

# Devoid of Guilty Shame: Ovidian Tendencies in Spenser's Erotic Poetry

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For loue is Lord of truth and loialtie,  
Lifting himselfe out of the lowly dust,  
On golden plumes vp to the purest skie,  
About the reach of loathly sinful lust

(“An Hymne in Honour of Loue,” 176–79)

Edmund Spenser struggles to reconcile the erotic with the sacred throughout his career as a writer.<sup>1</sup> The foregoing quatrain exemplifies such moral earnestness, a need to expunge lust from his poetry. Failing at that, he demonizes it; failing at that also, he renames it desire. This pattern manifests itself in his problematic works that celebrate physical love, such as this first, and most sensual, of the *Fowre Hymnes*

1. Unless otherwise noted, all Spenserian texts cited here follow the orthography and lineation of *The Works of Edmund Spenser, a Variorum Edition*, 11 vols., ed. Edwin Greenlaw, Charles Grosvenor Osgood, Frederick Morgan Padelford, and Ray Heffner (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1932–57). I use the following standard acronyms in parenthetical citation: “An Hymne in Honour of Loue” (HL); “An Hymne in Honour of Beautie” (HB); “An Hymne of Heauenly Loue” (HHL); “An Hymne of Heauenly Beautie” (HHB); *Epithalamion* (*Ep.*); *The Faerie Queene* (*FQ*); *Amoretti* (*Am.*). In the hope of avoiding confusion with this latter, I use no acronym for Ovid’s *Amores*. However, for Christopher Marlowe’s translation of these elegies, I use the acronym *AOE*. My edition of this text is *All Ovids Elegies: 3 Bookes. By C. M. Epigrams by J. D.* (Middleborough [i.e., London]: n.p., n.d., ca. 1595), with the lineation of most modern editions such as Fredson Bowers, ed., *The Complete Works of Christopher Marlowe*, 2 vols. (Cambridge University Press, 1973), 2:309–421. My edition of the Latin Ovid is *The Metamorphoses*, 2 vols., trans. Frank Justus Miller, 3rd ed., rev. G. P. Goold (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977). My edition of Golding’s translation, *The xv. Bookes of P. Ouidius Naso, entytuled Metamorphosis*, is *Shakespeare’s Ovid, Being Arthur Golding’s Translation of the “Metamorphoses” (1567)*, ed. W. H. D. Rowse (London, 1904; repr., New York: Norton, 1966). My acronyms are *Met.* and *XVB*, respectively.

(1596). The more strident his attempts at separation, the more that earthly and celestial types of *amor* hopelessly intertwine themselves in his canon, “opposing irreconcilable conceptions” that “occur simultaneously,” as Ilona Bell explains.<sup>2</sup> A cynic might say that Spenser’s stubborn flesh, his “too constant stiffness” (*Am.* 84.12), overmasters the spirit, since descriptions, tableaux, and allegories concerning *amor* burn more ardently in his canon than the less enticing matter of *caritas*. Yet his Cupid seems Christlike: “thy glory seemeth more, / By so hard handling those which best thee serue” (HL 162–63).<sup>3</sup> Finally, as Enid Welsford says, this conflation of the sacred and the erotic “is neither heretical nor sinful.”<sup>4</sup>

The double-edged hermeneutic of the medieval Ovidian moralizing tradition is analogous to Spenser’s technique in crafting his love poetry.<sup>5</sup> For example, the fourteenth-century *Ovide moralisé* allegorizes Jupiter, Danae, and Perseus as Father, Blessed Virgin, and Son, much to the scandal of Luther and the amusement of Rabelais.<sup>6</sup> The

2. See Ilona Bell’s indispensable *Elizabethan Women and the Politics of Courtship* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 157.

3. Spenser addresses Cupid as “My guide, my God, my victor, and my king” (HL 305), and describes Venus as if she were able to resurrect the dead: “show what wondrous powre your beauty hath, / That can restore a damned wight from death” (HB 286–87). Einar Bjorvand analyzes the interrelatedness of “An Hymne in Honor of Loue” and “An Hymne of Heauenly Loue,” especially the linkage of Eros and Christ on the linguistic level. See “Spenser’s Defence of Poetry: Some Structural Aspects of the *Fowre Hymnes*,” in *Fair Forms: Essays in English Literature from Spenser to Jane Austen*, ed. Marie-Sofie Røstvig (Cambridge: Brewer, 1975), 19–24.

4. In these bracing words, Welsford stresses the unabashedly erotic nature of “An Hymn of Heauenly Loue”: “Without the grace of Love one cannot worship Love; whom Love loveth he chasteneth, in Heaven Love will become the sole object of adoration. Is this not to place the Ovidian Amor on the throne of the Christian God? Yes, but not necessarily with any impious or defiant intention. . . . In itself, this is neither heretical nor sinful.” See *Spenser: Fowre Hymnes [and] Epithalamion: A Study of Edmund Spenser’s Doctrine of Love* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1967), 40–42.

5. Two basic accounts of this tradition accessible to the nonspecialist reader are Dorothy M. Robathan, “Ovid in the Middle Ages,” in *Ovid*, ed. J. W. Binns (London: Routledge, 1973), 191–209; and Daniel Javitch, “Rescuing Ovid from the Allegorizers,” *Comparative Literature* 30 (1978): 97–107. However, S. Clark Hulse’s subtle and nuanced work on this material a quarter-century ago is still unparalleled, especially his summary of the division between the humanist and the moralizing traditions, which serves as a corrective to Robathan and Javitch. See *Metamorphic Verse: The Elizabethan Minor Epic* (Princeton University Press, 1981), 244–47.

6. Luther, from the *Commentary on Genesis* (ca. 1535–45): “At first allegories originated from stupid and idle monks. Finally they spread so widely that some men turned Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* into allegories. They made a laurel tree Mary, and Apollo they made Christ.” See Don Cameron Allen, *Mysteriously Meant: The Rediscovery of Pagan Symbolism*

anonymous maker thus Christianizes his pagan materials yet eroticizes the most sacred of stories in the very act of joining such disparate entities—although one may not be prepared to think of Mary receiving a shower of gold in her lap or to accept Perseus as one's redeemer. Similarly, Spenser's use of scriptural and liturgical echoes reveals an attempt to make sacred the earthly, erotic forms of the Petrarchan sonnet sequence and the Catullian epithalamion, a transformation that exposes the sexual dimension of the ideals of heavenly love and beauty—although one may not be prepared to countenance Venus and her little son as personal saviors, or to hear “Hymen io Hymen, Hymen” echoing across the rough stone walls of an Irish country church. Yet some would say with Welsford that Spenser's poetic capaciousness makes both hearing and believing possible. As Laura Getty optimistically generalizes, he creates “an earthly form of spiritual love.”<sup>7</sup> This accomplishment, I argue, depends very much on Ovid's help.

Ovidian eroticism asserts itself in *Amoretti* and *Epithalamion* (1595) and *Fowre Hymnes*. For this late poetry, the Spenser *Variorum* tabulates allusions from the expected medium of the *Metamorphoses* (ca. 2–8 CE). However, the Ovidian work most analogous to these Spenserian texts

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*and Allegorical Interpretation in the Renaissance* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970), 240. Rabelais, from *Gargantua* (1546): “Croiez vous en vostre foy qu'oncques Homere, escrivent l'*Iliade* et *Odyssee*, pensast es allegories lesquelles de luy ont calfreté Plutrache, Heraclides Ponticq, Eustatie, Phornute, et ce que d'iceulx Politian a desrobé? Si le croiez, vous n'approchez ne de pieds ne de mains à mon opinion, qui decrete icelles aussi peu avoir esté songées d'Homere que d'Ovide en ses *Metamorphoses* les sacremens de l'Evangile, lesquelz un Frere Lubin, vray croque lardon, s'est efforcé demonstrer, si d'aventure il rencontroit gens aussi folz que luy, et (comme dict le proverbe) couvercle digne du chaudron.” (But do you faithfully believe that Homer, in writing his *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, ever had in mind the allegories squeezed out of him by Plutarch, Heraclides Ponticus, Eustathius, and Phornutus, and which Politian afterwards stole from them in his turn? If you do, you are not within a hand's or a foot's length of my opinion. For I believe them to have been as little dreamed of by Homer as the Gospel mysteries were by Ovid in his *Metamorphoses*: a case which a certain Friar Lubin, a true bacon-picker, has actually tried to prove, in the hope that he may meet others as crazy as himself and—as the proverb says—a lid to fit his kettle.) text: *La vie très horrifique du grand Gargantua*, ed. V. L. Saulnier and Jean-Yves Pouilloux (Paris: Flammarion, 1968), 45; translation: *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, trans. J. M. Cohen (1955; repr., New York: Penguin, 1983), 38–39.

7. Laura Getty, “Circumventing Petrarch: Subreading Ovid's *Tristia* in Spenser's *Amoretti*,” *Philological Quarterly* 79 (2000): 297. Alexander Dunlop suggests that Spenser is closer to Dante than to Petrarch in his attempts to integrate the two loves. See *The Yale Edition of the Shorter Poems of Edmund Spenser*, ed. William A. Oram, Einar Bjorvand, Ronald Bond, Thomas H. Cain, Alexander Dunlop, and Richard Schell (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 587.

is one that scholars have infrequently mentioned in this context, the *Amores* (16 BCE). This linked series of elegies that recounts the sexual pursuit of a woman, Corinna, by a somewhat unreliable narrator who identifies himself as the *desultor amoris* (1.3.15), served as the most important ancient precursor and therefore model for the sonnet sequence: *La vita nuova* (ca. 1283–93), the *Rime sparse* (ca. 1327–68), the work of the Pléiade (fl. 1550), *Astrophil and Stella* (ca. 1585), Shakespeare's *Sonnets* (1609)—and Spenser's.<sup>8</sup> Since the titles *Amoretti* and *Amores* are linguistically cognate, it is curious that scholars have rarely seen a relationship between them.<sup>9</sup> More significant parallels between the two poets abound, and readers have always noticed other analogues between Ovid's erotic poetry and Spenser's. His first real commentator, E. K., mentions this text in a note to the "Januarye" eclogue of *The Shepheardes Calender* (1579), so his use of the *Amores* can be traced to the beginning of his career as the New Poet.<sup>10</sup> Christopher

8. "non sum desultor amoris" (I am no circus-rider of love) (*Amores* 1.3.15). Although the speaker disavows the label, his subsequent behavior suggests that he seeks to personify it. See my *Harmful Eloquence: Ovid's "Amores" from Antiquity to Shakespeare* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 1–38.

9. Syrthe Pugh's *Spenser and Ovid* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005) discusses some aspects of such a relationship, albeit cursorily (152–58). Truly revisionist study of the *Amoretti* may be said to begin with Carol V. Kaske's article, "Spenser's *Amoretti* and *Epithalamion* of 1595: Structure, Genre, and Numerology," *English Literary Renaissance* 8 (1978): 271–95. Here she challenges traditional readings of the sequence by such esteemed critics as C. S. Lewis, G. K. Hunter, Louis Martz, and J. W. Lever, all of whom seem to think it boring, arbitrarily constructed, unerotic, or glib. Kaske's most important critical successor in this dimension, Bell, argues that the *Amoretti* is a remarkable text because it is none of these things, and "its devout, quiet, harmonious pattern is continually controverted by the presumption of a 'self-assured' female reader who undoes Spenser's rhetoric, refutes his conceptions of women, love, sex, and marriage, and prompts him to undertake a far more probing exploration of what it means for the lyric to be in the business of transacting a courtship" (Bell, *Elizabethan Women*, 184). Getty implies that Spenser uses the persona of Ovid's *Tristia* as a model in *Amoretti* and *Epithalamion* of the devoted and doting husband, one of his revisions of the anguished Petrarchism of sonnet tradition: "By following the advice of Petrarch on how to imitate correctly, Spenser surpasses Petrarch at his own game by writing a Petrarchan sonnet sequence (a glaring imitation) that is actually a deep imitation of another work entirely," i.e., the *Tristia* (Getty, "Circumventing Petrarch," 299). She makes the excellent point that Ovid portrays himself as a devoted and doting husband in the exile poetry, and that this was Spenser's model for his revision of Petrarch in the *Amoretti* (293), although she does not include the important qualification that the exiled Ovid's desperate wish to return to Rome provided the motivations for adopting such a guise.

10. E. K.'s note to line 60: "Ouide shadoweth hys loue vnder the name of Corynna, which of some is supposed to be Iulia, the emperor Augustus his daughter, and wyfe to Agryppa" (see Greenlaw et al., *Spenser Variorum*, 7:18).

Marlowe's notorious and contemporaneous translation, *All Ovids Elegies* (ca. 1595–99), publicly burned by the common hangman, may also have been known to Spenser. It allows us to hear how this text, like all other renderings during this Elizabethan *aetas Ovidiana*, sounded in English to early moderns.<sup>11</sup>

Since an utterance such as "Ile hate, if I can: if not, loue gainst my will" (*AOE* 3.10.35) may have been quite familiar to Spenser, his analogous line, "this continuall cruell ciuill warre, / the which my selfe against my selfe doe make" (*Am.* 44.5–6), suggests how the *Amoretti* and *Amores* (Marlovian or otherwise) illuminate one another. He also understood the reciprocity between the *Amores* and the *Metamorphoses*, and learned from it, because the same types of relationships seem to exist between the erotic themes of *The Faerie Queene* and his late nondramatic poetry. A lyric or elegiac speaker meditates on the chaos of love that the epic presents in narrative form. So Spenser uses Ovidian *ars* to intertwine the erotic and the sacred when he cannot reconcile the two, an activity not so much hopeless or shameful as it is shameless.

## I

Loe I confesse, I am thy captiue I,  
And hold my conquered hands for thee to tie.

(*AOE* 1.2.19–20)

I haue beene wanton, therefore am perplext,  
And with mistrust of the like measure vext.

(*AOE* 1.4.45–46)

She drawes chaste women to incontinence,  
Nor doth her tongue want harmefull eloquence.

(*AOE* 1.[8].19–20)<sup>12</sup>

Some critics of the last two decades have read the *Amoretti* as a record of the speaker's unwitting exposure of his failures as a lover and his

11. For a textual history of the editions of Marlowe's translation, see Fredson Bowers, "The Early Editions of Marlowe's *Ovid's Elegies*," *Studies in Bibliography* 25 (1972): 149–72. Most of the Ovidian canon was translated into English between 1567 and 1640. See A. W. Pollard and G. R. Redgrave, *A Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England, Scotland, & Ireland and of English Books Printed Abroad 1475–1640*, 3 vols., 2nd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1974–91), 2:354–57.

12. In the Middleborough text, this elegy is misnumbered 5. It is actually *Amores* 1.8.

need for education by the lady, a tempting conclusion to reach.<sup>13</sup> Yet Spenser's middle-aged lover, like the *desultor*, represents no authorial alter ego but the poet's clever Ovidian sabotage of his narrator from a distance. This staged self-implication hardly seems unusual when considered in the context of Spenser's other work. He undermines each wailing lover who populates *The Shepheardes Calender*, most notably Colin in the "June" eclogue—as well as the mature and bitter version of this figure in *Colin Clouts come home againe* (1595). Book 3 of *The Faerie Queene* (1590) would appear to overpopulate itself with personifications of How Not to Love, from Busirane, a pessimistic vision of the love poet who deforms subject (love) as well as object (women) with his pen, to the frightened Florimell, the lustful Malecasta, the captive Amoret, the sulking Scudamour, the deservedly cuckolded Malbecco, the lustful and superficial Paridell and Hellenore, and even the badly confused and confusing Britomart. Hence no single abstraction can completely trump any other, just as Ovid himself crazily sets various storytellers against one another in various nexuses of the *Metamorphoses*. For example, when the daughters of Minyas tell the stories of Pyramus and Thisbe, Mars and Venus, Leucothoe and Clytie, and Salmacis and Hermaphroditus (*Met.* 4.1–415), one must consider not only the relationships that the tales of love have to each other but also the situational context of the tellers and their gender as well as their refusal to participate in the rites of Bacchus, for which the god transforms them to bats. Their literal weaving mimetically evokes the polyphonic stories they create and symbolizes the delusive and indeterminable craft of storytelling itself.

The *desultor* and the *Amoretti* persona differ in one important respect. Of the latter, Alexander Dunlop observes: "Because we understand more about the lover than he does about himself, he is inescapably ironic."<sup>14</sup> I would amplify this valid point in the following manner. Though the ironic distance between both authors and their speakers makes it obvious that the unreliability of the latter sometimes borders on idiocy, the *Amoretti* lover acknowledges his failure of perception, whereas in Ovid, no such enlightenment seems to occur. The capacity for self-delusion is itself metamorphic and, as Richard

13. See especially Donna Gibbs, *Spenser's "Amoretti": A Critical Study* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1990), 61–138, as well as Mary A. Villeponteaux, "'With her own will beguyld': The Captive Lady in Spenser's *Amoretti*," *Explorations in Renaissance Culture* 14 (1988): 29–40.

14. Dunlop, in *Shorter Poems of Edmund Spenser*, 594 (see n. 7 above).

Lanham implies, characteristic of the *auctor* in question.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, it is difficult to imagine the guilt-ridden speaker of *Amoretti* 84, desperate to contain his sparks of filthy lustful flame, meditating on the *membrum virile*, as in Shakespeare's Sonnet 151, or berating it, as in *Amores* 3.7, Maximianus's fifth elegy (ca. 550), or Rochester's "The Imperfect Enjoyment" (1680) as it insensibly weeps in his hand—even on what might have been a challenging wedding night in Ireland, especially for a middle-aged man hoping not to disappoint his young bride.<sup>16</sup>

The three quotations from *All Ovids Elegies* that begin this section approximate some of the characteristics that Spenser saw as important precedents for a speaker in a sequence of erotic poems: the callow sexual adventurer who claims to be enslaved by love but who does not know what this emotional state truly signifies; the deceptive speaker mistrustful of others because of his very propensity for deceit; the angry lover who resents an experienced older woman warning his beloved of such perfidy before he perpetrates it against her. As he confronts the sonnet tradition, Spenser complements these classical conventions or moral mutability with an analogy to Ovid's favorite god, Proteus. In *The Faerie Queene*, "To dreadfull shapes, he did himselfe transforme" in an attempt to seduce Florimell:

Now like a Gyaunt, now like to a feend,  
Then lyke a Centaure, then like to a storme,  
Raging within the waues: thereby he weend  
Her will to win vnto his wished end.

(3.8.41)

Thomas Roche observes that Proteus attempts "to win Florimell's *willing* consent," as opposed to the rude Chorl and the crude Fisher,

15. In *The Motives of Eloquence: Literary Rhetoric in the Renaissance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), Lanham discusses Ovid as an archrhetorician. In his chapter "The Fundamental Strategies: Plato and Ovid" (48–65), he argues that Plato is an essentialist who champions man as a unique creature who finds reality within himself, whereas Ovid, shallow and insincere, is a species of Huizinga's *homo ludens*, who may not be sincere because he must create many identities—very much in keeping with the many he adopts in his poetry.

16. See "Loue is too young to know what conscience is," and the impotence poem, "At non formosa est, at non bene culta puella" (Either she was foule, or her attire was bad) (*Amores* 3.7, numbered 3.6 in the Marlowe translation). The Earl of Rochester needs no introduction, but the "imperfect enjoyment" genre in which he participates is also upheld in late antiquity by a less well-known poet, Maximianus Etruscus (sixth century CE), whose six elegies discuss the plight of old age, the fifth most famously about diminished sexual capacity. His most modern edition is *Elegiae*, ed. Richard Webster (Princeton University Press, 1900).

who would employ brutality over persuasion.<sup>17</sup> In this way he represents a kind of *aurea mediocritas* between their extremes. Such technique approximates what the maker of sonnets and other courtly forms employs to win his lady. He changes his form into a new body, rhetorically speaking, or as Spenser explains it in another context, “the refyned mynd doth newly fashion” materials “Vnto a fairer forme” (HL 192–93). Abraham Fraunce reads the sea-god as an allegory of the intellectual process, and thereby of the potential one: one who “so wisely did apply himselfe, and frame his wit to euery particuler accident, that he was said to turne and transforme himselfe to any kinde of shape.”<sup>18</sup> This trick is worthy of the amorphous *auctor* himself, who recreates Proteus in other divinities in the *Metamorphoses* such as Morpheus, a son of Sleep, “artificem simulatoremque figurae” (craftsman and imitator of the human form) (*Met.* 11.634). This epithet accounts for Spenser very well, as does Arthur Golding’s elaboration on it in his translation of the *Metamorphoses* (1567):

*Morph* the feyner of mannes shape, a craftye lad.  
None other could so conningly expresse mans verrye face,  
His gesture and his sound of voyce, and manner of his pace,  
Toogither with his woonted weede, and woonted phrase of talk.

(XVB 11.736–39)

Like Ovid and his signature god who epitomizes his epic, Spenser does not hold the same shape for long, nor should he. The male Ovidian poet, a crafty lad indeed, uses his words to morph into a giant, fiend, centaur, or storm to win his subject’s will unto his wished end.

Since speakers in erotic sequences, whether elegiac or lyric, ancient or early modern, seem driven by the same biology, Marlowe’s Ovidian persona may be a younger version of the middle-aged man who narrates the *Amoretti*. Yet he appears less similar to the bridegroom who presides over the ceremonies of the *Epithalamion* and the Neoplatonic

17. Thomas Roche, *The Kindly Flame: A Study of the Third and Fourth Books of Spenser’s “Faerie Queene”* (Princeton University Press, 1964), 159.

18. “Plato compareth him to the wrangling of brabbling sophisters: and some there be that hereby vnderstand, the truth of things obscured by so many deceiuable appearances: Lastly there want not others, which meane hereby the intellectual parte of mans minde, which vnles it seriously and attentiuely bend it selfe to the contemplation of things, shall neuer attaine to the truth, as Proteus would neuer reueale his propheticall knowledge, but first did turne and winde himself euery way to escape.” See *The Third Part of the Countesse of Pembrokes Iuychurch, Entituled Amyntas Dale. Wherein are the most conceited tales of the Pagan Gods in English Hexameters together with their auncient descriptions and Philosophical Explications* (London: Printed for Thomas Woodcock, 1592), sigs. 22v–23r.

sage of the *Fowre Hymnes*. Granted, an aged *desultor* probably would not have regretted having composed “An Hymne in Honour of Loue” and “An Hymne in Honour of Beautie” in “the greener times of my youth,” or fretted (disingenuously?) to the Countesses of Cumberland and Warwick that young people like himself, “being too vehemently caried with that kind of affection, do rather sucke out poyson to their strong passion, then hony to their honest delight.”<sup>19</sup> Still, the groom’s pathological concern with detail in his wedding song and the sage’s obsessive attempt to divide *amor* from *caritas* in the *Hymnes* suggest that Spenser intended some ironic distance between author and speaker in these compositions as well. He happily undermines grave sententiae such as this: “louers eyes more sharply sighted bee / Then other mens, and in deare loues delight / See more then any other eyes can see” (HB 232–34).<sup>20</sup> In this sense, the *desultor* and Spenser’s personae are equally sightless, spawn of the terribly deluded Narcissus: “by piecemale being spent and wasted through desire, / Did he consume and melt away with Cupids secret fire” (*XVB* 3.615–16).

Of the three speakers, the *Amoretti* persona is closest to Ovid’s in the *Amores* in the matter of self-delusion. His elaborate phalanxes of disingenuous explanation and argument make his reliability constantly suspect. Sonnet 86 rebukes any critic who questions the purity of his love as the owner of a “Venemous toung tipt with vile adders sting” (*Am.* 86.1), after several poems in which he upbraids his subject for her failure to love him: “ye cruell one, what glory can be got, / in slaying him that would liue gladly yours?” (57.11–12). Early in the sequence, he appears to criticize those who think his lady guilty of the root of the Seven Deadly Sins: “Rudely thou wrongest my deare harts desire, / In finding fault with her too portly pride” (5.1–2). Yet, disingenuously, only he finds such fault, over and over and over again. He undermines his submissive position as a suitor as soon as he states it: “lowly still vouchsafe to looke on me, / such lowlinesse shall make you lofty be” (13.13–14). If his “lowlinesse” will make her “lofty” because he writes about her, he must think that his poetry raises him. Like the *desultor* and Petrarch, he relishes his suffering: “Ne doe I wish . . . / to be acquit from my continuall smart” (42.5–6), which the wise philosopher of the *Hymnes* explains in this way: “th’euils which poore louers greeue,” he sayd, “Doe make a louers life a wretches hell” (HL 258, 265). The

19. Edmund Spenser, *Fowre Hymnes* (London: William Ponsonby, 1596), sig. Aiiir.

20. It could well be argued that “An Hymne in Honour of Loue” represents self-conscious spiritual error by the poet in praise of Cupid. Yet Edgar Wind observes that it is a Neoplatonic tradition to say that the blind passions of love enable the mind’s eye. See Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance*, 2nd ed. (London: Faber, 1968), 62.

*Amoretti* speaker would concur, an old man curiously inexperienced, against type, “I, vntrainde in louers trade” (*Am.* 51.5), one who will say to Cupid himself that he is “too full” of him (HB 3). And the *Metamorphoses*, on which both sequences rely, has no dearth of self-deluded, changeable, fickle victims of the little love god, beginning with the first, Apollo, whom he humiliates for his hubristic disrespect, and not by chance the eventual patron of poets as a result of such humiliation. In the ur-paradigm of all such pursuits, Apollo tells his Daphne, just as the *desultor* and Spenser’s speaker remind their own objects of pursuit: “Thou doest not know poore simple soule, God wote thou dost not knowe, / From whome thou fleest. For if thou knew, thou wouldste not flee me so” (*XVB* 1.625–26). Yes, she does; yes, she would. At least there is ample room for such an ironic reading in both Spenser’s text and Ovid’s.

## II

My spotlesse life, which but to Gods giues place,  
Naked simplicitie, and modest grace.

(*AOE* 1.3.13–14)

Heere I display my lewd and loose behaiour

(*AOE* 2.4.4)

Ovid’s *desultor* displays such broad contradictions in his self-description that he seems not just unreliable, but also a liar, as the above quotations, taken together, imply. Spenser’s speaker, careening between moods and sonnets, sometimes approximates his forebear, especially when he makes his celestial assurances about love and beauty, although his simple Christian concern with chastity may appear naïve in comparison with his ancient predecessor’s curious anxiety about sexual fidelity in the midst of an adulterous relationship.<sup>21</sup> The plaintive “Ah why hath nature to so hard a hart, / giuen so goodly giftes of beauties grace?” (*Am.* 31.1–2) radically undermines the concluding couplet of the preceding poem in the sequence: “Such is the powre of loue in gentle mind, / that it can alter all the course of kynd” (30.13–14). The power of love, it seems, has had no effect on the speaker’s mind,

21. Or as Angus Fletcher explains it, “Virginity is simply the fixated state of which chastity is the perfected flowering form” (Fletcher, *The Prophetic Moment: An Essay on Spenser* [University of Chicago Press, 1971], 97). For an article devoted exclusively to the subject, see Lesley W. Brill, “Chastity as Ideal Sexuality in the *Faerie Queene* III,” *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* 11 (1971): 15–26.

gentle or no, as he berates his lady for her failure to love him and continues his attempt to compel love “by maistry.” This comprises a familiar Spenserian bifurcating pattern that one may observe in the *Amoretti* from the beginning. The poetry itself will be happy when it beholds “that Angels blessed looke, / my soules long lacked foode, my heauens blis” (1.11–12). But the next sonnet suggests that all may not be so happy, the speaker afflicted with “Vnquiet thought,” “inward bale,” and passion trapped in his “inner part, / in which thou lurkest lyke to vipers brood” (2.1, 2, 5–6). And his beloved may not always make him stand amazed “at wondrous sight of so celestiall hew” (3.8) or appear to be “full of the liuing fire, / Kindled aboue vnto the maker neere” (8.1–2). Instead, she may merit the epithet “fayrest proud” (2.9), a motif to which Spenser returns with some frequency and which climaxes in *Amoretti* 27: “Faire proud now tell me why should faire be proud” (1). His heart, he says, burns “in flames of pure and chast desyre” (22.12) with “such loue, not lyke to lusts of baser kynd” (6.3), but it is actually subject to those aforementioned sparks of filthy lustful flame (84.1–2) that determine almost everything he does. He resembles a type of Pygmalion who “woondreth at his Art, / And of his counterfetted corse conceyeth love in hart” (*XVB* 10.271–72).

Celestial matters occasion celestial posturing in Spenser's lover and result in even more egregious self-exposure. The lady's eyes do not serve as moving blinds for armed *putti* who shoot out their “darts to base affections wound.” Instead, they effect the potential for virtue within: “Angels come to lead fraile mindes to rest / in chast desires on heauenly beauty bound” (*Am.* 8.6–8). In an entire (and entirely conventional) sonnet on the organs of sight, the speaker concludes, “to the Maker selfe they likest be, / whose light doth lighten all that here we see” (9.13–14). One can almost hear the *desultor's* sugary “Accept him that will serue thee all his youth, / Accept him that will loue with spotlesse truth” (*AOE* 1.3.5–6) and suspect that underneath lies the dubiety we eventually discover: “let thine eyes constrained learne to weepe” (1.8.83). For Spenser's lover turns on his lady when she fails to love him with a kind of furor not anticipated by Ficino and his school. Her “freewill” is “licentious blisse,” and she is a “Tyranresse” (*Am.* 10.3–4). Rather than a desire to revere her, he reveals a more pernicious wish to be able to laugh at her “as she doth laugh at me and makes my pain her sport” (10.14). In the Ovidian love's war that the suitor often loses, the *Amoretti* lady is a “cruell warriour” who “Ne wilbe moou'd with reason or with rewth, / to graunt small respit to my restlesse toile” (11.5–6), as if she were obligated to do so. Also, “her foot she in my necke doth place, / and tread my life downe in the lowly floure,” more “cruell and more saluage wylde, / then either Lyon or

the Lyonesse," who "taketh glory in her cruelnesse" (20.3–4, 9–10, 12). She is "a new Pandora," "to wicked men a scourge" (24.8, 11), "my scourge," even (13). Spenser's lover, it seems, has taught his eyes to weep for nefarious purposes, much in need of reforming, transparently Ovidian in a way that Isabella Whitney memorably and mercilessly anatomizes in another context thirty years earlier:

Some vse the teares of Crocodiles,  
 contrary to their hart:  
 And yf they cannot always weepe,  
 they wet their Cheekes by Art.  
 Ouid, within his Arte of loue,  
 doth teach them this same knacke,  
 To wet their hād, & touch their eies:  
 so oft as teares they lacke.  
 Why haue ye such deceit in store:  
 haue you such crafty wile:  
 Lesse craft thē this god knows wold soone  
 vs simple soules begile.  
 And wyll ye not leaue of: but still  
 delude vs in this wise:  
 Sith it is so, we trust we shall,  
 take hede to fained lies.<sup>22</sup>

Such souls are rarely as simple as they claim, and habitually take heed to feigned lies. It never seems to occur to a male speaker in a sonnet sequence that his subject can visualize his devices and trumperies even before he conceives and executes them, a Daphne predisposed to flee, even without the aid of that leaden arrow.

Spenser's lover tacitly, even unconsciously, criticizes himself in finding fault with the lady, in the manner of his classical predecessor. His tendency to flash his "hungry eyes through greedy couetize" (*Am.* 35.1) does not exactly amount to lewd and loose behavior, but his capacity to be self-absorbed "lyke *Narcissus vaine*" (7) approaches the narcissism of the *desultor*, as well. *Amoretti* 23 exemplifies this phenomenon and seems disconcerting in other ways:

22. "The admonition by the Auctor, to all yong Gentlewomen: And to al other Maids being in Loue," in *The copie of a letter, lately written in meeter, by a yonge gentilwoman To her unconstant louer* (London: Richard Jones, 1567), sig. A6r. In the *Ars Amatoria* (1.659–62), a text that Whitney would have had to have read in Latin, the *praeceptor Amoris* advises his charges to feign grief for the purposes of seduction. For discussions of Whitney, see Danielle Clarke, *The Politics of Early Modern English Women's Writing* (London: Longman, 2001), and Lynette McGrath, *Subjectivity and Women's Poetry in Early Modern England: "Why on the Ridge Should She Desire to Go?"* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 123–66.

*Penelope* for her *Vlisses* sake,  
 Deviz'd a Web her wooers to deceaue:  
 in which the worke that she all day did make  
 the same at night she did againe vnreave [i.e., unweave]

(1-4)

Perhaps at this point a reader expects the extension of the analogy in a conventional direction. The speaker's lady is faithful, or artistic, or even an Arachne, metamorphosed into a spider. He wanders in search of her, or is one of many suitors who fails to obtain her. But things take a curious turn indeed:

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.

(5-8)

The first two lines suggest that, yes, he is simply another suitor, one of those who furthest come behind, as Wyatt puts it in a famous translation from Petrarch, and that the "Damzell" uses Penelope's "subtile craft" of unweaving to "shonne" her middle-aged lover's advances. But the conclusion of the quatrain essentially fractures the analogy. The speaker suddenly becomes the weaver whose work his lady strangely and comically mars: "with one looke she spils that long I sponne, / and with one word my whole years work doth rend" (11-12). Does such metaphorical slippage reveal a flaw in the persona's reasoning, perhaps overcome by passion and disappointment? Perhaps not. This transformation from the woman weaving to the male speaker himself performing this task (literally in the lines and metaphorically in the poem and elsewhere) epitomizes Ovid's metamorphic technique. It also alludes to the larger competition between Spenser and his ancient predecessor, who, like Arachne and Minerva, "in a severall frame / Eche streynde a web, the warpe whereof was fine" (*XVB* 6.65-66). The concluding couplet of *Amoretti* 23, as some have noted, suggests something darker in the lover than pique. He is predatory, a spinner of webs to trap his prey: "Such labour like the Spyderys web I fynd" (*Am.* 23.13).<sup>23</sup> When he asks the lady "What guyle is this?" (37.1), one might think his use of the noun extremely ironic, similar to his claim

23. Villeponteaux makes this observation ("With her own will beguyld," 35), although one should also say that the attempt to trap is a failure at this juncture, since the speaker does not spring it until *Amoretti* 71.

that if he falls silent, he will “choked be with ouerflowing gall” (43.4). He does not reach the former state for forty-six more sonnets. And plenty of choler flows in the *Amoretti*.

Again, Spenser seems all too aware of the foolishness of the Ovidian lover elsewhere in his work. Just as the *desultor* contorts himself in histrionics at the feet of Corinna’s keeper, “*Bagoas* whose care doth thy Mistresse idle” (*AOE* 2.2), Paridell epitomizes his every descendant, each Troilus or troubadour who has tumbled to the earth in purported lovesickness. At Hellenore’s sweet, reluctant, amorous delay, “He sigh’ed, he sob’d, he swoond, he perdy dyde, / And cast himselfe on ground her fast besyde” (*FQ* 3.7.2), just as the *Amoretti* narrator vows to “lay incessant battery to her heart; / playnts, prayers, vowes, ruth, sorrow, and dismay” (14.11–12). The poem in the sequence that observes Easter actually turns idolatrous toward its human subject, even somewhat Catholic in Spenser’s strange way, worthy of Tristan or Paridell himself: she becomes “my sweet Saynt,” for whom he “will builde an altar to appease her yre, / and on the same my hart will sacrifice” (22.11–12). This may represent a nod to medieval tradition, with its ambiguous intermingling of sexual and religious subject matter, as in Petrarch’s “Era il giorno ch’al sol si scolaro” (*Rime* 3), handsomely and anonymously translated in Tottel’s *Songes and Sonettes* (1557) as “The louer sheweth that he was stricken by loue on good Friday.”<sup>24</sup> Here Petrarch’s lover dedicates his time in church to contemplating the beauty of the female form beneath diaphanous garments rather than the flayed figure of the crucified Christ, naked and bloody, or uses one as a palimpsest of the other. In any case, Spenser thinks of his lover as someone in need of reforming and redeeming, someone who will be transfigured: he bemoans “my hungry soule, which long hast fed / On idle fancies of thy foolish thought” (HHB 288–89). And once this metamorphosis takes place, Spenser shows us how a woman may tame a man to love her so that his simplicity might be truly naked, his grace unimpeachably spotless, an Apollo transformed so that “The tree to which his love was turnde he could no lesse but love” (*XVB* 1.678).

### III

No where can they be taught but in the bed.

(*AOE* 2.5.61)

24. See Hyder Edward Rollins, ed., *Tottel’s Miscellany (1557–1587)*, 2 vols., rev. ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), 1:220.

Pleasure addes fuell to my lust-full fire  
I pay them home with that they most desire.

(AOE 2.10.25–26)

Marlowe's translation here stresses the facelessness and interchangeability of women in the *Amores*, who are merely "they" and "them" to the *desultor Amoris*. Spenser re-envisioned such Ovidian lust as honest desire, a division of experience that remains problematic for him and his critics. The contrast between the Garden of Adonis (*FQ* 3.6) and the Bower of Bliss (2.12) notoriously epitomizes both the licit-illicit dichotomy and the interpenetration of these dimensions. Commentators note that "erotic fulfillment is fragile" in his canon "and achieved at considerable cost."<sup>25</sup> One could utter similar things about the *Amores*, wherein the *desultor* finally experiences consummation—"About my temples go triumphant bayes, / Conquer'd *Corinna* in my bosomes layes" (AOE 2.12.1–2)—but then loses her (see *Amores* 3.8, AOE 3.7), perhaps victimized by the same sadomasochistic incarnation of the little love god personified in the second poem of the sequence as he leads the *amans* in triumph (1.2). If we read Spenser's parody of this satiric procession, the Masque of Cupid (*FQ* 3.12.7–26), in a traditional way, as a negative commentary on the carnal sonnet traditions that he also challenges in the *Amoretti*, obviously this speaker may not lawfully achieve his state of bliss until the proper time, having to delay this phase of matrimony until the *Epithalamion* (see lines 315–71). Yet sex still appears to be an important motivation in the sonnet sequence—perhaps the one and only—despite his protestations to the contrary within. The hyperbolic assertion that the lady "with sterne countenance back again doth chace / their looser lookes that stir vp lustes impure" (*Am.* 21.7–8) does not bear scrutiny, a feat that not even Belpheobe can perform, as the desire-addled Timias guiltily reflects (*FQ* 4.8.1–17). The *Amoretti* speaker may think of poetry and physical love as reciprocal so that one produces the other, as the *desultor* so clearly does: "when I praise a prettie wench's face / She in requitall doth me oft imbrace" (AOE 2.1.33–34); "would I lie with her if that I might" (2.4.22). He may well consider himself as a doctor of love, teaching women in bed, and believe that they desire to be paid home with lustful fire above all, with the help of the "glad Genius" who "With secret ayde" supplies "the sweet pleasures of theyr loues

25. Louis Adrain Montrose, "Spenser's Domestic Domain: Poetry, Property, and the Early Modern Subject," in *Subject and Object in Renaissance Culture*, ed. Margreta DeGrazia, Maureen Quilligan, and Peter Stallybrass (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 99.

delight" (*Ep.* 398, 402, 401), an exorcism of the demented extremes to which such urges can lead, as Orpheus says of the incestuous Myrrha: "Shee feeles her filthye love, and stryves agenynst it," yet "fryes in Cupids flames" (*XVB* 10.352, 416).

A reader striving to reconcile the speaker's stated goals with his implicit motivations may find herself as confused as one attempting to interpret the puzzling allegory of book 3 of *The Faerie Queene*, in which Britomart, the knight of Chastity overcome with vicarious desire, gazes with equal fervor at her prophesied spouse in Merlin's magic mirror (*FQ* 3.3), the pornographic tapestries in the House of Busirane and the Masque of Cupid (3.11), and then the hermaphroditic coupling of Amoret and Scudamour that follows (3.12) in the 1590 version of the text. This activity resembles Ovid's own proverbial obsession with visual enjoyment of Corinna's erotic beauty as imagined by George Chapman in *Ovids Banquet of Sence* (1595): "In a loose robe of Tynsell foorth she came, / Nothing but it betwixt her nakednes / And enuious light."<sup>26</sup> How is one to take the pathetic yet empowered figure of Hellenore, assuredly not attired in tinsel, who cuckolds her horrible husband according to the dictates of the *Ars amatoria* and *Amores*, then ventures into bestial territory, refusing to be rescued from the buss-bestowing members of the Salvage Nation, one of whom "comes aloft" nine times before daylight? Might one read the better parts of these episodes as analogous to the happy copulations of the Garden of Adonis? There, "Franckly each Paramor his leman knows" (3.6.41), fueled by that "Most sacred fyre" which inspires "that sweete fit, that doth true beautie loue" (3.3.1), which ensures that Amoret will "be vpbrought in goodly womanhed" (3.6.28) and that Venus, "when euer that she will," possesses Adonis "and of his sweetnesse takes her fill" (3.6.46). Clearly, one should avoid the compulsive fornications of Castle Joyeous, in which those "Vaine votaries of laesie loue" (*Colin Clouts come home againe*, 766), damsels and squires "swimming deepe in sensuall desyres" (*FQ* 3.1.39), prove "Such loue is hate, and such desire is shame" (50), an urge that "doth base affections moue / In brutish mindes, and filthy lust inflame." Yet the escorts for Malecasta, that "*Lady of delight*" (31), who make up the profane *gradus Amoris* that Spenser professes to critique—Gardante (gazing), Parlante (speaking), Iocante (playing), Basciante (kissing), Bacchante (drinking) and eventually Noctante (consummation)—could serve as outline for the sacred

26. See *Ovids Banquet of Sence. A Coronet for his Mistresse Philosophie, and his amorous Zodiacke. With a translation of a Latine coppie, written by a Fryer, Anno Dom. 1400* (London: Printed by I. R. for Richard Smith, 1595), sig. B2.

courtship and marriage that he outlines in his innovative sonnet sequence and epithalamion for his Elizabeth, néé Boyle, in a temple with gates open wide, and pillar and posts adorned.<sup>27</sup> All six are represented in *Amoretti* and *Epithalamion* (even drinking to the point of drunkenness in *Epithalamion*, 250), although their powers are, as they say, used for good. Britomart, the *Amoretti* persona, and their readers have reason to be confused. Yet perhaps such Ovidian allegorical material may counsel us to accept a certain level of amorphousness as not simply inevitable but salutary. Ovid's Iphis discovers, through the power of prayer (to Isis), that even her lesbian desires for Ianthe have their utility: "DONA · PUER · SOLVIT · QUAE · FEMINA · VOVERAT · IPHIS" (The vows that Iphis vovd a wench, he hath performd a Lad) (*Met.* 9.974; *XVB* 9.933).<sup>28</sup>

*Fourre Hymnes* reproduces this ambivalent Ovidian agenda about sex itself, a dichotomy between Florimell and her False *eidolon*, even under the guise of sage advice. Real and chaste love, "that sweet passion," overmasters "sordid baseness" (HL 190–91). Those with "baseborne mynd," on the other hand, tend to "feelee no loue, but loose desyre" (173, 175), with "dunghill thoughts, which do themselues enure / To dirtie drosse" (183–84). The *Amoretti* speaker tries to purge himself of sordid baseness, as well. In painfully justifying to himself his lady's "vnmoued mind" full of "rebellious pride," he distinguishes between sacred and profane sexuality, insisting that "such loue, not lyke to lusts of baser kynd, / the harder wonne, the firmer will abide" (6.1–4). But the distinctions become very fine indeed. Love is the sacred fire that Spenser mentions in *The Faerie Queene* and elsewhere. Man "Not for lusts sake, but for eternitie, / Seekes to enlarge his lasting progenie" (HL 104–5), says the sage character. Love inspires his "feeble breast" with "gentle furie" (27–28). It helps conquer Chaos and gives shape to the world and existence itself (56–91), reconciling the warring elements. Spenser reconfigures the opening lines of the *Metamorphoses* to explain how Love, as opposed to Ovid's ambiguously titled "deus et . . . natura" (God and Nature) (*Met.* 1.21; *XVB* 1.20) or "quisquis fuit ille deorum" (what God so ere he was) (*Met.* 1.32; *XVB* 1.33) literally reconciles the warring elements: "Ayre hated earth, and water hated

27. Perhaps Spenser's greatest violation of convention is the devotion of the sonnet sequence to actual courtship without the usual overtones of adultery or fornication. C. S. Lewis is the first critic to discuss the importance of Spenser's innovative use of the motif of married love in the *Amoretti*. See *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition* (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), 298, 338–46, 360.

28. Miller's modern English prose translation of this ambiguous line is "These gifts as man did Iphis pay which once as maid he vowed" (Miller, *Metamorphoses*, 2:61).

fyre, / Till Loue relented their rebellious yre" (HL 83–84).<sup>29</sup> Does desire not inform these processes at all? A stanza later in the hymn implies that the answer to this question is affirmative. Created beings

all doe liue, and moued are  
To multiply the likenesse of their kynd,  
Whilest they seek onely, without further care,  
To quench the flame, which they in burning fynd.

(HL 99–102)

Again, although the following stanza claims that this process occurs "Not for lusts sake" (104), the indiscriminateness, the attempts to "quench" the sensation "without further care," argues the opposite conclusion.

The sage persona claims continually that love bestows and restores life, but then in describing its essence, does not distinguish between baseborn minds wallowing in dunghill thoughts and sweet passion itself. Love's arrows seem lustful indeed, anatomically penetrative in that they

Rest not, till they haue pierst the trembling harts,  
And kindled flame in all their inner parts,  
Which suckes the blood, and drinketh vp the lyfe  
Of carefull wretches with consuming grieve.

(HL 123–26)

So Love, whether produced by dunghills or sweetness, produces similar bad feelings. Some of "th'euils which poore louers greeue" (HL 258) resemble those in the catalog in the *Masque of Cupid*: Ease, Fancy and Desire, Doubt and Danger, Fear and Hope, Dissemblance and Suspect, Grief and Fury, Displeasance and Pleasance, Despite and Cruelty (*FQ* 3.12.7–22). "By these, ô Loue, thou doest thy entrance make" (HL 273), says the sage:

The gnawing enuie, the hart-fretting feare,  
The vaine surmizes, the distrustfull showes,  
The false reports that flying tales doe beare,  
The doubts, the daungers, the delayes, and woes,  
The fayned friends, the unassured foes,

(HL 259–63)

29. Ovid's phrases have many English translations depending on the motivations of the translator. These two sets of four Latin words are often rendered "god or kinder nature" or "whichever of the gods it was." *Metamorphoses* 1.21–31 explains the formation, separation, and harmonizing of the four elements.

One could argue that this material is from the first of the *Hymnes*, whose theme Spenser revises over the course of the three ensuing poems to a comfortably chaste, heavenly conclusion. One could then make the equally familiar counterargument that Spenser does not expunge “An Hymne in Honour of Loue” from his quartet, but uses it as a gateway to everything else in it, and that one cannot understand “An Hymne of Heauenly Beautie” without reference to the first poem so that everything connects and belongs together, in the manner explained by Ovid’s Pythagoras: “For nature loving ever change re-payres one shape a new / Uppon another” (XVB 15.277–78). There, in the first *Hymne*, in Pleasure’s “snowy bosome,” lovers lay “Their quiet heads, devoyd of guilty shame” (HL 290), a phrase that Milton emulates in his vision of prelapsarian Eden, the naked Adam and Eve happily enjoying their marital relations in *Paradise Lost*: “Then was not guilty shame: dishonest shame / Of Nature’s works, honor dishonorable, / Sin-bred” (4.313–15). Shameless Ovidian pleasure fuels both Spenserian and Miltonic emotional topography. And the speaker’s wry observation that it is no wonder that “such rage extreme” should make the sight of “Fraile” men “enrauisht” (HL 117–19) touches the first line of the final hymn: “Rapt with the rage of mine own rauisht thought” (HHB 1). This phrase describes almost precisely the mind-set of both the wildly striving *desultor* and the calmly strident narrator of the *Amoretti*.

Also, Spenser and Ovid each play *artifex*, fashioning the female body by allowing their speakers in the *Amoretti* and *Amores* to describe it in masculine-oriented terms of perusal and taxonomy. Readers may well be reminded of Pygmalion, that sculptor from the *Metamorphoses* who serves as an emblem of every male artist who, unable to attract women, strives to make one of his own, allegedly “Offended with the vice whereof greate store is packt within / The nature of the womankind” (XVB 10.262–63). His fondness for handling his mute, static creation extends to the point of comic grotesquerie: “He beleved his fingers made a dint / Uppon her flesh, and feared lest sum blacke or broosed print / Should come by touching over hard” (277–79). Whether calmly strident or wildly striving, both the *desultor* and the *Amoretti* persona seem just as obsessed with the terrain of the female body. Each, in the manner of Pygmalion, expresses a species of tactile wish-fulfillment. Ovid’s *amans* says to Corinna, “touch what ever thou canst touch of mee” (AOE 1.4.58). Earlier in the same poem, he expresses jealousy over her husband possessing the same parts of her that Spenser’s groom celebrates in his bride: “Thy bosomes Roseat buds let him not finger” (37); compare to Spenser’s “Her brest like to a bowle of creame vncrudded, / Her paps lyke lyllies budded” (*Ep.* 175–76). This last detail may seem uncannily reminiscent of the bolder of the “wanton

Maidens" who displays "her two lilly paps aloft" in the Bower of Bliss (*FQ* 2.12.66). This exemplifies the aphorism, "Nothing so good, but that through guilty shame / May be corrupt, and wrested vnto will" (HB 157–58), which Milton obviously reworks in the aforementioned prelapsarian passage. Commentators on Spenser often note the *Amoretti* sonnets devoted to the breasts of the beloved, appropriately two in number: "Fayre bosme fraught with vertues richest tresure" (76.1); "two golden apples of vnaulewd price" (77.6).<sup>30</sup> Sonnet 64, "Coming to kisse her lyps," supplies a catalog of the beloved's bodily charms, its most piquant detail the "nipples lyke yong blossomd Iessemynes" (12). That blazon seems firmly in the tradition of its Ovidian predecessor, in which the *desultor* fondly recalls an afternoon encounter:

Starke naked as she stood before mine eye,  
 Not one wenne in her body could I spie.  
 What armes and shoulders did I touch and see,  
 How apt her breasts were to be prest by me.  
 How smooth a belly under wast saw I?  
 How large a legge, and what a lusty thigh?

(AOE 1.5.17–22)

Spenser's visionary bard from the *Hymnes* might say that this passage demonstrates how beauty can be "Made but the bait of sinne, and sinners scorne" so that "euery one doth seeke, but to desprauce it" (HB 152, 154). Yet *Epithalamion* notably addresses the blazon convention in almost exactly the same way: eyes, forehead, cheeks, lips, the aforementioned breast and paps, and then the neck, "all her body like a pallace faire" ascending to "honors seat and chastities sweet bowre" (*Ep.* 178, 180).<sup>31</sup> One might presume that this seat represents

30. See esp. Theresa M. Krier, "Generation of Blazons: Psychoanalysis and the Song of Songs in the *Amoretti*," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 40 (1998): 317.

31. Feminist psychoanalytic criticism sometimes reads this Petrarchan convention as misogyny, fueled by castration anxiety. See esp. Nancy Vickers, "Diana Described: Scattered Woman and the Scattered Rhyme," in *Writing and Sexual Difference*, ed. Elizabeth Abel (University of Chicago Press, 1982), 95–110. Lynn Enterline extends Vickers's arguments by incorporating an Ovidian tradition "by which male poets in the Renaissance fetishized and dismembered the female body." Bodily fragmentation in the *Metamorphoses* is, of course, always bad. See Enterline, "Embodied Voices: Petrarch Reading (Himself Reading) Ovid," in *Desire in the Renaissance: Psychoanalysis and Literature*, ed. Valeria Finucci and Regina Schwartz (Princeton University Press, 1994), 120–45, quote on 127.

the mind, since the next stanza celebrates the “inward beauty of her lieuly spright.” One might also observe that Spenser’s narrator does not devote ten lines to this less palpable or observable part of his beloved, as he does with her body. In the context of *Amoretti*, even in describing her virtue, “a melting pleasance ran through euery part” (*Am.* 39.7) of him, which resembles the sexual gratification of the type imagined in explaining the metaphysics of marital consummation: “deepe is the wound, that dints the parts entire / with chast affects, that naught but death can seuer” (6.9–12). Certain kinds of penetrations even infect Britomart so that she, wounded perchance by Busirane’s authorial knife, becomes subject to a kind of lust, “Vnwares it strooke into her snowie chest” (*FQ* 3.12.33), between, it must be assumed by all snortingly masculine spawn of Pygmalion, breasts apt for pressing.

Some commentators who imagine themselves as female readers resisting the persona’s insidious sexual pressures suggest that Elizabeth Boyle herself would have perused the *Amoretti* in a state of resistance anticipatory of modern feminism.<sup>32</sup> A less tenable if ingenious argument has it that sonnet 58, problematically subtitled “*By her that is most assured to her selfe*,” is “by” the lady, and demonstrates her non-compliance in a way that trumps any other sonnet sequence—the object of affection mutinies against her beloved.<sup>33</sup> These points would seem more credible if one were willing to ignore the strongest argument against them. The “Elizabeth Boyle” of these poems is the construct of an early modern male poet who makes our perceptions of her very

32. See Bell, who says of *Amoretti* 23, “the lyric tapestry Spenser weaves [in lines 5–8] is continually undone by his resisting female reader” (*Elizabethan Women*, 162), and suggests that in *Amoretti* 29, “Spenser’s female reader knows exactly what he is doing, and she is furious” (166). Villeponteaux argues that the lady in the sequence develops a character just as Britomart does and defines herself against obstacles (“With her own will beguyld,” 30). Gibbs’s arguments are similar. She even assigns a persona to the lady (*Spenser’s “Amoretti,”* 61–138).

33. To summarize the major arguments, Dunlop insists that *Amoretti* 58 is “by” the lady. See *Shorter Poems of Edmund Spenser*, 634–35, and Dunlop, “The Drama of *Amoretti*,” *Spenser Studies* 1 (1980): 112–13. Gordon Braden disputes Dunlop on the strong evidence of the recurring epithet traditionally applied to women, “proud fayre,” which the speaker uses often for his subject, and argues, rightly, I think, that Dunlop’s entire case rests on the preposition “By” in the subtitle. See Braden, “Pride, Humility, and the Petrarchan Happy Ending,” *Spenser Studies* 18 (2003): 123–42. Bell suggests that “By” means “nearby,” and argues that the male persona is certainly speaking, not the lady. She also notes that *Amoretti* 59 retracts sonnet 58’s attempt to define the subject’s viewpoint and determine her response (*Elizabethan Women*, 173). I would also add: why would a woman enduring fifty-seven sonnets of a man’s specious criticism for her independence in turn castigate someone else for exhibiting precisely the same characteristic?

existence possible, and whose perspective not only influences but compels our own views of “her.” Yet some would presume to speak for an Elizabeth who fits the familiar, unspoken, yet anachronistic paradigm of contemporary gender politics. Resentment of the cultural conventions (and even biology) of courtship dictates hostility toward the appraising male gaze, which in turn necessitates the rejection of the traditional accoutrements of femininity.

Harry Berger’s fine arguments about gendered readings of the Garden of Adonis (*FQ* 3.6) seem apposite here, as well as a necessary corrective to those just considered. “Spenser,” the “product rather than the producer of his text,” necessarily circumscribes all discourses therein and “sometimes mimics or parodies the perspective of a traditional (ergo, male) reader whose attitudes are those of the dominant literary or cultural discourses” that *The Faerie Queene* embodies. Yet his persona, admittedly male and masculinist, still encourages one to read from the masculine or feminine perspective with appropriate sympathy, in predictably amorphous fashion—as if Ovid’s Iphis could appropriate the powers of Woolf’s Orlando. You don’t have to be a woman to read like one.<sup>34</sup>

So, if any “resistance” on Elizabeth’s part is accessible to modern readers, Spenser creates it, and this dimension also has an Ovidian genesis. Corinna naturally resents the literary and physical abuse of the *desultor*: “Her teares, she silent, guilty did pronounce me” (*AOE* 1.7.21–22). Perhaps she is even more resistant than Elizabeth, since she actually erases the wax *tabula* on which his blandishments are written to seduce her (*AOE* 1.12). Or, according to Berger’s logic, Ovid allows us to imagine ourselves as Corinna righteously choosing to do so. In this tradition, Spenser’s addressee, full of a “stubberne wit” (*Am.* 32.8) not susceptible to poetical blandishments, “doth laugh at me and makes my pain her sport” (10.14). She “doth deprauē / my simple meaning with disdainfull scorne” (29.1–2), willing to make his

34. See Harry Berger, “Actaeon at the Hinder Gate: The Stag Party in Spenser’s Gardens of Adonis,” in Abel, *Writing and Sexual Difference*, 91–119, esp. 103, 108, and 114. Berger’s excellent (and humorous) essay critiques simplistic readings of Spenser’s Garden that are tightly circumscribed by gender, such as those of Maureen Quilligan and Lauren Silberman, who (respectively) hypothesize that the female viewpoint is the only logical one from which to read *FQ* 3.6 and that the canto envisions a male reader who is in essence, tamed, a female fantasy. See Quilligan, *Milton’s Spenser: The Politics of Reading* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), 195–96; Silberman, *Transforming Desire: Erotic Knowledge in Books III and IV of “The Faerie Queene”* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 271.

poetry a “sacrifize vnto the greedy fyre” (48.4)—so that the *tabula* is completely *rasa* as she refers to her immortalizer as “Vayne man” who “doest in vaine assay, / a mortall thing so to immortalize” (75.5–6). One can hardly resist more than that.<sup>35</sup>

## IV

Lines shalt thou read in wine by my hand writ.

(AOE 1.4.20)

the boord with wine  
Was scribled, and thy fingers writ a line.

(AOE 2.5.17–18)

It seems contrary to our expectations of Ovid and Spenser that poetry frequently outweighs sex in their work. At times, it may appear to us that the authors invoke the erotic merely to write about the poetical, as if we had made the astonishing discovery that they were eagerly perusing a copy of the *Ars poetica* hidden under a false cover labeled *Priapea* or *Ragionamenti*. Yet this apparent tension also informs the most influential precedents in sonnetdom for the *Amoretti*, the *Rime*, and *Astrophil and Stella*. These sequences imply that Laura and her Elizabethan descendants, like Corinna, exist as conveniences to demonstrate the virtuosity of the poetical self. They are not primarily “about” women. This element seems to be an Ovidian legacy. The first elegy of the *Amores* (even the four-line prologue to the sequence) concerns itself with the writing process.<sup>36</sup> Likewise, Spenser’s first sonnet, “Happy ye laeues,” ostensibly devoted to the beautiful fiancée, concerns poetical composition, a dramatic apostrophe to pages, lines, and rhymes. It exemplifies a more ardent desire for the master’s *ars* than for the charms of the beloved or implies that such charms are only *ars* in the first place.

35. On the resistance of the subject, William C. Johnson claims that the *Amoretti* shows Spenser to be “a daring proponent of mutuality in relationships—not, as has been argued, as an idealizer of women or a conflicted power-loving personality.” The lady, after all, subverts the Apollo and Daphne story in *Amoretti* 29.5–8 after the preceding sonnet had been devoted to defining her in Daphne’s role. See Johnson, “Gender Fashioning and the Dynamics of Mutability in Spenser’s *Amoretti*,” *English Studies* 74 (1993): 508, 511.

36. Marlowe’s translation: “We which were *Ouids* fiue bookes now are three, / For these before the rest preferreth he, / If reading fiue thou plainst of tediousness, / Two tane away, thy labour will be lesse” (AOE 1.1.1–4).

Ovid demonstrates the risks of subordinating sex to poetry in the Orpheus section of the *Metamorphoses*, the notorious book 10, one well known to sonneteers. It may be his most breathtakingly complex example of the divides between author and narrator, the multiplex ironies of tale-telling, and the perils of miscalculating the tolerance of one's audience, a narrative "bound together by misogynist, antierotic, and gynephobic themes that reflect the bitterness of the singer," as Berger puts it.<sup>37</sup> Ovid's heartbroken bard who laments the death of his bride in a pointless accident "did utterly eschew / The womankynd" thereafter for mysterious reasons, and, even less explicably, prefers "the flowring pryme of boayes the pleasure for too take" (XVB 10.88–89, 92). Poetry outweighs sex (with women). Motivated as much by rage as by poetical *furor*, he strokes his lyre to the interludes of Cyparissus, Hyacinthus, and Apollo, Jupiter and Ganymede, Venus and the Pro-poetides, Pygmalion and Galatea, Myrrha and Cinyras, and Venus and Adonis. These stories concern, among other things, man-boy love, the etiology of prostitution, hatred of women, truly bizarre lust and wish fulfillment concerning an art object, and father-daughter incest. In the example of the insatiable Venus and her "beawtyfullyst" boy who constitute the mathematical center of Spenser's own epic in her garden, we have the inverse of what was once referred to as pederasty. Since Adonis's "manhod by admonishment restreyned could not bee," the fatal boar, as Golding so memorably explains, castrates him, "hyding in his coddys his tuskes as farre as he could thrust" (XVB 10.601, 832, 839). Although current academic culture might read this material as evidence of Ovid validating its own ethic of sexual tolerance—as a nonjudgmental chronicler of the different forms that sexuality may take—it is just as possible that his Orpheus represents something else. The Cicones and Maenades interpret his stories as the perversions of a scornful teller, contemptuous of their gender, since women are excluded, abused, and ridiculed in each one: "hic est nostri contemptor!" (*Met.* 11.7). And then they tear him apart. Any poet can lose his way and alienate his listeners, even the very type of the bard, the son of Apollo himself.

So Ovid knows too well that such supersubtlety often undermines its practitioner and exposes him as the fool he is. In the unhappily contrasting passages above from the *Amores*, the *desultor* experiences the consequences of following the advice of the *praeceptor* in the *Ars amatoria*, in this case about writing erotic messages to married women

37. Berger, "Actaeon at the Hinder Gate," 91.

in wine spilled on the table.<sup>38</sup> Corinna now cruelly adopts the same technique with her new lovers as a means of excluding the speaker, a practice necessitated by his own behavior. It is difficult to discern whether the infidelity or the usurped power of erotic authorship (however crude) upsets him more. Spenser dramatizes these Ovidian issues in *The Faerie Queene* book 3, comically with Paridell and Hellenore, who actually write in wine on the table, and grotesquely with Busirane in a more sinister analogue, when he dips his pen in Amoret's heart's blood as he tries to compose his love into existence and then inscribe himself in her flesh—leaves, lines, and rhymes less happy.

These three elements from the initial *Amoretti* sonnet devoted to the material text also demonstrate the perils of authorial supersubtlety, since the pitiful satisfaction the speaker claims to crave from the lady—that she merely look upon his leaves, lines, and rhymes—is all he really gets for much of the sequence, much to his anguish, since the ensuing poems betray a wish for so much more. Perhaps this represents another version of the creatively deforming relationship between sonneteer and subject, which Spenser dramatizes most vividly in Busirane, that owner of mythological tapestries based on the *Metamorphoses* (see *FQ* 3.11.29–43). Many commentators have noted that the wizard's torment of Amoret (another name cognate with *Amoretti* and *Amores*) and his Masque of Cupid allegorize precisely this dynamic between male author and female subject, a bizarre parody of the Pygmalion myth to which this relationship is analogous: “with feeling he began his wissed hope too prove” (*XVB* 10.314). The poet denies the woman her subjectivity while defining his own, appropriating and recreating her.<sup>39</sup> Most read this as Spenser's critique of Petrarchism,<sup>40</sup> but it might serve as another instance of his

38. “Blanditiasque leves tenui perscribere vino, / Ut dominam in mensa se legat illa tuam” (and you may trace light flatteries in thin characters of wine, that on the table she may read herself your mistress) (*Ars amatoria* 1.571–72), in *Ovid: The Art of Love and Other Poems*, trans. J. H. Mozley, 2nd ed., rev. G. P. Goold (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 52–53.

39. For example, Quilligan says that Busirane's behavior shows the “sterile, prisonlike effect of his art,” that he is a “sadistic sonneteer” whose “his instrument of torture is his lyric pen” (*Milton's Spenser*, 197, 198).

40. Though Roche observes that the Masque of Cupid follows the convention of “love as mock war, the battlefield of the conventional sonneteer” (*The Kindly Flame*, 74), O. B. Hardison suggests that Spenser modifies Petrarch thematically. In the *Rime*, the flesh and spirit are at war and the latter should triumph. In the Christian marriage that Spenser champions, both must work together according to the One Flesh model from Genesis. See Hardison, “*Amoretti* and the *Dolce Stil Novo*,” *English Literary Renaissance* 2

Ovidianism as well, since his courtship and marriage sequence demonstrates most of these same tendencies pioneered by his more subversive, cynical classical predecessor. (It has even been posited that Busirane's name has an Ovidian genesis, although one must admit that this connection is tenuous.)<sup>41</sup> This necromantic personification of the Ovidian-Petrarchan love poet tattoos himself underneath Amoret's skin:

Figuring strange characters of his art  
 With liuing blood he those characters wrate,  
 Dreadfully dropping from her dying hart  
 Seeming transfixed with a cruell dart,  
 And all perforce to make her him to loue.

(FQ 3.12.31)

Her apparent vacuity approximates the blank page onto which these strange characters are figured. An enterprising scholar of the old-fashioned type could perhaps assign a Masque of Cupid abstraction to various groups of *Amoretti* sonnets, from Ease to Death, so that one might see that the poet's betrothed suffers under Amoret's constraints. The difference between them, of course, is that his Elizabeth frees herself by educating the poet, whereas Britomart must free Amoret, not only from Busirane but from Scudamour, whose own desires mirror the wizard's—and the poet's.<sup>42</sup> Wizard, poet, and lover could use the phrase “perforce to make her him to loue” as an emblem of their own

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(1972): 215. Similarly, Reed Way Dasenbrock discusses Spenser's “pattern of adapting Petrarchan poems in a non-Petrarchan direction” to produce the “selfless and mutual concord” to celebrate marriage in a more Protestant formulation, a critique of the Catholic assertion that celibacy is the preferable state (Dasenbrock, “The Petrarchan Context of Spenser's *Amoretti*,” *PMLA* 100 [1985]: 44, 46, 47).

41. Roche develops a suggestion of Thomas Warton's that links Busirane and Busiris, using *Ars amatoria* 1.643–58 as Spenser's analogue (Roche, *The Kindly Flame*, 81–82). Warton's own note reads, “He seems to have drawn this name from Busiris, the king of Ægypt, famous for his cruelty and inhospitality” (Warton, *Observations on the Fairy Queen of Spenser*, 2 vols., 2nd ed. [London: Printed for R. and J. Dodsley; Oxford: Printed for J. Fletcher, 1762], 2:173).

42. Johnson has written most insightfully on the uncanny relationship between the *Amoretti* speaker and the wizard. The lady forces her lover “to enter his own House of Busyrane” (“Gender Fashioning,” 507). See also Johnson's “Spenser in the House of Busyrane: Transformations of Reality in *The Faerie Queene III* and *Amoretti*,” *English Studies* 73 (1992): 104–20, in which he explores other kinds of parallels, such as one between the subject of *Amoretti* and Britomart: “The lady's resisting of the Petrarchan wooing, forcing the lover to be true to her real self, penetrating the flame and the smokescreen of passionate love, and delivering her own ‘knight’ from his false quest, are clear human parallels to Britomart's allegorical achievements” (118).

obtuseness, which a battalion of spear-wielding Britomarts could not eradicate. Scudamour's "My Lady and my loue is cruelly pend" (*FQ* 3.11.11) states the theme under discussion with great precision. And Busirane confines the lady as he defines her, with his "strong enchauntments and blacke Magicke leare" (16). They should all know better, as Britomart admonishes Redcrosse: "Ne may loue be compeld by maistry" (3.1.25), a paraphrase of Chaucer's "Love wol nat been constreyned by maistrye."<sup>43</sup>

Perhaps Busirane represents the misuse of the Ovidian technique of love poetry. The wizard's appropriation of this method seems repulsive enough to undermine Spenser's entire enterprise, however unintentionally. Even the smell in his house is odious: "stinking sulphure, that with griesly hate / And dreadful horror did all entraunce choke" (*FQ* 3.11.21). His Masque of Cupid features "wanton Bardes, and Rymers impudent" (3.12.5) as benighted as the clownish and pathetic Paridell, the author of "Bransles, Ballads, virelays, and verses vaine" (3.10.8) for the seduction of Hellenores everywhere. Yet the *Amoretti* speaker, less clownish and pathetic, nevertheless provides an amusing echo of his *Faerie Queene* doppelganger as he notes of his subject, "She with flattering smyles weake harts doth guide" (*Am.* 47.5), an allusion to the inner erotic life of Paridell himself, whose "weake hart opened wyde" to the wound that Hellenore makes with "one fierie dart, whose hed / Empoisoned was with priuy lust" (*FQ* 3.9.29, 28).

So ultimately, Spenser implies that Ovidian *ars* trumps all, and that sonneteers, wizards, and weak-hearted carpet-knights participate in the same activity, guided by the authorial puppeteer. Three examples will suffice. The sonneteer disingenuously says of his subject's mien, "the louely pleasance and the lofty price, / cannot expressed be by any art" (*Am.* 17.11–12). He purports to marvel at her tendency to attract and repel: "such art of eyes I neuer read in bookes" (21.14). For the lovely proportions of her face, he exclaims, "I honor and admire the makers art" (24.4). Yet surely it occurred to Spenser that *ars* provides the means of transmission for our understanding (and his own) that such generalizations may be true. He is the maker whose art creates the reader's understanding of lofty pride, bewitching eyes, and beautiful countenance precisely because he read about it "in bookes."

If I may return to the fractured analogy of Odysseus's wife and the suitors in *Amoretti* 23, the "Damzell" who "Deuiz'd a Web her woers to deceave" with "subtile craft" (*Am.* 23.2, 5) reveals the speaker's

43. Chaucer, *The Franklin's Tale*, line 764, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd ed., ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), 179.

self-betrayal. That he rather than the lady is the Penelope figure exposes him as the spider he truly is, not one who unweaves but one who can always reweave his broken web, both Arachne and Minerva. His triumphant, even fleeing “Right so your selfe were caught in cunning snare / of a deare foe, and thralld to his loue” (71.7–8) suggests how his arachnoid *ars* defines and delineates his Elizabeth. The blazon in *Epithalamion* (167–80), for example, represents a taming of her, control by stylized description. By synecdoche she is a sum of parts, and part of a sum, made immortal by “this verse, that neuer shall expyre” (*Am.* 27.11), her “true” self portrayed in his heart, where it becomes “the fayre Idea of your celestiall hew,” although “through your cruelty, / with sorrow dimmed and deformd it were” (45.5, 7). He praises her and then criticizes her for her failure to acquiesce to his demand that she love him. His appeal to Beauty herself in one of his last poetic compositions sounds strangely like that of a lover to his lady: “How then dare I, the nouice of his Art, / Presume to picture so diuine a wight [?]” (HHB 225–26). The Ovidian notion of *ars* is operative here, also.

So we may credit the *magister Amoris* for the Elizabethan poet’s shameless intertwining of the sexual and the sacred, which overwhelms the contradictions between the two, and the accompanying sense of shame and hopelessness mentioned at the beginning of this essay. Ovid’s youthful elegies and Spenser’s late sonnets, linked by the cognate *amor* in their titles, also concern themselves with courtship of a kind, although one revels in its adulterous pagan ethos whereas the other stresses the One Flesh model of Christian marriage. Some may feel that the *desultor* deservedly loses his Corinna. Spenser’s bemused older speaker attains his young lady, although this accomplishment does not seem explicit at the end of the *Amoretti*. He implies that his middle-aged lover may be redeemed by the “Damzell” who gradually makes him aware of his own foolishness, to the satisfaction of implied female readers everywhere, and thereby improves him. Ovid grants the *desultor* no such epiphany or rude correction. The most supreme subterfuge of the *Amoretti* may well be Spenser’s illusion that the speaker writes real poetry for a real woman, even recording the process of composing sonnets for her whose themes she dislikes or corrects, a version of Corinna’s similar dislikes and corrections in her erasure of the tablet. However, Ovid’s *desultor* learns nothing from experience, and his observation on Callimachus applies, strangely, to himself: “His Arte excell’d, although his witte was weake” (*AOE* 1.15.14). We may regret that more of this Ovidian humor does not inform the Spenserian pursuit. To compensate for this apparent deficiency, we may supply an epigram by Sir John Davies from *All Ovids Elegies* that

is strangely apposite to Spenser's speaker in *Amoretti* and reduces all sonneteers to the same essence:

When *Francus* comes to sollace with his whore,  
 He sends for Rods & strips himselfe stark naked:  
     For his lust sleepes, and will not rise before,  
     By whipping of the wench it be awaked.  
 I enuie him not, but wishe I had the powre,  
 To make my selfe his wench but one halfe houre.<sup>44</sup>

There is no telling which phase of court life anticipatory of Krafft-Ebing is so amusingly delineated here, nor is it clear whether *Francus*, his wench, or both do the whipping. Yet this pose underlies the patina of all medieval and Renaissance sonnet sequences: shame-induced self-flagellation, apparent nakedness, dormant but present lust, and the ambiguity of identity. It may explain the choice of married love as a theme in the *Amoretti* as well as the need for Ovidian intervention. Spenser knew that marriage is supposed to redeem us from lust and to contain it, as the unmarried and celibate St. Paul famously explains (1 Corinthians 7.1–15). He also knew that Ovid, a married man like himself (albeit pagan), provides a model of redemption and containment as he appears to distinguish himself from his poetical personae: “My maners milde repugnant are, to verse (beleue you mee) / My life both chast and shamefast is, though muse more pleasaunt bee.”<sup>45</sup> Yet Spenser, from the vantage of his Irish estate at Kilcolman, must have also known that this display of modesty was simply another pose of the *magister*, a means of leaving a foreign shore to return to *patria* and *mulier*—as he wished to do himself.

44. Sir John Davies, Epigram 33, in *All Ovids Elegies*, sig. G1v.

45. Thomas Churchyard, trans., *The Three first bookes of Ouid de Tristibus* (London: Thomas Marshe, 1580), 15. Ovid's lines in Latin: “crede mihi, distant mores a carmine nostro / (vita verecunda est, Musa iocosa mea)” (*Tristia* 2.353–54).