho seemeth most of al to blaze their chastitie vvith the Tergate of *Medusa*, they play more legerdemaynes vnder this cleane kind of conueyance, or at the least as many, as do those wwwho neuer vvoore the necklace of *Iasper*" (sig. Bi^r). In Grange's tale, Sir I. I. ignores the Lady Alpha Omega's caustic rejection of his wooing of her because he considers her rebuff to be, like that of Venus on the tortoise, a delaying tactic for the sake of appearances and for the avoidance of rumor, rather than a sign of moral purity:

Callyng to minde the description of *Venus* after the order of *Phidias* payntyng, (that is) to sette hyr feete vpon a *Tortoise*, hir deniall moued him not, considering, that Ladies of honor, courtlike Dames, and Ladylike gentlewomen are seldome rüners forth of theyr dores, but much lesse strayers abroade, least the sharp windes of *Eolus*, or the boysterous blastes of *Boreas* shoulde nippe their liuely blood . . . (Grange, *Golden Aphroditis*, sig. Kiii^v)

Though Marvell would certainly have read *Euphues*, he might well have been ignorant of the more obscure *Golden Aphroditis*, and one would not want to make much of his specific connections with either work. Yet Lyly and Grange do not so much invent as notice the ambiguity built into the popular emblem of chastity. As Murray Roston writes, "The [Renaissance] cleansing of Venus from her medieval association with lasciviousness in order to prepare her for her new role as [neoplatonic] Love in its purest form was a task which needed to be performed with caution" (*Renaissance Perspectives*, 153). The medieval idea that Venus represented sins of the flesh was too strong to be erased utterly. It is Venus, after all, rather than Diana, who has her foot on that tortoise – and in most versions of this emblem, it is just one foot.

What this means is that just after Marvell's encomium to Maria and to the Fairfax line, when "Upon Appleton House" seems bound for a morally elevating conclusion about the proper relationship between sober duty and innocent pleasure, the very imagery that the narrator uses to declare his commitments to domesticity, enclosure, and the strict avoidance of Venus's wanton Idalium circles back on itself. Although Marvell's final stanza strongly recalls the claim of a restricted but sufficient world at the end of Virgil's first eclogue, and although the tortoise-shell coracles that cover Marvell's homeward-bound fishers represent the modest sufficiency of Appleton House here as they did at the beginning of the poem, bringing the "dark *Hemisphere*" down to a manageable size, Marvell's teasing use of this same imagery would have been recognized by his readers as potentially bound up with the "wanton Love" of the "Idalian Grove" that the narrator has just now archly

claimed to abjure. To interpret this claim as having no irony, to say that the meaning of “Upon Appleton House” lies in the narrator’s giving up this latter preoccupation at the end of the poem after being admonished by Maria, would be to deny that the deepest pleasures of the longest and most memorable passages in the poem have centered upon Marvell’s negotiations between the desire to revel in private domesticity and the desire to revel in the errant wanderings of a sensuous imagination released from the normal rules of perspective and scale. After the narrator’s description of Maria’s future marriage, he addresses the Appleton estate directly, instructing it in proper deportment:

Mean time ye Fields, springs, Bushes, Flow’rs,
 Where yet She leads her studious Hours,
 (Till Fate her worthily translates,
 And find a *Fairfax* for our *Thwaites*)
 Employ the means you have by Her,
 And in your kind your selves preferr. (94)

In a sense, the entire poem takes place in the “Mean time” of Maria’s girlhood, when sexuality is only conditional. The meantime of the poem is the time of sensuous delay and of withholding, so that the poem is founded upon roughly the same provisional materials as a flirtation.

Neither the praise of Maria nor the whimsical image of the tortoise-fishers overtly develops the narrator’s earlier flirtations with femininity. Marvell’s final stanza much more directly points to those literary and pictorial tortoises that represent self-sufficiency and prudent self-government, as in George Wither’s *Collection of Emblemes* (1635), in which one tortoise stands for “That man, who in himselfe, hath full contents; / And (by the *Vertues* lodging in his minde) / Can all things needfull, in all places, finde,” while another teaches us that “They are not *Houses* builded large and high, / Seel’d all with *Gold*, and pav’d with *Porphyrie*, / Hung round with *Arras*, glaz’d with *Christall glasse*, / And cover’d o’re with plates of shining *Brasse*, / Which are the best; but, rather, those where wee / In *safetie*, *health*, and best *content*, may bee” (2.24; 4.19). Though on the whole female tortoise-emblems predominate, the use of male or neuter tortoises to represent self-sufficiency or prudence increases in the seventeenth century. Partly, the slight shift may be due to an increased distancing from the Latin, but because the gendering in English certainly is not incidental – chastity being not incidentally more required of the female sex – the shift may be significant, as well. Both feminine and masculine tortoise-virtues depend upon self-containment, but only the former inspires authors to treat it with playful irony that sometimes privileges the very actions and desires that the emblem ostensibly warns

against, finding arousal in the tug-of-war between the virtue and its companion vice. The end of “Upon Appleton House” most obviously uses the masculine iconography of self-sufficiency, but because the image of the “low roof’d Tortoises” in the poem’s second stanza tends to merge with the image of the house in the seventh stanza whose smallness makes its pregnancy painful, and because of the feminizing of containment-imagery throughout the rest of the poem, not to mention the flurry of conditionally erotic situations and metaphors that center upon the discussion of Maria’s chastity just before the closing stanzas, even our presumption that salmon-fishers must be men cannot keep out of sight the association of female tortoises both with chastity and with sexual sparring. By making the tortoises at the beginning of the poem represent a house that not only shelters the self-sufficient Lord Fairfax but also endures the throes of parturition, and by making the tortoises at the end of the poem represent a hemisphere that is reflected in the “lesser world” of Fairfax’s estate – whose gardens are themselves mirrors of Maria (“Therefore what first *She* on them spent, / They gratefully again present”: 697–698) – Marvell is allowing the seventeenth-century emphasis upon masculine virtue to be informed and problematized by the earlier emphasis upon feminine struggles with virtue, vice, and men.

Indeed, we could go so far as to say that time and again Marvell puts his male narrator in the position of the female tortoise on her back, flapping his hands uselessly at female characters such as the aggressive Thestylis or at the various other forms of femininity that infiltrate the encampment of his mind. And as with the female tortoise, this narrator’s attempts to ward off sexual aggressors are hard to distinguish from gestures of enticement. At times, the voice of the poem positively hungers to make itself both vulnerable and ridiculous, to put itself delectably out of control. (It was the herb that made me do it.) At the same time, the narrative voice relishes erotic contention, in a balancing act between caution and pleasure, retreat and risk. Just before a stanza in which he laments England’s loss of its former paradisaic self, a garden surrounded by water in order “to exclude the world,” the speaker describes the flowers in the lesser paradise of the Appleton garden:

See how the Flow’rs, as at *Parade*,
Under their *Colours* stand displaid:
Each *Regiment* in order grows,
That of the Tulip Pinke and Rose.

But when the vigilant *Patroul*
Of Stars walks round about the *Pole*,
Their Leaves, that to the stalks are curl’d,
Seem to their Staves the *Ensigns* furl’d.

Then in some Flow'rs beloved Hut
 Each Bee as Sentinel is shut;
 And sleeps so too: but, if once stir'd,
 She runs you through, [n]or asks *the Word*. (39–40)²¹

The idea of a bee sting is uncomfortable, yet Marvell's whimsical tone and the fact that, in context, these stanzas are contrasting this tiny soldier surrounded by beautiful flowers with the far keener rigors of civil war combine to suggest that erotic bliss consists of being run through by a female bee rather than by a real soldier.

Poets such as Herbert and Donne often conceive that spiritual bliss comes paradoxically through the perforation or emptying of the desiring self – a relinquishment that occurs only in the agonies of battles with God. Marvell's *oeuvre* contains at least three poems in a similar vein. "The Coronet" is fairly orthodox, yet "A Dialogue between the Soul and Body" (if it is a complete poem) seems more engrossed in the pleasure of the participants' mutual wounding than in showing that the Soul will win by losing itself to God, and "A Dialogue Between the Resolved Soul, and Created Pleasure" derives its poetic delight from observing the delicate sparring between its hero, Soul, and a flirtatiously sensual Pleasure. Marvell has aspirations to the spiritual bliss of a self emptied to God, but his poetry is often more entranced with the notion of a secular bliss that comes when one risks losing the integrity of one's gendered self in a jumble of possible relationships, surrenders, and identifications. It is worth taking a closer look at the description of Appleton's river that immediately follows the stanzas in which the narrator calls for the vines to bind him and immediately precedes the stanzas in which Maria disturbs the speaker's "trifling" pleasures:

See in what wanton harmless folds
 It ev'ry where the Meadow holds;
 And its yet muddy back doth lick,
 Till as a *Chrystal Mirrour* slick;
 Where all things gaze themselves, and doubt
 If they be in it or without.
 And for his shade which therein shines,
Narcissus like, the *Sun* too pines. (80)

The word "shade" is one of Marvell's little masterpieces of quirkiness. As well as meaning "ghost" or "spirit" – appropriately enough, given Narcissus's demise by starvation – the word also of course means both "reflection" and "shadow." Cleverly, Marvell has made the sun's bright mirror-image a shadow, its own antithesis. For Marvell, Narcissus represents not just vanity or culpable self-absorption but a kind of vertigo of the ego: am I up here on the riverbank or down there in the

water? Is the thing I love something that gives back (a reflection) or only a place-marker for absence (a shadow)? And can I succeed where Narcissus failed, diving truly into the arms of my desire? One thinks of Guyon and Arthur looking at Alma's confusions, except that in Marvell's more comic scene we find the possibility not only of being either "in it or without" but of being neither, of looking in and seeing oneself a stranger. As when one gazes at the salmon-fishers whose heads are shod in their canoes, or as when the speaker discovers that the landscape he had thought was a mirror of his mind is actually a mirror of Maria's, here the sun sees both its reflection and that which it longingly lacks in a kind of Antipodean absurdity.

The narrator tells us that Maria brings sanity and harmony both to his untidy fantasies and to Nun Appleton, which fashions the "rude heap" of the world into "a more decent Order tame" (stanza 96). The fisher-tortoises whose silly hats are like the "dark hemisphere" overhead, however, suggest that an orderly harmony is not only impossible but not necessarily even preferable. The end of the poem implies that we find our most fitting home in the ridiculous, in something that is paradoxically quite disparate from ourselves: the dark hemisphere of the world fits over all of us as the boats fit over the heads of the fishers who are so patently "tortoise-like" rather than tortoise-like, imaginative analogies rather than functionally similar. The hemisphere is our fitting home precisely in its being a humorous makeshift. If our being "rational amphibii" means we are amphibians which, unlike other amphibians, are rational, it also hints that we amphibiously live both in the rational and in the irrational.

The resemblance that Marvell's narrator fancies between tortoises' curved shell-homes and the hemispheres of the globe is effective and pleasing partly because it is so far-fetched, and when he plays with the notion that the Antipodes are a mirror image of our world, forming the other half of us, he necessarily makes us think about the possibility that this, too, is far-fetched. Because the stakes are at once so large and so trivial here – the dark but ironically comforting symbolism of a sky that covers our warring land, the game of making canoes into shoes for people on the other side of the globe – Marvell brings almost to the surface in these stanzas a whole shoal of cherished human illusions about otherness and completion that find perhaps their most succinct expression in Plato's *Symposium*, in Aristophanes' story of the original human race of spherical beings with two heads and eight limbs (190a–193e).²² Ever since Zeus angrily humbled our strong ancestors by bisecting them, we have been hemispheres longing for our other halves, wanting to heal our wounds by embracing. But implicit in Aristophanes' story is the idea that complete union is no longer possible for human beings; desire is

always a longing for something that we cannot have – Gloriana’s bounty, the Graces’ dance – and indeed, for something that may bring the wrath of the gods upon us, like eagles from the sky. We are left vulnerable to harms, flapping our arms in warning and invitation, with one side of ourselves always unprotected by any shell.

One way to think of Marvell’s interest in the questionable dividing line between “within” and “without” is to say that “Upon Appleton House” is concerned with sexual halves that may or may not be complements. The poem explores the teasing relationships between approach and retreat, desire and avoidance, voyeurism and complicit participation. Of the many other myths in which union is inseparable from vulnerability, Actaeon’s story is especially useful here. If, as Nancy Vickers has argued in her influential essay on the *Rime sparse*, fourteenth- through sixteenth-century Petrarchan discourse rescues the about-to-be-dismembered Actaeon-poet by preëemptively dismembering Diana’s body with “scattered rhymes” and fragmenting blazons so that the poet himself may remain whole, in “Upon Appleton House” Marvell may be said instead to scatter his male speaker’s limbs across a landscape of feminine analogies, metaphors, and images. Yet in the light-headed world of this poem, this particular Actaeon’s dismemberment does not constitute a mournful cancellation of Petrarch’s recuperative myth but an action that is desirable in and of itself. It is, indeed, the action that Marvell associates most strongly with his nostalgia for Spenser’s luscious, erotic, and potentially fatal gardens. In the absence of the sort of sparring match that Petrarch had with Laura and Astrophil with Stella, in which the poet displayed his beloved’s body erotically in his verse both as a form of possession and in order to heighten his own frustration, Marvell’s speaker improvises erotic tension by inviting us into a wood of perceptual error to peek past his nymphs so we can see him naked. He then displays the normally private voluptuousness of his psychic body in bits and pieces across the Appleton estate: Diana reinscribed.

What Marvell gives his speaker in the Appleton woods is not calm but an erotically charged disturbance of the imagination. The final section of “Upon Appleton House” simultaneously celebrates and winces at the fact that Maria will eventually have to lose her virginity in marriage, and although this meditation upon the girl’s vulnerability is partly the narrator’s way of restoring equanimity after his own sheepishly vulnerable moment – in a kind of competition for control of the poem – the odd nostalgia for sexual vulnerability that also runs through Marvell’s work is inseparable from a yearning for imaginative fragmentation. The famous “green Thought in a green Shade” of “The Garden” is a distillation that proceeds from the annihilation of “all that’s made,” yet

the fact that the mind that surrounds this distilled thought finds its “resemblance” in every creature of the world makes it not only potent but irreducibly multiple. If Spenser obliquely acknowledges Guyon’s and Arthur’s implication in the crowd of fantastic creatures that tumble haphazardly through Alma’s brain, Marvell seeks out such creatures and embraces them as though they were scattered pieces of himself from whom Aristophanes’ Zeus has severed him. Like the royalist Cavendish sisters, Marvell recycles the dismembered, invaded, and cross-gendered Petrarchan body with tropes that construct an imaginative economy based on a traffic in pieces of the male body. These rewritings speak to cultural fears about civil division and about the perceived prostitution of the monarchy, whether from a parliamentarian or royalist perspective. Yet it also makes sense to ask what these political fears can tell us about gendered imagination in mid seventeenth-century England.

One royalist pamphlet written when civil war was rolling darkly over the horizon provides a usefully heightened version of some ways that national politics were a metaphor for gender at the same time that gender politics metaphorized national concerns. *The Parliament of Women* (1640) attacks Parliament by representing it as an undisciplined and ignorant pack of women. It tells the story of a group of housewives in ancient Rome who form a pseudo-parliament of their own when their husbands refuse to let them know what goes on in the official, male Senate. The ultimate absurdity in the satirist’s eyes is that women should form a political body. Unlike chaste tortoises, the Roman matrons neither observe silence nor stay at home; they are pushy and ineffectual, arguing among themselves rather than getting anything done. After a crude and disparaging discussion of their husbands’ sexual “ware” and stamina, the women decide that it should be legal for them to seek such ware elsewhere, having sex whenever and with whomever they please. Anticipating possible objections from their husbands, the female parliamentarians then invent a cure for cuckolds that begins with an elaborate recipe for a medicinal syrup and proceeds to still more elaborate recommendations for action. The cuckolded man and his wayward wife must pretend that she has died:

He must conceive himselfe a Batchelour, or a widdower again, as he was at the first state when he came a wooing to her : then must hee make himselfe a mourning suite and cloake and walke as demurely and as sad, as if his wife were dead indeed : he must likewise be so well conceited of himselfe, as if no such thing had ever beene or thought of : then hee must refraine her company, and the house where she is, eight or ten dayes together, then begin to inquire of her as if she were a stranger to him, afterwards visite her, and then send her presents, and make much of her, then make good cheare, and when you are in a merry vaine,

aske her if she can love you? then will she say presently yes, if you affect her : then get a licence, and forth with marry her; that being done, see then if any one dare so much as poynt at you with their fingers, or call you Cukold, as formerly they did, if they do, then have you the Civill Law on your side to punish them there, and an action at the Common Law for defamation. (*Parlament*, sig. B3^v)

The male author's recipe for curing a cuckold constitutes a bitter condemnation of England's parliament, asking us to see that the women in the story desire to use the recipe as an excuse to cheat on their husbands, cheapening their husbands' "ware" by making it a matter for their own free-market consumption or rejection. The cynical description of the cure hints that following the instructions would not really make the woman innocent again; instead, it would license another round of cuckoldry that would rob the husband a second time. When the wife is admonished to promise her husband "never againe to pollute the marriage bed," she is envisioned as "striving to villifie the old Proverb : Once a whore and ever a whore," with the strong implication that she is either mistaken about her own capacities for virtue or simply lying (sig. B4). At the same time, the instructions for killing the wife and giving her a new identity are suffused with a poignantly hopeless dream of being able to restore the original marriage to wholeness. One can easily find it not only ludicrous but touching when the wronged husband is told to ask his supposedly new beloved whether she can love him. Only willful self-delusion on the cuckold's part can keep his dream in working order; only a half-surrender to the cuckold's self-delusion can enable readers to feel the pull of that dream – a paradoxical pull, given that the pamphlet primarily sneers at the dream's emptiness. The criminal delusions and sleights that proceed haphazardly from female minds are the insubstantial fuel of this dream, nourishing the cuckold who has been consumed by it.

Yet there is a third set of desires at work here: in addition to condemning the wandering woman while indulging in the fantasy that the right set of social and legal practices, were they known, might actually dispel the infamy of cuckoldry and bring purity and innocence back into a relationship (or a country), the anecdote also hints that the female characters who are being satirized are not the only ones titillated by the idea of recycling a woman's virginity only for the purpose of tearing it again. In terms of national politics, this would seem to make little sense; the royalist author who hates Parliament enough to represent it as a convocation of yapping women (how much lower can one go?) surely must want the male throne to regain complete control over the effeminate government to which it is married, without the possibility for further parliamentary infidelities. But "The chiefe heads of the womens Lawe,"

which form an appendix to the story of the Roman women, end with the following:

Item, That that man which promises a pritty mayd [a] good turn, and doth not perform it within three moneths shall loose his what do you call them. (*Parlament*, sig. B4^v)

The author's fantasy of the state's making it mandatory to screw around with women who are both lascivious and dangerously aggressive is clearly open to the possibility for flirtation with a wayward woman if she is not one's own wife but someone else's. Alongside the vicious condemnation of the women who codify their own wayward lusts into law, *The Parliament of Women* registers a longing to be able to take oneself back to a time before the present anxieties about unity, constancy, and proprietary rights, returning to something that is not at all an innocent Golden Age (Tasso's "sweet delights / Of joyful, amorous wights . . . / lovers without conflict, without flame") but an edgy, antagonistic, and demanding dalliance.²³

This fantasy was much wider than Marvell; puritan and royalist men both had it. Where Marvell's poetry is unusual is in recognizing that the status of women's autonomous desire within this masculine fantasy is problematic – as, indeed, is the status here of men's own freedom to desire. When Maria petrifies the speaker with her sudden appearance, what she catches him at is envisioning and testing gender roles for himself; she disturbs him while he is in the act of what Sidney's dream-sonnet calls "seeing better sights in sights decay." In other words, the relationship between male poets, whose tradition incorporates a slightly out-of-hand femininity, and seventeenth-century women entering the authorial game for the first time becomes dramatized in Marvell as a charged moment in which a dreamer who engages in the Spenserian *literary* activity of playing with language in order to flirt with gender finds himself being observed by a woman. Or rather – and even more appropriately – he is critically evaluated and found wanting by a young girl whose powers of analysis owe much to his own tutelage. The way that Marvell handles the matter of Maria's still-future but inevitable move from her protective home out into the "rude heap" of the larger, war-torn world suggests that he wants us to feel not only sympathy but some envy towards the girl who may well experience things that he has only imagined. England's step from the Renaissance into the period of Restoration is thus marked by a girl's step from the enclosure of a man's teeming mind out into the still more teeming world.

Afterword

We are accustomed to think of the Reformation, and especially of the seventeenth-century's further development of reform, as a turning away from communal identification toward a growing conception of privacy. We teach our students that the journey from Chaucer and the Gawain poet to Sidney, and then from Sidney to Herbert and Donne, represents an inward turning. Scholars such as Wendy Wall and Patricia Fumerton have linked coterie poetry to the English aristocracy's growing desire for seclusion, and Barbara Everett's description of the situation under the Stuarts tallies with her sense that sonnets are "cabinet poetry":

Post-Tudor England saw the discovery of the formal private life, the projection on to the forms of society itself of the impulses of civilized inwardness. In the seventeenth century England becomes a country of high-walled gardens and collectors' cabinets. Its gentlemen hang their houses with muffling silk and with silencing Turkey carpets; its ladies read romances and write letters. Its finest aristocrats withdraw from the capital and make of their estates a "college in a purer air." The King himself is an amateur and a collector, who seeks to keep not only his Court but even his country as his private property. ("Shooting of the Bears," 66)

If we think of Petrarchism simply in terms of men's appropriative impulses, it fits Everett's pattern. Yet when we join Spenser, the Cavendishes, and Marvell in recognizing a potential in the Petrarchan tradition for a femininity even less comforting than the etherealized and indifferent neoplatonic lady, we must also recognize that within the general historical tendency to turn inward was an exceptional capacity to recognize otherness. The literary phenomenon that I have called conditional erotics makes inwardness quite different from privacy; when Spenser's narrator delves into the center of his own poem, he finds himself already occupied – in the military sense. The bride and her Medusa look out at him, converting his innermost self into a conditional and inconstant *interaction*.

When we move from Spenser's work to that of the Cavendish sisters, we do not move from women's political and textual exploitation to their

triumph or from authorial ignorance to authorial awareness. Nor, when we consider Marvell in relation to either Spenser or the Cavendishes, do we discover a male author who is likable in proportion to his penitent admission of the crimes of his Petrarchan forefathers. Literary sexual oppression is a pervasive force, but Renaissance male and female authors navigate its waters with intricacy and variety. In Spenser's work, conditionality both enables and encapsulates examples of disruptive femininity. Whereas we might expect pure distaste or resistance from the Cavendishes, they actually invest in the enclosures of Petrarchism; despite their female characters' longing for the end of their siege and for the return of their male relatives, the violence that hems them into a house also gives them the delicious opportunity to direct their own "scenes" and deploy their own "languages." In another twist, these female characters find that when they occupy masculine spaces conditionally, they must accept not only the joys of inconstancy but the darker pleasures of psychic risk. When we reach "Upon Appleton House," we find that although its narrator talks a great deal about encapsulation, his secret self is about as retentive as a sieve. Marvell distributes the narrator's feminine interior all over the Appleton estate, just to see what will happen when the narrator trots around to pick up the pieces.

The sieve is a nice image with which to end, speaking as it does against the tacit or explicit assumption of much gender theory that men cannot have permeable psychic boundaries or be flexibly gendered. Certainly members of subdominant cultural groups are far more likely than members of dominant groups to commute among cultural positions, but exceptions abound. The important exception represented by erotic conditionality gives us challenging and sympathetic interlocutors in the literature of an age that produced few or no overt expressions of what we would now call feminism.

Notes

INTRODUCTION

- 1 Susanne Wofford's *Monumental Choice of Achilles* explores the ways that figurative speech in the form of similes can shore up the central ideology of an epic while nevertheless also making room for readings that criticize this ideology "by showing how an ethical system [is] constructed out of resistant material" (p. 2). A type of conditionality is inherent in similes, of course, and Wofford's and my areas of interest dovetail nicely.
- 2 Marotti, "Love is Not Love," 416. See also Montrose, "Celebration" and "Eliza."
- 3 "Now that the care and weight of a kingdom lies upon my shoulders, to add to these the incumbrance of the married state would be no point of discretion in me: but that I may give you the best satisfaction I can, I have long since made choice of a husband, the kingdom of England" (Elizabeth, *Public*, 117–118).
- 4 See Greenblatt, *Self-Fashioning*; Goldberg, *James I*, ch. 1; Javitch, *Poetry*, and Whigham, *Ambition*.
- 5 "Elizabethan Subject," 325; "Infinite Desire," 756. Hegel's applicable essay is "Lordship and Bondage."
- 6 Elizabeth, *Public*, 96. Stone discusses the queen's relationship to her Maids of Honor in *Crisis*, 605–606. For interpretations of Elizabeth's power as depending on the idiosyncrasy of sexual position, see, e.g., Marcus, *Puzzling*, 59. Montrose writes, "Elizabeth's strategy is to subsume a gesture of womanly self-deprecation within an assertion of the unique power that inheres in her by virtue of her office and nation. Her female honor, the chastity invested in a body that is vulnerable to invasion and pollution, is made secure by the kingly honor invested in her body politic" ("Elizabethan Subject," 315). But Maus gives another turn to the screw: "Elizabeth's claim [that she had "the heart and stomach of a king"] apparently reverses the metaphors that I have been considering here [in which male writers claim female wombs], since it involves a woman appropriating male bodily parts, but it relies upon an identical intuition: it is never obvious what a woman has inside her" ("Womb," 272).
- 7 One of the few Spenser studies in recent years not to focus on Elizabeth is Cavanagh's. Although Cavanagh and I cover some of the same subject territory, our theories about Spenser's relationship to femininity balance each other rather than overlap. Whereas Cavanagh begins her study with the

premise that “*The Faerie Queene* has traditionally been read without much overt recognition of the poem’s repeated displacement, subversion, and abuse of female characters,” believing that the poem “employs representational strategies which undermine efforts of readers to approach the text from female perspectives,” what interests me is the degree to which the capaciousness of Spenser’s poetry allows and even woos feminine opposition (*Wanton Eyes*, 3, 7).

- 8 A related study is Estrin’s *Laura*. Because Estrin and I often speak in very different theoretical languages, it is difficult for me to summarize her work fairly. Two excerpts from her introduction, however, can give a sense of where her theoretical concerns and mine overlap:

Laura views Petrarchism as a series of anamorphic representations imbricated by three principal spaces: the main plot, with Laura as Daphne – or woman who denies sexuality; and the two subplots – with Laura as Eve, or woman who returns sexuality, and Laura as Mercury, or woman who invents her own life by escaping configuration altogether. (*Laura*, 9)

Laura–Mercury’s “I am not perhaps who you think I am” puts down both the “existing idiom” [reference omitted] that Petrarch’s sublimating laurels perpetuate and the rationale by which such idioms become acceptable. In proposing that “I am” demands both another story (another *there is*) and a different arena of thought (a being which is not), Laura–Mercury questions patriarchal form and hegemonic thinking. Her questions destabilize the “I” so that the poet can bring a “being which is not” into the realm of imagined possibility. (*Laura*, 21).

- 9 Maclean summarizes interpretations of Galenic medical theory (*Renaissance Notion*, 28–46) as does Laqueur (*Making Sex, passim*). Cf. Naomi Miller: “Potentially even more disturbing to the male Renaissance sonneteer . . . is not difference alone, but rather the possibility that the objectified sonnet mistress or wife may herself seek to become a speaking subject” (*Changing the Subject*, 30). See also Heather Dubrow: “Petrarchan poets . . . sometimes literally gender female their own doubts about Petrarchism – and thus gender them transgressive, seductive, at once dangerously empowered and powerless” (*Echoes of Desire*, 92). Though I agree with Miller and with Dubrow, our emphases differ. Whereas both of them focus on the male sonneteer’s doubts and his efforts to narrow his mistress’s scope, my interest lies in the erotic relationship between the masculine poet and his feminine other self, as well as in the strength he draws from giving the mistress at least some scope.
- 10 The entry “Faults of women” in the index to Woodbridge’s *Women and the English Renaissance* gives leads to pamphlets that warn against women’s changing minds, inconstancy, and talkativeness.
- 11 Woodbridge lists examples of literary heroes who feel the necessity to assert that their love for a woman has not made them effeminate (*Women*, 185).
- 12 See Greenblatt, “Fiction and Friction,” ch. 3 in *Shakespearean Negotiations*; and Orgel, “Nobody’s Perfect.”
- 13 *Aretino’s Dialogues*, 256; Harvey’s term “Arte Meretricandi” is in his and Spenser’s “Two Other, Very Commendable Letters,” in Spenser, *Poetical Works*, ed. Smith and de Selincourt (p. 641). Goldberg discusses the significance of the term in *Sodometries* (p. 77).

- 14 Parker's *Fat Ladies* explores various Renaissance conceptions of women's bodies as literary enclosures. Stallybrass and Montrose have written important pieces on the political myth that Elizabeth I's virginal body represented England's inviolate borders, enclosed by the ocean ("Patriarchal Territories" and "Shaping Fantasies").
- 15 Kerrigan ("A Theory of Female Coyness") theorizes that women's coyness gives heterosexual men a chance to reconcile their desire to deflower virgins with their fear of making those virgins into whores. Coyness fans the flames of men's desire by combining wantonness and chastity in one woman, thus engaging both sides of a split in the masculine psyche. At the same time, a woman's delay proceeds not so much from her shyness as from her sense of her own value. Although Kerrigan therefore believes that coyness has a mutual purpose, he does not proceed from coyness to the more varied dimensions of flirtation, nor does he think of coyness as providing a means for the coy woman to investigate her feelings or to live in conditionality. In his model, as in that of Simmel, flirtation is the prerogative of women, who know all along that they will eventually capitulate.

I. INTO OTHER ARMS: AMORET'S EVASION

- 1 This and all further parenthetical citations to *The Faerie Queene* are to Hamilton's edition, which reproduces the text of Smith and de Selincourt's 1912 edition.
- 2 Since the first publication of this chapter as an article, Goldberg has given the most generous possible response to my criticism of his argument about the hermaphrodite by republishing my article in his anthology with the comment that he is "happy to stand corrected," so I feel somewhat churlish in repeating the correction now (*Queering the Renaissance*, 3). Many of us have become more attuned to the possibility of female subjectivities in Renaissance texts in the past few years.
- 3 *Transforming*, 70. Silberman differentiates Scudamour and Amoret's embrace from the hermaphrodite's body to which Spenser's narrator compares that embrace:

The picture of chaste love presented for our edification does not evoke the traditional notion of two becoming one. Rather, the two lovers become a new entity: a couple.[fn omitted] Amoret and Scudamore are not the Hermaphrodite precisely because their embrace does not depend on the effacement of sexual difference and the disfigurement of bodily form. (*Transforming*, 69)

I continue to believe that this reading smoothes over some disturbing flaws in the couple's mutuality – flaws that Book IV later makes more visible. Silberman does, however, show us disturbing connections between Busyrane and Scudamour:

Busirane continues to torment Amoret because she will not deny her commitment to Scudamore. However, another meaning of "deny" [in the line "All for she *Scudamore* will not deny," *FQ* III.xi.11] as "to withhold anything desired" (*OED* s.v. "deny," 3.5) suggests that Amoret is tormented by Busirane because she will not deny anything to her lover Scudamore. Scudamore's words reveal both a traditional view of Amoret as a

passive object of desire and an unconventional picture of her as a desiring subject. (*Transforming*, 63)

- 4 I am indebted to Janet Adelman for pointing out to me the Roman artist's possible sleaziness.
- 5 See Halperin, *One Hundred Years*, 147. "Naturally," writes Berry ironically, "Diotima must be fictitious, an hallucination of the otherwise impeccably rational Master. For were she not to be a figure of fantasy, behind the text of *The Symposium* would loom the disturbing shadow of woman both as mystic and as original possessor of the Socratic *logos*. And how could a search for masculine identity through sublimated desire be reconcilable with a maternal, rather than a paternal source for this system?" (*Of Chastity and Power*, 36).
- 6 Certainly other critics have noticed Spenser's allegorizing of Petrarch in the Busyrane episode. Silberman writes,

Busirane's attempt to impose upon Amoret the conventions of courtly love is a forcible troping: he forces her to embody a metaphor, a profane version of the sacred heart, in order to alienate Amoret's chaste affection for Scudamore. Busirane assaults her integrity with those Petrarchan conventions that identify a woman with a heart and mind of her own as Cruel and Despiteous.[note omitted] He uses the masque both to imprison Amoret among alien forms and to intrude foreign content into her mind. ("Singing," 266)
- 7 Though we do not know what version of the Bluebeard story Spenser would have read, we do know from *Much Ado*, I.i. 186 that the story was already considered old and familiar. Hamilton makes this point, citing Fowler, who takes his version of the tale from Chambers (Fowler, *Courts of Love*, 56; Chambers, *Book of Days*, 291), but the same version of the English nursery tale appears as an appendix to Humphreys' Arden edition of *Much Ado*. According to Humphreys' sources, it comes from "A Mr. Blakeway," who contributed it to the 1821 Variorum edition (*Plays and Poems*, VII.164–165), saying it had been "told him by a great-aunt born in 1715 who, he surmised, had heard it from a narrator born under Charles II" (Humphreys, ed., *Much Ado*, 232). My surmise is that because Spenser's quotation of the jingle's first line is an exact match, he may well have known a similar version of the rest of the tale and almost certainly would have known the rest of the jingle.
- 8 The courts could hold a husband legally responsible for his wife's debts. Unless he were convicted of being a pimp, a husband could not be legally punished for his wife's sexual misconduct; nevertheless, popular punishment outside the courts often took the form of skimmingtons – rough music – that could be almost as severe on the cuckold as on his wife. A husband's subjection to either legal or popular punishment proceeded from the idea that wives had no legal status separate from that of their husbands. For the husband's legal responsibility and the wife's legal duty to submit, see Baker, *Introduction*, 391–399; Ingram, *Church Courts*, 143–144, 163–165, and 283; Stetson, *Woman's Issue*, 3–6; Maclean, *Renaissance Notion*, 58, 72–81; and *Laves Resolutions*, *passim*. Maclean also gives ample evidence for philosophical, religious, medical, political, and social notions of women's essentially wayward and unstable nature (*Renaissance Notion*, *passim*, but especially 42, 72), and Woodbridge lists pamphlets that contain both popular and learned opinions of husbands who abdicate their authority (*Women*, 190–195). Beier

shows that magistrates often assumed a connection between women's geographical wandering and their sexual appetites (*Masterless Men*, 7, 25, 55–57). Underdown (“Taming”) discusses the fears enacted in skimmingtons. Newman gives one example of rough music directed at a cuckold and his erring wife (“Renaissance Family Politics,” 86–87).

- 9 Cf. Fleming on early modern English books written by men for female audiences: “In representing itself as something women ‘ask for,’ the ladies’ text both displays and attempts to enact the potential violence that women have to fear from the helpful male” (“Ladies Man,” 158).
- 10 Three standard *topoi* of the literature of anxiety about women’s friendships are the Amazons, the gossips’ meeting, and Diana’s encounter with Actaeon. Defenders of women praised the Amazons for their courage, but even this praise was sometimes mixed with a repugnance for the Amazons’ self-sufficiency. And just as often, writers used the Amazons to represent all that was wrong in interactions among women. One thinks, for example, of *Epicoene*, where the epicene is accused of being an Amazon and reviled for encouraging “her” female friends to meet and plot against the men. Woodbridge cites many examples of uneasiness about the Amazons in Shakespeare’s and Jonson’s plays and in pamphlets about women (*Women*, 117, 128, 142, 160, 164–165, 181, and 277). Gossips’ meetings were a favorite target for misogynist pamphleteers, who represented women as meeting at one another’s houses to plot against their husbands and to deride their husbands’ lack of prowess with scornful descriptions of the men’s sexual equipment. Henderson and McManus (eds., *Half Humankind*) give extensive selections of these pamphlets, and Woodbridge summarizes many of them in *Women*, ch. 9. The story of Diana and Actaeon has served critics as a model for the Petrarchan lover’s fears about his mistress, but it is worth noting that whereas the Petrarchan mistress often seems to float in a vacuum, Diana is emphatically surrounded by her protective nymphs, and it is Actaeon’s breaking of this circle that earns him his horrific punishment.
- 11 Goldberg sees Britomart and Amoret’s “embrace of friendship” as an opportunity for them to “fall into each other’s arms and reveal their mutual desire to each other, sharing one another’s wound” (*Endlesse*, 95). Paglia is considerably less subtle in reading overt homoeroticism into the passage (“The Apollonian Androgyne,” 51–2).
- 12 This remark about Guyon’s form of temperance appears in Milton’s *Areopagitica* (*John Milton*, 248).
- 13 I owe the ironic phrasing in parentheses to James Turner.
- 14 Anderson makes essentially the same point about these pronouns, but in the service of a different argument: “It is not at all clear whose ‘fayned Paramour’ or whose ‘forced guest’ Blandamour is or with whom he dares ‘to dallie’. . . [D]oes this sudden blurring of referents arise from a shift in point of view . . . ? Or is it, perhaps, meant to suggest an identification of Britomart and Amoret which, therefore, involves a sudden vaporizing of the narrative or story level . . . ? By the end of canto i it is clear that the narrative and figurative realms are neutralizing and undermining one another” (“Whatever Happened?” 191–192).
- 15 The *OED* does list one other example before 1596 of a woman being

addressed as “sir,” and of course the title would be appropriate for a knight; nevertheless, etymologically and in common practice the honorific “Sir” and the rank of knight were strongly masculine (*OED* sb. 9).

16 For a different take on Scudamour’s substitution of his narrative for his bride, see Silberman, *Transforming*, 84–86.

17 See ch. 5.

2. “NEUES OF DEVILS”: FEMININE SPRIGHTS IN MASCULINE MINDS

1 I strongly prefer Grosart’s editorial choices in this sonnet to those of Geoffrey Bullough, who, with the conviction that the Folio’s “darkenesse” cannot be trisyllabic, would have us read not only “darkenesses” but “confusednesses.” This sort of thing leaves me crotchety and harrumphing.

2 A different interpretation of the gendering of nightmares in Spenser’s work is Cavanagh’s “Nightmares of Desire,” in *Wanton Eyes*, 42–74.

3 This and all subsequent parenthetical citations of Spenser’s poetry and prose other than *The Faerie Queene* will refer to Smith and de Selincourt’s edition.

4 Hamilton cites Florio and A. Fowler as sources.

5 Guillory describes Phantastes as one “to whom any power of origination is being denied” (*Authority*, 37). While acknowledging the threat that Phantastes’ version of imaginative activity poses, Guillory nevertheless regards the poem’s containment of that threat as more or less successful. Quite rightly, I think, Guillory’s argument leads him to conclude that “Spenser need not deny the power of imagination to intensify desire, or even its subversive effect upon allegory, but he must resist desire as a source that draws him to the dangerous priority of the ‘unprecedented’ act of imagination” (*ibid.*, 38). Yet this *resistance* that Guillory privileges occupies only one of the poem’s many voices.

6 See, e.g., Wofford, *Choice*, 345. Berger helpfully contrasts Phantastes’ projection of these threatening forces with the middle sage’s aloofness from them:

[The murals of the middle sage] exclude the failures registered by fantasy and memory. Locked in his eternally efficient present (a happy conservative), he can have little awareness of the dangers which have threatened Alma for seven years. . . [Maleger] represents a generic set of evils which are part and parcel of the ethical and social environment created by the soul. If and when Maleger breaches the castle defenses his evils would seem to be most directly channeled to Phantastes’ room (cf. ix.8–13, where many of Phantastes’ “idle thoughts and fantasies” appear among Maleger’s troops). (*Revisionary* 40–41)

7 The same year that this chapter first appeared as an article, Maus published an essay in which she noted Sidney’s use of the same pun in his letter to his sister published with *The Countess of Pembroke’s Arcadia* (“Womb,” 269–270). I wonder whether Sidney was thinking of Spenser’s Alma when he wrote, “In sum, a young head, not so well stayed as I would it were . . . having many many fancies begotten in it, if it had not been in some way delivered, would have grown a monster” (*Arcadia* 57). The influence could have worked either way, though Sidney’s monster feels more like a reference than an invention.

8 Silberman argues that in Book II, “The moral and exegetical defenses

- provided by Temperance to cope with sensual experience fail in their designated task because the very notion of defense is revealed to be a spurious ideal” (“Limitations,” 17).
- 9 Mueller has a useful take on this stanza and episode: “Gloriana is the creation solely of Arthur’s quest for her. Arthur’s infinite desire is equated with Elizabeth’s endless stream of courtiers. Arthur differs from his fellow knights who have come from Gloriana’s court in that very condition of frustrated seeking” (“Infinite Desire,” 757). Mueller’s line of inquiry requires that he make pronounced distinctions between Arthur’s and Sir Guyon’s relationships to desire; my admiration for his argument does not, however, prevent my deciding here to pay more attention to the two knights’ mutual difference from Alma than to their differences from each other.
- 10 Cavanagh comments trenchantly, “If women are believed always to be hiding something wicked, allaying such fears becomes paramount before credibility can truly be established” (*Wanton Eyes*, 36). For analyses of the political significance of Elizabeth’s virginal body, which figured the inviolable realm, see Montrose, “Elizabethan Subject,” 315 and Stallybrass, “Patriarchal Territories,” *passim*.
- 11 Incidentally, Alma’s genitals are in a sense displaced rather than entirely lacking. Long after we leave Alma’s story, we discover that the river which carries Guyon away from her – first mentioned, we might recall, in the stanza that introduces Alma’s “goodly castle, plast / Foreby a riuer in a pleasaunt dale” – leads eventually to the sea that surrounds the Bower of Bliss (II.ix.10; xi.3–4; xii.1–2, 38–42).
- 12 Quilligan’s pages on this theme do, in fact, do something of this sort. She scarcely mentions the “Firebrand of hell” stanzas, but she does argue that although Spenser begins his epic with the idea that he will succeed where Orpheus failed, “by canto x of Book IV . . . we find Spenser’s narrative suffering a failure like Orpheus’s” (*Milton’s Spenser*, 203–204). Spenser’s voice, she says, “insofar as it elides into Scudamour’s (and Orpheus’s),” fails to rescue Amoret (*ibid.*, 206).
- 13 Nohrnberg, *Analogy*, 482; Berger, *Revisionary*, 98, 111, 139; Alpers, *Poetry*, 183–184; Kane, *Moral Allegory*, 99; Cavanagh, *Wanton Eyes*, 149; Williams, *World of Glass*, 93, 135; Silberman, *Transforming*, 26.
- 14 Wofford observes that there is “a significant difference between treating an evil double as a powerful male magician, like Archimago or Busyrane, and representing it in a weaker, impoverished female, such as the ‘witch’ who constructs Snowy Florimell” (*Choice*, 287).
- 15 Although I am using Fairclough’s Latin text, all translations of the *Aeneid* are from Fitzgerald.

3. MONSTROUS INTIMACY AND ARRESTED DEVELOPMENTS

1 See, e.g., Alpers, *Poetry*, 379.

2 Gregerson comes very close to acknowledging that the poem asks Britomart to engage in a significant exchange of meaning with Malecasta: “Britomart . . . resembles Malecasta in that she is different from what she appears to be and is taken in by appearance . . . Britomart escapes from the

- unbecoming shadow of this wanton woman, but not without ‘feeling one close couched by her side’ (III i 62)” (*Reformation of the Subject*, 31).
- 3 In the stanza immediately before the one in which Malecasta pours out her declaration of love, Britomart refuses to take off her armor, “For she her sexe vnder that straunge purport / Did vse to hide” (III.i.52). Britomart disarms only when alone in her bedroom.
 - 4 Crooke, Helkiah. *Microcosmographia. A Description of the Body of Man* (1615). Adelman looks at refutations of Galen’s one-sex model in “Making Defect Perfection.”
 - 5 See ch 1, note 7, for information about Spenser’s use of the Bluebeard folk tale.
 - 6 Lucan is the only writer I have run across who mentions Medusa’s effect on women: “Medusa was dreaded . . . even by her sister-Gorgons” (IX.644; Graves, 213). I am greatly indebted to Nancy Vickers for this and many other mythological references in this chapter.
 - 7 Freccero writes, “Whatever the horror the Medusa represents to the male imagination, it is in some sense a female horror. In mythology, the Medusa was said to be powerless against women, for it was her feminine *beauty* that constituted the mortal threat to her admirers” (“Medusa,” 7). Fraunce is more explicit: “Medusa herselfe noteth lustfull beawty and voluptuousnes, turning men into stones” (*The Third Part*, 29). And although both Boccaccio and Fulgentius allegorize Medusa as the gold that causes avarice and misery, Boccaccio also describes her as a bewitching snare: “[T]am grandis ac placidus oculorum illi fuit vigor ut, quos benigne respiceret, fere immobiles et sui nescios redderet” (“[S]o great and so gentle was the strength of her eyes that those upon whom she looked kindly were immobilized and rendered unaware of themselves”) (*De mulieribus*, 22, trans. mine; cf. Fulgentius, “Fabula Persei,” 21). See also Apollodorus, *The Library* (II.iv.4); Christine de Pisan’s translation of Boccaccio’s account (*Livre de la Cité*, 2.63d, but 2.61.5 in Richards’s English trans.); the *Ovide moralisé* (IV.5740 ff.), Bateman (*Golden Booke*, 21), Arnulf of Orléans (*Glosule*, 623), and Petrarch (*Rime*, 197, 179).
 - 8 When Petrarch describes Laura as a Medusa, it is a way of describing her anger (*Rime*, 179) or her cool seductiveness (*Rime*, 197, 366) rather than her chastity. Although most ancient, medieval, and Renaissance commentators associate the armed goddess Minerva with chastity or purity, among other things, and although most of them allegorize Medusa as Minerva’s weapon, virtually none of them allegorize the Gorgon directly as the weapon of chastity. Instead, they link her snaky head to one or more of Minerva’s other functions, saying that Medusa represents prudence in war, for example. Fortunio Liceti comes perhaps the closest to aligning Medusa with chastity, referring to Medusa indirectly by mentioning Minerva’s shield: “Minerva is represented armed with helmet, shield, and spear, because a virgin ought to guard her own integrity with prudence, constancy, and strength, against every wanton aggressor” (*Hieroglyphica*, 155 B–C; excerpt trans. Fowler, *Numbers of Time*, 126 n. 2).
 - 9 See Berger, “Orpheus,” 30, 34–35; Durling’s introduction to Petrarch’s *Rime*, 29–31; and Freccero, “Medusa,” 10–11.
 - 10 See, e.g., Pindar, *Pythian*, 12; Bateman, *Golden Booke*, 5v; Fraunce, *Third*

- Part*, 29; and Friedlaender, *Caravaggio Studies*, 88. Erich Neumann interprets Medusa's death as the freeing of Perseus's creative powers in the form of Pegasus, whom numerous sources represent as springing from Medusa's blood when Perseus kills her (*Origins*, 213–219; cf. e.g. Hesiod, *Theog.*, 280–283).
- 11 Other critics who compare Amoret with the lady of the *Epithalamion* are Bieman ("Sometimes," 139), Loewenstein ("Echo's Ring," 292–293), and Kaske ("Spenser's *Amoretti* and *Epithalamion*," 282–284).
 - 12 Bates notes the bridegroom's incomplete conquest, though she refers this incompleteness to Spenser's relationship with his queen (*Courtship*, 147). It makes great sense to see political power at work here, but if our turning to Elizabeth Tudor makes us fail to see any power in the character of Elizabeth the Bride, we will simply have joined our efforts to those of the bridegroom. Spenser's poem is larger than the bridegroom's vision.
 - 13 Spenser implies Ate's power to do such a thing in his equivocal description of the Argonauts, "all mindlesse of the Golden fleecce, which made them striue." Their hope of finding the fleecce made them strive nobly in quest of it, while now their forgetting the fleecce makes them quarrel with each other.
 - 14 See introduction, pp. 15–18.
 - 15 Barkan describes Perseus as using Medusa's head this way (*Gods Made Flesh*, 55). It is not far-fetched to compare Arthur to Perseus if we consider that Spenser borrows his description of Arthur's shield from Ariosto's description of a Medusan shield belonging to Atlante, a Persean figure who rides a flying horse.
 - 16 Berger discusses this reduction of our sense that mutability is a character in the poem (*Revisionary Play*, 260).
 - 17 Elizabeth Bellamy makes a related argument in "The Vocative and the Vocational: The Unreadability of Elizabeth in *The Faerie Queene*." Parker notes that the mirror's figuration of both queen and poem in this proem implicates the poem in multiplicity, a counterpart to error (*Inescapable*, 80).
 - 18 In a discussion of Alma's castle in *FQ* II, Berger points out that "memory's power lies in its weakness. Its character as reservoir or matrix triggers the reforming tendencies of mind because it is so manifestly incomplete. This is what makes it parent to the Muse" (*Revisionary Play*, 41). Anderson comments that Spenser makes the war relics on Ate's wall gradually become more and more substantial until clearly we are seeing things that could not possibly be hung on a wall – seeing the original cities and wars rather than the relics of these places and events: "The force, the vitality, the reality of the poet's vision of discord has taken over completely the action of the poem. It is 'Hard by the gates of hell' that we now find poetic life, and there also, perception" ("Whatever Happened," 189). Compare Goldberg: "The realm of Ate, so fully destructive, and yet so fully revelatory of the life of the text, is productive. This cave, where the text first takes its life, is replicated throughout book IV, so that the history of the self that is presented is the same as the history of the broken and lost text" (*Endlesse Worke*, 112). Wofford points out that Ate "is explicitly associated with the high epic tradition" (*Choice*, 289).
 - 19 Cf. Parker, in a discussion of the retreat offered by the romance mode:

The suggestion through the Legend [of Courtesy] is that to inquire too closely into origins – or to penetrate a secret “shade” – would be to intrude upon a privacy, like that of a grace which cannot be forced or the Graces who disappear when Calidore determines to question their identity. But here this circumspection seems to be yielding to its other aspect, a sense of being ineluctably excluded from this bower, or unable to find the “way.” (*Inescapable*, 111)

What interests me is the specific femininity of this exclusive interior and the complicated flirtations of Spenser’s relationship to it. Wofford recognizes the poem’s gendering of this forbidden territory – though she locates it outside and above, in an elusive, transcendent knowledge that Queen Elizabeth comes to symbolize, rather than in an internal femininity (*Choice*, 227–230).

- 20 Wofford’s arguments about petrification and enclosure provide a nice counterpoint here: “The imagery of bondage and thralldom is used throughout the poem as in the House of Busyrane to represent the figurative strategies of allegory itself, and perhaps for this reason seems to release a greater variety of interpretations than the narrator appears able to control” (*Choice*, 311).
- 21 After comparing Salutati’s reading to Plato’s quip about Gorgias’s petrifying rhetorical powers, Vickers says that the Gorgon’s threatening eloquence is “a threat of forgetting . . .” (“Blazon,” 111). Cf. Gallagher’s critique of an essay by Neil Hertz: “Hertz immediately limits himself to a single interpretation of the Medusa’s head. It stands for the vagina, which in turn represents the threat of losing one’s penis and, by extension, one’s property, one’s social and economic power, one’s very self-representations . . . [This analysis] prevents insights that would see the displayed vagina as something other than the sign of an absence . . .” (“Medusa’s Head,” 55). Gallagher goes on to suggest that this “something other” might be a Medusan reproductive power, which she links to “woman’s . . . authority to call men’s authorship into question” (*ibid.*, 56). My argument about Spenser is that his poetry finds inspiration in this very threat. In this, I diverge both from Parker’s exploration of “the interval of ‘wandering’ between vision and fulfillment” in *Inescapable Romance* and from her more recent arguments about Spenser’s suspended poetic voice in *Literary Fat Ladies*. Although I owe a great deal to Parker’s brilliant probing into the phenomenon of Spenserian stasis, *Inescapable Romance* does not treat gender as a particularly important factor. Parker’s later work puts questions of gender front and center, yet it casts feminine suspension in an almost purely Circean mode, as a danger (however pleasurable in the short run) that the poem wants to overcome (*Inescapable*, 59; *Fat Ladies*, 63, 65; 111–112). I would argue that although Parker correctly describes one of *The Faerie Queene*’s sets of values, another impulse in the poem is to participate and be changed rather than to control the agents of change.

4. NARRATIVE FLIRTATIONS

- 1 Johnson notes the changing roles in this sonnet: “The lady is identified with Penelope, the deceptive weaver, the artist who can attract and repel; yet by the end of the quatrain it is the poet who plays the part of the Penelope who weaves, while the lady takes the part of the Penelope who unweaves” (*Spenser’s “Amoretti,”* 117).

- 2 Cf. Naomi Miller: “Spenser’s re-casting of the tale so that the male poet alone has the power to weave language into artistic creation, his beloved retaining only the power of speech to ‘undo,’ exposes the male sonneteer’s fear of female speech as competitive with and destructive of his own” (*Changing the Subject*, 31). Heather Dubrow’s study of counterdiscourses to Petrarchism looks at some ways that male writers tell stories about their own defeat. See *Echoes of Desire*, e.g. p. 3, p. 92.
- 3 The earliest non-punning example in the *OED* of the use of *spill* to mean *spindle* is from the pseudonymous *Willobie His Avisia*, published in 1594, just one year before Spenser’s *Amoretti and Epithalamion* (*OED* “spill” sb. 2.1; *Willobie*, 40.58). But if the author of *Avisia* could assume that his readers knew the meaning of the word, Spenser could make a pun out of it. This sense of *spill* might well have come into gradual use long before anyone used it in print, since there are printed instances dating back to the fourteenth century of its use to mean “a sharp-pointed fragment of wood” (*OED* sb. 1.1). More importantly, if Spenser did read *Willobie*, he may have hoped that that source would help him make his pun, since “Willobie” uses *spill* to mean *spindle* in lines of verse not just about any spinner but about Penelope herself. In this poem, the spill functions unambiguously as a noun: the lover hopes that the spill full of thread will enable his Penelope to finish her work and choose him as a mate.
- Dubrow notes that in the *Rime sparse*, Petrarch uses the trope of the pilot to represent “the careening relationship between success and failure in the sequence”; she argues, further, that “at times success from one vantage point is failure from another; at times one cannot clearly distinguish the two” (*Echoes of Desire*, 20, 26).
- 4 Parker describes Spenser’s narrative dilation and deferral (*Inescapable*, 54–113; *Fat Ladies*, 54–66).
- 5 Penelope and her suitors are, after all, at home in an epic, and Spenser’s choice of these particular characters to play the mistress and suitor in Sonnet 23 may be what allows him more room for complex movement here than in many of his other sonnets.
- 6 In this, Spenser differs from Ariosto, who teases his readers and tells sexual jokes but never makes the gender of his speaker ambiguous or changeable. Ariosto’s narrator, in other words, does not flirt with gender; he does not risk his own gendered position.
- 7 Rambuss points out that although Spenser consciously and publicly styles the *Calender* the inaugural poem of his career, “Strictly speaking . . . the literary career of ‘the new Poete’ (as he is termed throughout the *Calender*) began some ten years previously with the appearance of his English translations of van der Noot’s *Theatre for Worldlings* – a debut which, had it been allotted by Spenser the inaugural position in his canon, would suggest both an alternative poetic lineage and a potentially different (satiric) direction for his career” (*Spenser’s Secret Career*, 96). Because these earlier translations were truly anonymous, however, as opposed to the thinly veiled pretence of anonymity in the *Calender*, I follow the herd in considering the *Calender* Spenser’s debut.
- 8 Wall gives a valuable alternative reading of the envoy to *The Shepheardes Calender* in her *Imprint of Gender* – a book replete with insights on every page. Wall historicizes the fragmentation of authority in *The Calender* “by placing it

in the context of manuscript reading practices, the inflections of class within those practices, and the writer's stylization of his career" (*Imprint*, 239 n.).

- 9 It is true that Chaucer's Pandarus is arguably less sleazy than the Pandarus we often think of now, but Spenser falls in step with the common opinion of his own time in his unfavorable judgment of the go-between. In *Mother Hubbard's Tale*, for example, Spenser tells us that the Ape, a scurrilous fellow, does not even scorn to put on "a Pandares coate (so basely was he borne)" (*Hub.*, 808). Spenser's use of the term without further explanation presupposes that his readers will associate Pandarus not only with lovers' trysts but with the commodification of sexual favors.
- 10 For valuable discussions of the discourses of siring and of promiscuity in introductions to this and other Renaissance texts, see Wall, *Imprint*; and Rambuss, *Spenser's Secret Career*. Noting E. K.'s remarks about "the patronage of the new Poete" in the dedicatory epistle, David Miller argues that the etymology of "patronage" suggests that "Harvey, Sidney, and eventually all readers are being asked to 'father' the text: not to author it, but to accord it a public authority independent of its natural father's identity" ("Authorship," 225). I agree with Miller but see an additional layer of bawdiness in the author–reader relationship that E. K. describes.
- 11 Compare Sir John Harington's introduction to his command performance of the *Orlando Furioso* in English, where he asks Queen Elizabeth to recognize herself as the divine inseminator and transformer of his heretofore barren earthly womb:
- I presume to offer to your Highnes this part of the fruit of the litle garden of my slender skill. It hath bene the longer in growing and is the lesse worthie the gathering because my ground is barren and to colde for such daintie Italian frutes, being also perhaps overshadowed with trees of some older growth, but the beames of your blessed countenance vouchsafing to shine on so pore a soile shall soone disperse all hurtfull mistes that would obscure it and easily dissolve all (whether they be Mel-dews or Fel-dews) that would starve this shallow set plant. (*Ariosto's "Orlando Furioso"*)
- 12 Insulted by Lady Mary Wroth's allegorical portrait of him in the *Urania*, Sir Edward Denny wrote a savage poem about her, "Whose vaine comparison for want of witt / Takes up the oystershell to play with it / Yet common oysters such as thine gape wide / And take in pearles or worse at every tide" (quoted from Huntington MS HM 198 by Roberts, "Introduction," 33). See also Richard Hyrde's introduction to Margaret More Roper's translation of Erasmus's *Devout Treatise* (1526), in which Hyrde takes many pages to assure the readers that the translator's learning does not make her unchaste and that she has pursued her literary work for the pleasure of her learned husband. Goreau discusses the allegations against Aphra Behn, and Gallagher argues that Behn adopted the persona of a whore partly in response to the double standard by which female authors were judged (Goreau, *Reconstructing Aphra*, 263 ff.; Gallagher, "Masked Woman," *passim*).
- 13 Fumerton advances the intriguing argument that the circulation of Spenser's *texts* in a coterie gift-exchange resembled the circulation of aristocratic children in arranged marriages: "The rewards Spenser sought by addressing patrons in the language of gift included, in addition to money, the 'friendship' that brought protection, personal prestige, and social and political advance-

ment – the amity, in other words, that could foster himself and his poetry precisely as if they were gift-children” (*Cultural Aesthetics*, 61). Goldberg argues persuasively that the “open secret” of *The Calender* is homosociality (*Sodometries* 71–72). Goldberg draws from Alan Bray’s theory that homosexuality did not exist as an identity in the Renaissance, given that what we now call homosexual acts could be practiced from any of a number of social positions. Without having to disagree with Goldberg, then, I feel free to concentrate on Spenser’s elided position as Cresseid, one sociosexual position among many for the speaker of *The Calender*.

- 14 Burleigh’s sour opinion of the poem is a widely accepted tradition, based partly on this proem and partly on the last stanza of Book VI, which mentions “a mighty Peres displeasure.” Whether or not the “rugged forehead” of IV.pr.1 does refer to Burleigh, it clearly does not refer to Elizabeth (given the turn to her as an audience in stanza 4) and yet must describe someone in power who “Welds kingdomes causes, and affaires of state” (pr.2).
- 15 Commenting on Spenser’s depiction of the poet Bonfont, whose tongue is nailed to a post at the command of the good queen Mercilla, Goldberg says, “The poet thereby authorizes a view of society that denies him authority and makes his text simply a transcription of the social text. In this formulation, however, the poet’s subscription is paradoxical, since in voicing it he appears to give the queen the very authority that he claims precedes his ability to write” (*James I*, 3). Rambuss, on the other hand, writes of *FQ* IV.pr.5, “Spenser rather high-handedly insinuates that the queen herself needs to be schooled, needs to be disciplined” (*Spenser’s Secret Career*, 104). Yet the flirtation in the proems always invites us to readjust our eyes to see the optical illusion in its other presentation – always the other presentation, no matter which one we are currently looking at.
- 16 Spenser compares Elizabeth to the sun and to the moon at I.pr.4, II.pr.5, and III.pr.4.
- 17 About an earlier passage, the proem to Book III, Anderson notes that “the present embodiment also begins to vie with the antique image, living Queen with Antiquity, and, indeed, to challenge it” (“In Living Colours,” 50).
- 18 Berry submits that when Spenser splits Elizabeth into an ideal and a fallible queen, he gives himself room to reduce the status of Petrarchism:

The Faerie Queene accorded Elizabeth as a female beloved greater imaginative or spiritual powers than ever before. Simultaneously, it restricted the exercise of these powers in the world of human affairs, by distinguishing between two different spheres of existence, the mythic and the historical, which paralleled the Platonic division between an ideal and a real world. . . The exercise of power in this historical dimension, where no sign is free of ambiguity and mutability, is defined by Spenser in patriarchal rather than matriarchal terms. Petrarchan or neoplatonic attitudes to women are now interpreted as potentially destructive for the masculine subject who is limited both by bodily and by historical necessity” (*Chastity*, 153–154).

Whereas Berry believes that Spenser “seems to have become increasingly uneasy about the limitations imposed upon [the questing subject’s] historical effectiveness by his dependence upon an idea of woman,” however, I see in *The Faerie Queene* a fascination with this very uneasiness and a willingness to flirt with these limitations.

- 19 Applicable articles by Montrose include “Celebration,” “Gifts,” and “Shaping Fantasies.” For Marcus’s treatment, see “Shakespeare’s Comic Heroines,” *passim*. Stone makes the point about the Maids of Honor (*Crisis*, 277).
- 20 Bellamy’s “Vocative” is a Derridean interpretation of Spenser’s distance from Elizabeth as purely productive of an unavoidable frustration and failure. Where Bellamy concludes that this distance equals futility, I am arguing that it may also make room for a not entirely futile eros.
- 21 Compare Goldberg, speaking of the monster in Spenser’s church of Gerioneo: “The voice of the monster – is it the voice of the poet? – inscribes the inevitability of that cherished self-destructiveness as the sustaining condition of power” (*James I*, 11).
- 22 The *Amoretti* suitor complains of his lady, “What then can moue her? if nor merth nor mone, / she is no woman, but a sencelesse stone” (Sonnet 54). By teasingly reproving Elizabeth for her hard heart in the proem to Book IV and then decrying the “stonie” state of Elizabeth’s England in the proem to Book V, Spenser engineers an exchange between the Petrarchan terms of his sonnets and the political terms of *A View of the Present State of Ireland*, where he invokes the stony tables of the law to sanction a slaughter of the stubborn Irish, toward whom he believes Elizabeth has shown excessive pity.
- 23 Lyly employs this erotically and intellectually provocative technique at the end of *Gallathea* (1592; published in the *Complete Works*). Immediately after Venus declares she can break through the impasse that Gallathea and Phyllida have reached by falling in love with each other, we discover that we will be denied even a glimpse of the solution. Although Venus has promised to change one of the women into a man in order to enable them to marry, she does so only on the condition that they will not ask to know beforehand which of them will undergo the transformation. And then the play ends. In his coy withholding of his own conclusion, Lyly lets in a more provocative conclusion by default: because we do not know whether it will be Gallathea or Phyllida whom Venus’s magic will transform into a man, we are forced to walk away with the image of two women betrothed to each other. When in the epilogue Gallathea exhorts us to “yield to love, ladies, which lurketh under your eyelids whilst you sleep,” she is, willy nilly, urging us to embrace the sort of love exchanged by two women. By teasing us with the irresolution of a choice (Phyllida or Gallathea?) that seems important simply because of our curiosity but is, upon reflection, morally irrelevant, Lyly presents us with a question (can two women love one another this way?) that is impossible to reduce to a clearly defined choice.
- 24 As in the other three places where he uses the metaphor of plowing to describe his narration (III.xii.47a, IV.v.46, and V.iii.40), Spenser implicitly but vividly puns on the etymology of the word “verse,” which derives from the Latin *versus*, past participle of *vertere*, to turn. A *versus* is the turning of a plow, a furrow, a line, or a line of verse.
- 25 Dubrow and Parker both see Spenser as employing shifts within *The Faerie Queene* from epic passages to more personal genres and back again in order to represent seductive threats to his epic program. As Dubrow writes, “Petrarchism . . . represents that which impedes and questions epic values” (*Echoes of Desire*, 257). Parker usefully notes a switch from Spenser’s earlier

books, in which pastoral romance frequently leads the epic astray, to Book VI, in which the pastoral bower becomes “a fragile defense” against the threat of epic intrusions (*Inescapable*, 103). But if Parker inverts the relationship between epic and lyric once we get to Book VI, Dubrow comes closest to my sense of the relationship among the poem’s gendered modes when she argues that despite the threat that Petrarchism poses to Spenser’s epic, the “anticlousural impulse manifest in the repetitiveness of the Petrarchan tradition” is inextricably integrated into his epic values (*Echoes of Desire*, 258). When Spenser wrests Calidore from the pastoral world and from Pastorella, Spenser is not simply excluding himself from political power or resisting the seductiveness of pastoral retreat; he is running the risk of excluding himself from the feminine modes of his own poetic voice.

26 VII.vi.16; see pp. 94–101.

5. “‘WHO CAN THOSE VAST IMAGINATIONS FEED?’”: *THE CONCEALED FANCIES* AND THE PRICE OF HUNGER

1 Ezell briefly discusses the play’s emphasis upon companionate marriage (“Your Daughter,” 289–90). Her important central argument about Cavendish and Brackley is that whereas Starr wrote of them as though they were purely naïve, their *œuvre* demonstrates their participation in the challenging literary conversation of a family that was full of patrons and writers.

2 For discussions of Sidney’s *Stella* and of Spenser’s resident feminine imagination, see introduction and ch. 2. Bowerbank (“The Spider’s Delight”) discusses the staunch defense of women’s disorderly imaginations put up by Margaret Cavendish, who was several years younger than Jane Cavendish and Elizabeth Cavendish Brackley and who became their stepmother soon after they wrote *The Concealed Fancies*.

3 For Phillips on versionality, see introduction.

4 For a discussion of Spenser’s Penelope sonnet, see ch. 4.

5 See Starr, “*The Concealed Fancies*” 803–804.

6 For a discussion of Lust’s Cave in *FQ* IV.vii, see ch. 1.

7 III.iv.44–45. This and all subsequent quotations from *The Concealed Fancies* are from Cerasano and Wynne-Davies’ edition (CWD) except where I specifically cite Starr’s diplomatic transcript of the unique Bodleian manuscript (Rawlinson MS Poet.16, hereafter cited as B), having judged that CWD represents a significantly different meaning.

8 A word is missing in the Bodleian manuscript.

9 Braden maintains that the Petrarchan tradition “probably did more to encourage than to inhibit female literary activity” (“Gaspara Stampa,” 118). I tend to agree but do not therefore conclude, as Braden does, that twentieth-century explorations of the difficulties that many early modern women had fitting themselves into this tradition are misguided. We cannot take lightly the fact that Englishwomen such as Lady Mary Wroth were accused of being whores when they began to publish original work. At the same time, I find Waller’s assessment of the possibilities open to women writers unnecessarily narrow:

[Wroth's] stance as a reader of the position she is asked to occupy, as a woman, ranges from passive uneasiness to outright anger. She could simply read in the interpellated male default position and not notice. Or she could notice, in which case she becomes a split subject. Or she may resist, even if with great difficulty. In Wroth's poems there is evidence of all three reading strategies. (*Sidney*, 156).

The Petrarchan tradition offers more choices for women than these three uniformly painful ones; if nothing else, I hope my readings of Spenser, Sidney, Greville, *et al.* show this. As Jones says, "Niches for acceptable feminine positions could be found in most prevailing conventions" (*Currency of Eros*, 34). She contends that "the Petrarchan mode, in which a male poet yearns for an unattainable lady, could be regendered to guarantee the chastity of a woman poet . . . [T]he absence of the male beloved . . . guaranteed the speaker's purity" (*ibid.*, 34–35). These are important points, but since Jones has illustrated them amply, I do not need to pursue them. My own interests lie in the unacceptable, marginally acceptable, or surprising feminine positions to which, nonetheless, male authors give conditional room, and in which female authors sometimes place themselves by choice.

- 10 Donne, "To the Countess of Bedford at New Year's Tide."
- 11 CWD mention the relationship (*Concealed Fancies*, 212 n. 51).
- 12 *Wye as I hope to contynew Tattiny I longe to see thee married* B. *Why, as I hope to continue Tattinye! I long to see thee married* CWD.
- 13 *There is noe such marraces B. there are no such miracles* CWD. Tattinye may be punning on the men's "marred" language.
- 14 Although the verb "blow up" must indicate inflation rather than an explosion here, elsewhere Cavendish and Brackley do see a potential association in the two senses of the verb. Courtley insults Luceny's second suitor, an odious man named Corpolant, by telling him, "Your puffed-up bladder thinks to marry her, by reason she gave you the civility of the house, as being her father[s] friend, which modest courtesy blows your brain up as gun powder into folly . . ." (II.i).
- 15 For a discussion of Medusa's gaze from within, see ch. 3.
- 16 *one more*] CWD. *once more* B.
- 17 Compare Wall's discussion of female authors' use of "male objects of display" in "Our Bodies" (68).
- 18 My thanks to Frank Whigham for pointing out this pun.
- 19 Cf. *The Currency of Eros*, Jones's discussion of the negotiations between Renaissance women writers (primarily on the Continent) and the most powerful ideological systems of their cultures.
- 20 *triumphs, I would*] B. *triumphs. I would* CWD.
- 21 As Starr points out, the fact that the play has so many characters – thirty-six, including at least eighteen for men – makes one wonder whether its authors ever found enough relatives, friends, and servants to perform it ("*The Concealed Fancies*," 835 n.15).
- 22 Lecture, April 1984.
- 23 *mechanic wife*] *mechanical wife* CWD. *Meachanick wife* B.
- 24 *my grave my eternal happiness*] *my grave, my eternal, happiness* CWD. *my grave my eternall happynes* B. I take "grave" to be a noun, consistent with the Bodleian pointing and with Young Stellow's next comment.

6. CAUGHT IN THE ACT AT NUN APPLETON

- 1 For a look at this complex desire in Spenser, see especially the discussion of his Penelope sonnet in ch. 4, but ch. 3 also addresses the issue more generally.
- 2 This and all subsequent quotations from Marvell refer to Margoliouth's text.
- 3 Holstun's analysis (in "Lesbian Elegy") of the politics of homoeroticism in "Upon Appleton House" is valuable reading.
- 4 Representative arguments appear in Hodge (*Foreshortened Time*, 141–145); Chambers ("To the Abbyss," 152); and Wilcher (*Marvell*, 152).
- 5 Malcolmson ("The Garden Enclosed," 261), Røstvig (*Happy Man*, I.188–189), and O'Loughlin ("The Sober Frame," 139) write additional encomia to Maria.
- 6 See, e.g., Kelly ("Narcissus," 209–211) and Patterson (*Marvell*, 109). Marcus does say that Maria is "more warrior than gentle goddess of spring" (*Politics*, 244).
- 7 Other readers who take Maria's calming and purifying influence straightforwardly, albeit often complexly, include Cousins ("Upon Appleton House," 54, 65–66, 76–78) and many of the authors mentioned in the previous two notes.
- 8 Herrick, "Delight in Disorder," *Hesperides*, 1648. Marvell could also be thinking of another Herrick poem from *Hesperides*, "The Vine," in which the speaker dreams his penis has turned into a vine that crawls across, explores, imprisons, and invades Lucia's body.
- 9 Marvellians who explore the social, religious, and political messages in the woodbine and ivy stanzas include Marcus, *Politics*, 259; Hodge, *Foreshortened Time*, 154; O'Loughlin, "This Sober Frame," 135–137; Røstvig, *Happy Man*, I.183; Empson, "Natural Magic," 47–48; and Rogers, "Great Work," 228.
- 10 See Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers*, and Laqueur, *Making Sex*. One thinks, of course, of Lear's rising "mother."
- 11 Variations on the theme of retreat and nostalgia appear in Cousins, "Upon Appleton House," 54; Wilcher, *Marvell*, 153–163; Patterson, *Marvell*, 102–106; Cullen, *Spenser, Marvell*, 153, 172; Chambers, "To the Abbyss," 152; Hodge, *Foreshortened Time*, 141, 149–153; O'Loughlin, "This Sober Frame," 124, 128; Empson, "Natural Magic," 46; Everett, "Shooting of the Bears," 93–95; and Colie, "Echoing," 219–239.
- 12 *FQ* I.i.7–28; see ch. 2.
- 13 See ch. 2. Some of the critics who note the disorienting sensory data in "Upon Appleton House" are Hodge (*Foreshortened Time*, 142), Wilcher (*Marvell*, 156), and Colie ("Echoing," 181–190, 201–211, and 276).
- 14 "Appleton," st. 93. Wallace, *Destiny*, 235. Hodge also sees the nightingale as a figure for Maria (*Foreshortened Time*, 155).
- 15 Those who see allusions to Charles I in the stanzas about Thestylis carving the rail include Allen (*Image and Meaning*, 131–138) and Hodge (*Foreshortened Time*, 151); those who believe that the idea of Stuart allegory here is reductive or partial include Marcus (*Politics*, 249–250) and Wilcher (*Marvell*, 156).
- 16 *Hesperides*, in *Complete Poetry*, 330–331.

- 17 There are compatible, albeit significantly different, interpretations of the tortoise-hats in O’Loughlin (“This Sober Frame,” 141), Alpers (*Pastoral*, 65); and Colie (“*Echoing*,” 238). Parker and Mulryan mention that tortoises are emblems of chastity, but not in connection with Marvell (*Fat Ladies*, 105; “Tortoise,” 78–79). Barish (“Double Plot”) has one paragraph on the possible gendering of the tortoise-evasion scene in Jonson’s *Volpone*.
- 18 Pliny, IX.ix.154–155. Phidias’s painting or statue at Elis of Venus with her foot on a tortoise is not extant but is mentioned by most mythographers who picture the tortoise with Venus. In addition to the texts I discuss below, for representations of tortoises as male or neuter see Ligon (*Barbados*, 36), Hughes (*Physician*, sig. A6^v), and Camerarius (*Symbolorum et Emblematum ex Volatilibus*, no. 33). For additional authors who represent tortoises as female, see Ripa (*Iconologia*, 448), Alciati (*Index Emblematicus*, no. 196), Peacham (*Minerva*, sig. Bb₃), Servius (*Commentarii*, note to *Aen.*, 1.505), Camerarius (*Symbolorum et Emblematum centuriae tres*, II.91), and Robert Greene (*Works*, XII.241).
- 19 From Vincenzo Cartari, “Venere,” *Le Imagini de i dei de gli Antichi*, 541, trans. Mulryan, in “The Tortoise and the Lady” (Cartari’s work went through at least eight Latin and two English editions between 1566 and 1615): E leggendo appresso del medesimo, e di Eliano anchora la natura di questo animale, trovo, che gli antichi scultori dettero una bella, e santa ammonitione alle donne, mettendo la testuggine sotto il pie di Venere, percioche questa sa il pericolo à che va quando si congiunge con il maschio, conciosia che le bisogni riversarsi con la pancia in su, & il maschio, compito che ha il fatto suo, se ne va via, e lascia quella, che da se non puo ridrizzarsi, in preda à gli altri animali, ma sopra tutti all’aquila. Per la quale cosa essa con somma continenza si astiene dal coito, e fuggendo il maschio prepone la salute al libidinoso piacere, al quale è sforzata pure di consentire poi tocca da certa herba, che tutta l’accende di libidine, si che piu non teme poscia di cosa alcuna. Adunque le donne parimente hanno da considerare, à che pericolo si mettono quando perdono la honestà, e perciò deono fuggire i piaceri lascivi, & i libidinosi appetiti, se non quando le sforza à questi il debito del matrimonio per la successione della nuova prole.
- 20 Tortoises actually mate doggy-style rather than in the missionary position. According to herpetologist Joseph Butler (e-mail), however, the loser of a male–male combat may be left on his back to die in the sun. If Pliny mistook fighting between males for mating, Cartari’s “lovely and holy admonition to women” is ironically misplaced in more ways than one.
- 21 *nor*] Cooke. or F, Margoliouth.
- 22 Thanks to Frank Whigham for calling my attention to this connection between Marvell’s tortoises and the *Symposium*.
- 23 *Aminta*, Chorus to Act I.

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