

EDMUND SPENSER'S MARRIED
CHASTITY: OVID, FEMINIST
CODING, AND RHETORICAL
ANDROGyny IN BOOK III OF
THE FAERIE QUEENE

By

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When Queen Elizabeth stood before the troops assembled at Tilbury, she proclaimed, "I know I have the body but of a weak and feeble woman; but I have the heart and stomach of a king, and of a king of England too" (Greenblatt 68). With this statement Elizabeth skillfully proclaims the rhetoric of the Queen's two bodies, one masculine and one feminine. Her troops may listen to her as their sovereign because a masculine animus¹ resides within her feminine body. In doing so she establishes a precedent for what I am calling rhetorical androgyny, or the use of the masculine

¹ The Roman conception of the soul/spirit/mind

and the feminine personas mixed together to manipulate an audience. Edmund Spenser borrows the concept in his seminal work, *The Faerie Queene*, but rather than asserting his own physical body as a meld of the masculine and feminine, he channels male forms of authority and female forms of communication in an effort to speak to his Early Modern aristocratic female readers. Spenser's rhetorical androgyny deploys an Ovidian authority that in turn allows for a feminist coding to take effect. He uses the subject matter of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* combined with the Early Modern view of Ovid as a moralist to establish masculine authority built upon the solidarity of the past. The use of Ovid in Book III, the Legend of Britomart, Knight of Chastity, asserts Spenser's authority to both speak on matters of desire and to moralize on the nature of desire. At the same time, Spenser employs feminist coding strategies designed to allow him to speak to women in ways that only women would notice and understand. Spenser's deployment of rhetorical androgyny creates a desired position for any poet writing under the reign of Elizabeth I. Through the use of rhetorical androgyny, Spenser is able to speak to women in a way that creates a degree of plausible deniability for himself.

Plausible deniability is a major concern for Early Modern poets under Elizabeth, especially when one considers the fate of Sir Phillip Sidney. Sidney was outspoken in his opinions about the Queen's matrimonial intentions, and as a result of giving the Queen too direct advice, he was exiled from court to his sister's country estate at Pembroke. He languished there away from the

active life he had previously considered a courtier's duty. Plausible deniability, for the purposes of Early Modern poets, may be seen as writing potentially unfavorable opinions and moralizing lessons in a subtle enough fashion that the poet is able to deny any interpretations that may land him in a heap of royal trouble. Many great authors before Spenser also cultivated plausible deniability through their literary practices, perhaps none so notably as Geoffrey Chaucer in *The Canterbury Tales*. Chaucer employs a type of indirection through impersonation because he creates a persona, Chaucer the Pilgrim, who is separate from Chaucer the Author. Chaucer the Pilgrim promises to report exactly what he has heard on the pilgrimage, creating a buffer from the possibly offensive stories written by Chaucer the Author, but presented by characters such as the Miller and the Reeve. Chaucer creates a second level of plausible deniability by including a retraction at the end of his work. Rhetorical androgyny creates this same degree of plausible deniability for Spenser, and he may be in need of it because the message he sends to aristocratic women concerns the proper expression of sexuality in a Protestant context. Considering that Elizabeth I is engaged in a political dance surrounding her theoretically available hand in marriage while Spenser is writing, he needs to take particular precaution that he does not anger her or any of the ladies surrounding her while still being able to provide meaningful instruction.

The contradictory nature of sexual expression in Protestant England is considered by Early Modern poets before Spenser as a result of Petrarch's influence,

especially his theory of the Neoplatonic ladder in the courtly love tradition. In Sidney's earlier sonnet sequence, *Astrophil and Stella*, the courtly lover uses the lady of his desire in an effort to follow Plato, where the admiration of beauty leads to higher virtue. Yet, this spiritual Neoplatonic ladder leaves little room for human desire. Astrophil memorably laments the problem after extolling his lady's beauty and the potential of his own virtue by exclaiming, "Ah, but desire still cries: 'Give me some food'" (71:14). This inherent tension between virtuous admiration and carnal love plays a major role in *The Faerie Queene*, especially in Book III, the Legend of Britomart, Knight of Chastity. While Book I chronicles the exploits of Redcrosse Knight and establishes the existence of a spiritual world and Book II shows Guyon discovering the sensual world in Acrasia's Bower, Book III attempts to reconcile the existence of the spiritual world with the existence of the sensual world (Desire 14).

Early Modern male poets explore the pull between virtue and physical love with a certain amount of freedom, but the stakes are much higher for female readers. Medieval views of women tended to align them at extremes, either as virgins or whores with little room in between the two. Though the culture abruptly shifted to Protestantism under Henry VIII, it is unlikely that the many years of Catholic doctrine mandating sex only for procreation could be easily erased from conceptions of feminine virtue. John Calvin attempted to undo Catholic teaching on the matter by arguing for marriage and the sex therein as a necessary and natural process, sanctioned by Christ through his

transformation of water into wine at the Canaan marriage feast (2:1257). In this context chastity in Protestant England is possible even if one is married and engages in sexual intercourse with his or her husband or wife, because the sex is Christ sanctioned as evidenced by the connection between Christ and his bride, the church. It is here that Spenser picks up Calvin's teaching. By situating Spenser in the sixteenth-century Protestant context, Chih-hsin Lin rightly argues that Spenser, following Calvin, defines chastity as sex within the proper confines of marriage. He does this by having Amoret, the ideal Protestant wife, suffer under the courtly love tradition, which is the antagonist to proper Protestant love in the House of Busirane. Lin remarks that Amoret represents the virtue "that a woman should accept the codes of courtly conduct with proper reservation like a Christian and be willing to build a sexual relationship with her husband like a Protestant" (376-7).

The consideration of Spenser's use of rhetorical androgyny and the way in which he forms layers of plausible deniability may seem only to elucidate a small portion of the method underlying *The Faerie Queene*, but in this case, I believe the method leads us to a further understanding of Spenser's own view of Protestant married chastity that is more vast than other codified views on the subject. His view is also in keeping with and perhaps better elucidated by his later works, the *Amoretti* and the *Epithalamion*. By observing Spenser's coded messages and the ways in which he claims the authority to speak combined with his specific tweaking of Ovidian

transformation, we may better understand Spenser's own view of married chastity, which incorporates the notion of production in a Protestant context.

In order to elucidate Spenser's strategy of rhetorical androgyny, I will begin by discussing Ovid, his authority, and his role in Early Modern society followed by an introduction to feminist coding strategies. Then, I will proceed to read Canto one of Book III of *The Faerie Queene* while highlighting Spenser's changes and rewrites of Ovid's tale of Venus and Adonis in the context of Spenser's coding strategy. I will turn to a discussion of Spenser's incremental lessons on female sexuality in the next section, and my final section will present Spenser's view of productive married chastity.

II.

While early twentieth-century scholarship concerning Spenser's use of Ovid tends to analyze individual correlations in subject matter between Spenser and Ovid, newer criticism attempts to generalize about the function of Spenser's use of Ovid in more holistic terms. Colin Burrow writes specifically about Spenser's use of the *Metamorphoses* in *The Faerie Queene*, arguing that Spenser employs Ovid's work to link morality to the sensual world (101). M. L. Stapleton refines Burrow's notion by arguing that the harder Spenser works to separate the worlds, the more forcefully they become intertwined. For Stapleton, it is through Ovid that Spenser is able to combine the two worlds so successfully in Book III (271-273). This point is demonstrated by Lauren Silberman,

who examines the Ovidian metamorphosis of Amoret and Scudamour into a complete hermaphroditic being at the end of Book III in the 1590 edition (208). Cora Fox takes Stapleton further by considering how Spenser is able to explicitly link the combined sensual and spiritual worlds, as demonstrated by Silberman, to the female world by arguing that Spenser's use of Ovid "reveals a deep and conflicted cultural engagement not just with Ovidian stories but with Ovidian gender politics and constructions of female subjectivity" (385). These scholars have uncovered the multiple twisting layers of meaning in Spenser's use of Ovid, which add coherence to the work as a whole. In order to understand how Spenser makes use of Ovid in Book III of *The Faerie Queene*, two separate considerations are necessary that are different from the direction of the scholars presented here: one is an understanding of Ovid's standing and reputation in the Early Modern community, and the other is a detailed and thorough comparison between what Ovid writes and what Spenser reworks and emphasizes from Ovid's original.

Publius Ovidius Naso lived and wrote under the reign of Augustus Caesar in the first century C. E, and his reputation during the Empire was vastly different from his Early Modern connotations. Ovid is perhaps best known for his *Amores* and *Ars Amatoria*, the latter of which served as an instruction manual for choosing lovers and engaging in adulterous relationships. He was exiled from Rome by Augustus, who had introduced a series of morality laws meant to curb the excesses of the Roman Patricians. Ovid's relationship to early modern politics has been explored in

depth by Heather James, who examines the ways in which editors and translators dealt with the *Metamorphoses* (345). Ovid was originally denied a place in the educational practices of Renaissance England due to the perceived vices extolled in his poetry. With the publication of Arthur Golding's complete translation in 1567, mature readers were asked to accept the responsibility of distinguishing Ovid's truth from his immoral content. Golding remarks in his introduction that "With skill, heede, and judgment, this work must be read,/ For else to the Reader it standes in small stead" (James 345). Nevertheless, later editors reduced the tales of the *Metamorphoses* to fables, distilling the lowest common moral out of tales. This tradition of moralizing Ovid contributed to Ovid's heightened status in the English Renaissance. The popular reputation of Ovid was that of a moralist, though more experienced readers would have understood Ovid as a much more complex figure. It is this reputation that Spenser channels when he draws upon Ovidian subject matter. To draw upon the famous scenes of the *Metamorphoses* is to conjure up Ovid's persona as moralizing instructor rather than exiled poet. By borrowing from Ovid, the sixteenth-century fabulist, Spenser claims a right to speak on moral issues. Additionally, Spenser channels authority simply by drawing on an earlier source. Authority in the Medieval era was established by reconstructions of older source material. Experiential authority did not hold nearly so high a status, as the opening lines from the "Wife of Bath's Prologue" remind us. No doubt some lingering authority remained in Early Modern literature from absorbing and incorporating

well-known tales. Both levels of Spenser's authority—Ovid's moralizing reputation and his reworking of older tales—help him make an implicit argument in his text that women should listen to him, even if he might be below their social situation.

Not only does Spenser need women to listen to him, he needs them to understand his messages in a way that allows him to speak without fear for his life. Feminist coding provides him with the perfect opportunity to do so. Women's cultures exist side-by-side with men's cultures, but because women often depend socially, economically, and emotionally on men, their "attitudes and understanding cannot always be openly acknowledged" (Radner and Lanser 2). As a result, women employ strategies of coding to communicate with other women. Susan Radner and Joan Lanser define coding as "the expression or transmission of messages potentially accessible to a [bicultural] community under the very eyes of a dominant community for whom the same messages are either inaccessible or inadmissible" (3). Though he is not a woman, Spenser is also not truly a part of the dominant hegemonic culture. He is of a lower social standing within the court, whose education was paid for by Robert Nowell, and he entered the service of the Earl of Leicester in 1578 (Hamilton 20). As a result, Spenser understood the necessity of communicating in a coded manner. He employs three coding strategies in an effort to transmit his messages: trivialization, indirection, and appropriation. Trivialization, an implicit form of coding, occurs in women's cultures when a woman attempts to communicate to other women through a medium that the

dominant culture sees as "unimportant, innocuous, or irrelevant" (19). Household decorations would have fallen into this category in sixteenth-century England, and Spenser performs exegeses on a number of tapestries in Book III. His attention to detail during these moments should convince us that the tapestries deserve special attention. Indirection, however, allows women to either distance themselves or create some type of ambiguity about the messages they are coding (Radner 16). The types of indirection Spenser predominantly uses are metaphor and impersonation via transformations and gardens, which Radner and Lanser note are often used for expressing "sexual or political impulses" (16). Spenser primarily uses trivialization and indirection, but he does include an instance of appropriation in the final canto of Book III, in which a "form or material normally associated with male culture. . . is adapted to feminist purposes or forms" (Radner 10). By channeling rhetorical androgyny through Ovidian authority and feminist coding, Spenser claims a right to speak and codes his lesson specifically for upper-class educated women.

Through coded Ovidian messages, Spenser constructs a series of lessons for aristocratic women that are meant to provide instruction on the proper expression of female sexuality. In canto one, he emphasizes the difference between love and lust and warns against feminine dominance in sexual congress. He continues his lesson by outlining a model sexual union in Venus' Garden of Adonis, while warning against completing repressing sexuality through the allegorical figure of Malbecco.

Finally, Spenser tests the women of Book III in an effort to codify his complete view of what we may call married chastity, or the engagement in righteous sex.

If we return to Ovid's moralizing reputation, we might expect to find Spenser using Ovid's tales strictly to emphasize a moral dimension in his poetry. However, a side-by-side comparison reveals that Spenser changes Ovid's emphasis and engages in the process of reworking. Spenser must have had some specific reason for modifying Ovid's text, for his audience would have already had the tendency to read Ovid as a moralist based on their own understanding of his role in Early Modern education. What is surprising in Spenser's rewriting of Ovid is that he tends to emphasize the sensual more than Ovid does. Such a view of Spenser's poetry is only possible through detailed comparison between Ovid's original and Spenser's work seen through the lens of feminist coding.

One tale from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* that Spenser makes extensive use of is Venus and Adonis.² Venus and Adonis is one of the more well-known excerpts from Ovid, and it features in two cantos in Book III of *The Faerie Queene*. In Canto I of Book III, Britomart, as the Knight of Chastity, has undertaken a quest to find her destined husband, Artegall. Along the journey, Britomart has a variety of adventures that serve to instruct her in how to be a proper wife to Artegall, for their line is destined to give birth to Queen Elizabeth. In her first adventure, Britomart enters the Castle Joyous under the protection of the owner

² Book X, Lines 519-652

and Lady, Malecasta. While Britomart is waiting for her hostess, she notices a series of tapestries on the wall that tell the story of Venus and Adonis from Malecasta's point of view. The narrator performs an exegesis of the tapestry for Britomart's and the reader's benefit. Ovid's original tales emphasizes three factors: the notion of fate as Venus fears retaliation and revenge from Hippomenes and Atalanta, Venus' unnatural change in habits based on her love for Adonis, and the transformation of Adonis' lifeblood into the pomegranate. He pays particular attention to Venus' daily habits. She leaves all of her heavenly places, pursues Adonis, and hunts small game with him while neglecting her appearance and duties. For Ovid, the depth of Venus' love is that she is willing to effectively give up her role as goddess of love.

Spenser, however, omits Ovid's consideration of Venus' love for Adonis. Instead, he emphasizes Malecasta's role as the embodiment of bad chastity³ and dwells on Venus' lust for Adonis. While Ovid allows Venus and Adonis rest in a shady grove after they are exhausted from hunting, Spenser's Venus leads Adonis into a "secret shade" and bathes him "in a fountain by some couert glade" (3.1.35). Spenser's language here is suggestive of a private liason that has more to do with pleasure than with wifely duties. His readers would have connected the scene on the tapestry and the scene that Guyon, Knight of Temperance, uncovers earlier in Book II, for Acrasia's Bower of Bliss also has a number of "couert groves" (2.12.76). Furthermore, while in

³ *Male* from the Latin 'bad' and *casta*, meaning chastity

the glade Venus is seen "making girlonds of each flowre that grew/ To crowne his golden lockes with honour dew" (3.1.35), just as Redcrosse Knight in Book I was "thinking of those branches greene to frame/ A girlond for her [Duessa's] dainty forehead fit," when Duessa had led him astray from Una (1.2.30). Spenser is making a point about the difference between love and lust, but in order to fully grasp the difference, one must understand that Ovid's original is about love and transformation.

Where Ovid expresses that Venus' love is about sacrifice and a change in habits to accommodate her chosen partner, Spenser's Venus is a female aggressor who leads Adonis away from his rightful place hunting to shower him with sexual attention. In addition to making garlands for Adonis' head and bathing him in the fountain when he should be out hunting, Spenser's Venus "ever with sweet Nectar...sprinkle[s] him" (3.1.36). Here, Venus performs the traditional masculine sexual action, while Adonis is receiving it. Spenser is again recasting Ovid, for Ovid's sprinkling of nectar occurs only after Adonis has died, as is customary in Roman funerary rites. Spenser has Venus sprinkle Adonis with nectar before his death as a tool of foreshadowing. The reversal of sexual roles in Venus' and Adonis' relationship as evidenced by her sprinkling of nectar suggests Adonis' death, thereby emphasizing that no good can come from female domination in sexual matters.

The story of Venus and Adonis constitutes a form of feminist coding called indirection, for while Britomart is examining the tapestry, the men of her party ignore it. As a result, it is a safe place for the placement of opinions and

ideas expressed by women that are meant to be read by other women. Malecasta's tapestry reflects her own desires and activities. As the lady of Castle Joyous, named for the pleasurable activities taking place within and described as "All full of Damzels, and of Squyres,/Dauncing and reueling both day and night,/And swimming deepe in sensuall desyres" (3.1.39), her tapestry displaying Venus' sexual aggression towards Adonis codes her nature for Britomart and other women, who are capable of reading the code. The message of the tapestry in Malecasta's eyes is that lust is an acceptable emotion for a woman to follow. As Britomart reads the code, it is possible that she feels sympathy for Malecasta's plight because she understands the pain Malecasta feels, for both the fire that erupts in Malecasta's heart on beholding Britomart and Britomart's own love wound after seeing Artegall's face in the mirror are wounds of intense feeling (Pugh 121, 3.1.47, 3.2.26-29). Britomart, however, experiences love while Malecasta feels lust; these feelings begin the same, but it is the character's actions that mark the difference between the two. Spenser is careful to underscore this idea in his aside to the ladies reading his text: "Faire Ladies, that to loue captiued arre,/and chaste desires doe nourish in your mind/Let not her [Malecasta's] fault your sweete affections marre" (3.1.49). For Spenser, love and lust arise from the same place. It is the actions that one takes that determine the nature of one's feelings. Britomart has often been interpreted as a naïve character during her stay in Castle Joyous, for she does not seem to know that she is encouraging Malecasta's lust for her. Syrithe Pugh points

out that Britomart may not be naïve in the sense that she does not know that Malecasta is interested in her in an erotic sense, but she may be naïve in that sense that she does not expect Malecasta to act unchastely on her feelings (122). Virtuous women can have lustful feelings, since love and lust stem from the same place, but as demonstrated by Britomart and Malecasta, they are expected to act in a chaste manner. From the perspective of educated Early Modern readers who were familiar with Ovid's original, there is a deeper suggestion that the tapestry is meant for Britomart's eyes alone, because there is distinct parallel between Ovid's Venus and Britomart. Venus' change in habits in Ovid's tale sounds remarkably similar to Britomart's donning of male armor and her quest for Artegall (Burrow 122).

Through this parallel, Britomart is linked to the expression of love rather than lust. What I suggest that Spenser is doing here is highlighting the difference between the two in order to suggest how a Protestant wife should behave sexually. Both Malecasta's tapestry and her later actions portray women as dominant sexual partners, but Ovid's Venus, on whom the whole love and lust contrast depends, is not a dominant lover. She adapts her habits to Adonis and assumes a subservient position in the relationship both psychologically and physically. She tells the story of Hippomenes and Atalanta to warn Adonis against hunting wild hunting game, but she does not physically restrain him even though it is in her power as a goddess to do so. Venus further forgoes the dominant position by physically "lying upward with her head upon

his [Adonis'] lappe along" (Golding 558). Spenser's Venus, in contrast, watches him while he sleeps and "ouer him would spred / Her mantle, colour'd like the starry skyes, / And her soft arme lay vnderneath his hed / And with ambrosiall kisses bathe his eyes" (3.1.36). The Venus of Spenser's tapestry is fully in command of her relationship with Adonis. By placing his lesson within the tapestry and connecting Britomart to the events therein through Ovid's tale and authority, Spenser sends a specific message to women to avoid lust and dominance in sexual matters while loving their husbands and submitting to their desires.

Though Spenser cautions against female dominance in sexual matters, he does not suggest that women should attempt to reduce or chain their sexual desires. Both Ovid's and Spenser's tale feature a wild boar that attacks and kills Adonis. While Ovid languishes over Adonis' flight and subsequent groinal goring from the boar, Spenser scarcely spends two lines on the event: "Lo, where beyond he lyeth languishing, / Deadly engored of a great wild Bore" (3.1.38), preferring instead to focus on Venus' reaction. Here, we have two different points of emphasis. Ovid's goring has more to do with revenge against Venus, while Spenser's bore attack focuses on what Venus loses due to her dominance. For Malecasta, Venus' loss is no great tragedy, for she may move onto another victim of lust. For Britomart, however, it is precisely Spenser's lack of focus on the sexual dimension of the bore attack that becomes meaningful. As Laura Silberman suggests, "construing the erotic in reductive terms can have violent consequences,"

and Venus' dominance confines Adonis by allowing him to hunt only small, safe game (Desire viii). Because he is not allowed to hunt larger, fiercer game, Adonis' sexual masculinity is reduced. By excluding the boar from the idea of sexual feeling, the boar returns as an agent of castration, effectively finishing the emasculation process that Ovid vividly details. What is true of Adonis is also true for Britomart, for she has left her customary place by traveling outside of the traditional confines of womanhood, as Adonis left his to be with Venus. Spenser further emphasizes that Britomart cannot chain her sexual feelings when she receives a thigh wound. Her sexuality must have some outlet, and her wounding can be seen as an "awakening of femininity" (Grund 12). Reducing her sexuality would be equally as dangerous for her as acting aggressively out of lust.

If women should not be dominant in sexual congress, but also should not attempt to restrain their sexual feelings, a question arises of exactly what Spenser would have women do. His lesson on love and lust in Canto i focuses on what lust is in order to highlight what love is not. By reworking Ovid, Spenser claims the authority to speak to women while at the same time using Ovid to embed messages within his text that enable women to speak to other women in a recognized form of coding, which in turn allows his external female readers to decode his messages to them. Spenser must turn to yet another form of coding and another rendering of Ovid's Venus and Adonis to provide his solution for the conundrum of sexuality that Britomart and the women of the court face daily.

III.

In canto vi Spenser builds upon the lesson he imparts in canto i by constructing an example of what feminine sexuality should look like. To do so, he adapts Ovid's Venus and Adonis once again and refashions it into an elaborate metaphor for sexuality through the strategy of indirection. Ovid, as discussed previously, tells the tale of the death of Adonis. Here Spenser, however, considers the aftermath of Adonis' death, a subject which Ovid does not touch upon other than to note Venus' grief. By continuing Ovid's story, Spenser abandons Ovid's focus on revenge for the actions Venus took against Hippomenes and Atalanta. Instead, he makes the continuation of the tale focus on the role of love and progeny.

Canto vi opens with Chrysogone, whom Burrow considers a representation of Venus, giving birth to twin daughters, Belpheobe and Amoret. As a more chaste version of Venus, Chrysogone falls asleep and is impregnated by the sun. Instead of reaping grief and frustrated passion, she gives birth to twin girls. Judith Anderson describes the twins in terms of the dual nature of Venus – the high and the low (153). Belpheobe corresponds to the higher nature, or Chastity in its Catholic sense. Accordingly, Belpheobe is given to virgin Diana to raise. Amoret, who represents the lower side of Venus in terms of love and sexuality, goes with Venus to live in the Garden of Adonis. By placing Amoret, who will later become the ideal Protestant wife we see in canto xii, in the Garden of Adonis, Spenser opens a discussion on the proper course of love and the expression of feminine sexuality.

While Venus and Adonis in Malecasta's tapestry represents lust, The Garden of Adonis is a place of love and production. It is an earthly paradise very much tied to the cycle of life and death. Spenser describes it as the home of Venus "when she on earth does dwell" (3.6.29). Anderson explains the history of the phrase "garden of Adonis" as ancient metaphor meaning a place of heightened fertility (123). It is presented in circular terms, and it has two gates, one of which is made of gold and is "faire and fresh," whereas the other is made of iron and is "old and dride" (3.6.31). The porter, Genius, takes the seedling babes, clothes them with flesh, and sends them out into the world through the golden gate. They return after death through the back gate to be replanted, renewed, and sent back out into the world. Spenser describes the cycle as a wheel: "Til thetether they retourne, where first they grew: So like a wheele arownd they ronne from old to new" (3.6.33). The description of the Garden of Adonis in circular time is very different from the tapestry of Venus and Adonis in Malecasta's castle. In stanza thirty-five of canto i, Spenser repeatedly uses the word "now" to convey a continuing sense of present time, whereas in stanza forty-two in canto xi, Spenser repeats "continuall." Ovid's original too is circular, but the circularity focuses on recurrent events rather than on time. As Venus has wronged others, so too is she wronged. Spenser's garden is productive and subject to constant rebirth, which mirrors the events happening in Venus' inner sanctum.

Within the center of the garden's production is the mons Veneris, or mount of Venus, where Adonis is eternal.

Venus has a shady private grove on the top of the mount, much like the shady spot portrayed in the tapestry and found in Ovid's version. Adonis is here on top of the mount where he is "subject to mortalitie, yet is eterne in mutabilitie" (3.6.47). Following Burrow, Adonis is transformed from frustrated lover into eternal figure (103). He is constantly changing form within Venus' garden (3.6.36). Spenser rewrites Ovid here to make Adonis a dynamic figure of production, rather than a static, fragile pomegranate. His eternity coupled with Venus' own may be taken together as a type of marriage. Within these marriage bounds surrounded by regenerating progeny, Venus experiences a continuing, present pleasure: "There wont fayre Venus often to enioy / Her dear Adonis ioyous company, / And and reape sweet pleasure of the wanton boy" (3.6.46). Spenser's description of Venus' liason with Adonis in Malecasta's tapestry is much different: "So did she steale his heedelesse hart away, / And ioyd his loue in secret unespied (3.1.37). The latter suggests that Venus' pleasure is obscene, for she actively steals and woos her partner and must hide their congress out of view in a dark grove, while the former glorifies in her pleasure within the productivity of the garden.

Significantly, the boar that attacked Adonis is incarcerated within the mount of Venus. It is no longer a symbol of emasculation and repression of sexuality. Its power and violence has instead been added to the garden, for its presence there creates the very mountain that Venus and Adonis inhabit. Furthermore, it lends its power to feminine sexuality in the process of productive married

chastity, for it is present within the symbolic representation of Venus' womb, the "gloomy groue of mirtle trees [that] did rise" (3.6.43). Within the confines of the productive garden and the closed grove of myrtle trees, Venus continually enjoys Adonis' sexual congress in a form of married chastity; her actions are appropriately taken in marriage and placed in a marriage bed, and together with Adonis' ever-changing form, the two engage in their own form of productivity.

Amoret is raised in the Garden of Adonis, where she observes the circular nature of the life as it leaves and returns to the garden. The reproductive nature of the garden works through indirection, a dynamic that Radner and Lanser note allows women to either distance themselves or create some type of ambiguity about the messages they are coding (16). The type of indirection used here is metaphor, which Radner and Lanser specify is often used for expressing "sexual or political impulses" (16). More specifically, the metaphor of the garden parallels Adonis' constant rebirth on the Mount, which is a result of the intimacy that he and Venus share in their eternal marriage. Amoret is not privy to Venus' actions on the Mount, so Venus communicates knowledge of productive sex in marriage through the garden. The garden is specifically designed to teach, for it is "first seminary/ Of all things," and its productive function is made quite clear by a biblical reference to "increase and multiply" (3.6.30, 3.6.34). As the garden produces, so too does Venus and Adonis' marriage bed. Spenser here codes the proper expression of sexuality and the nature of love in marriage for Amoret and by

extension, his female readers. In order to do so, he transforms the ending of Ovid's story from a single, though repeating floral rebirth into a garden of production that instructs women in matters of sexual feeling.

While canto i teaches the difference between love and lust and canto vi prescribes a course for married chastity, canto x illustrates the consequences of repressing sexuality altogether. Cantos ix and x tell the story of Hellenore, Paridell, and Malbecco. Malbecco is an old wrinkled miser with a great store of wealth and a very young wife, and his character seems in keeping with medieval stock cuckolded husbands. He keeps his wife, Hellenore, under lock and key, and she and Paridell, a knight traveling with Britomart, engage in an illicit relationship.

While Adonis is constantly changing and being made again in the garden, Malbecco is permanently transformed into the abstract, static figure of Geloxy. He hoards his money, and he is unable to sexually please his wife. His transformation demonstrates what happens when sexuality is not given its proper place through the concept of productive married chastity, and as such he constitutes a warning to female figures through the strategy of indirection.

Though many scholars have debated which Ovidian character Malbecco represents, the best fit is Aglauros.⁴ In Ovid's tale of Aglauros, her sister enjoys a sexually fulfilling and loving marriage with Mercury. Visited by Envy, Aglauros dreams of her sister and Mercury in sexual

⁴ Cf. Burrow and Theresa Krier

union. Unable to find her own happiness as a result of her envy, Aglauros transforms into a cold rock. Spenser retails the key details of Aglauros' story in Canto x, for Malbecco similarly engages in voyeurism by watching his young wife engage in sexual activity with a satyr and has a cold rockiness about him.⁵ However, Spenser shifts Ovid by changing Aglauros into cuckolded husband who metamorphoses into the embodiment of Geloſy rather than a rock. Ovid's figure displays the consequences of submitting to envy. Aglauros is unable to seek her own happiness and fulfillment because she is consumed with envy "as when that fire is put to greenefeld wood or fearne/ Whych giveth neyther light nor heate, but smulders quite away" (Golding 804-5). It is curious that Spenser retains distinct Ovidian details while changing the gender and role of the character.

Aglauros is female, but Spenser chooses to cast Malbecco as male. If Spenser is coding a message to women about the danger of repressed sexuality, his choice of a male character substitutes Malbecco for Aglauros. This, too, is a facet of indirection, one that suggests that Malbecco may be read as an impersonation or "the substitution of another persona for the 'I'" as a parodic double of Britomart (Radner 17). Like Britomart, he goes on a quest in search of his beloved. Britomart has traditionally been associated with an element of narcissism, for she admires herself in her father's mirror before she sees the image of Artegall. Malbecco, according to Louise

⁵ Cf. stanzas fifty-six, fifty-seven, and fifty-eight.

Gilbert Freeman, is also associated with narcissism, but he takes it much farther than Britomart, and in doing so, he becomes a cautionary figure (312). Britomart opens up her own worldview by seeking out Artegall through a knight's quest traditionally associated with men. In Malbecco's quest for Hellenore, he attempts to fit the entire world into his own worldview, and consequently does not learn from the world around him. Britomart, too, is often described as unawares in Book III, but she absorbs knowledge from the world around her, as evidenced by her success in rescuing Amoret from the House of Busirane in canto eleven. Malbecco's short sightedness is even has a physical representation; he only sees out of one eye. By forcing the world into his narrow attempt to understand meaning, he sees Hellenore in everyone (Freeman 316). Malbecco is trapped within his own mind. The result is that he is isolated from the rest of world. Isolation cannot lead to married chastity; this is one of the risks that Britomart faces in her future. An abundance of narcissism interferes with the proper expression of female sexuality in the marriage bed, for it prevents the kind of productivity that strengthens marriage bonds and encourages envious stagnation. Spenser instructs Britomart and his female readers through the figure of Malbecco as Aglauros while simultaneously distancing Malbecco from Britomart and the line of succession she finds in Queen Elizabeth by displaying in detail the consequences, namely envy and misery, of the complete denial of female sexuality

Malbecco's envy and misery stem in part because he is one of the "have-nots" in life due to his inability to modify

his own worldview (Krier 183). He wants what others have because his self-privatization does not allow him to fully possess what he does have. As he dwells on what others have, he begins to lose his sense of self. This sense of lost self is complete when he transforms into the figure of Gelosy. He loses his individual identity and forgets his humanity. Spenser describes Gelosy as one "woxen so deform'd that he has quight forgot he was a man" (3.10.60). The increase of narcissism through isolation leads to jealousy of others who are fulfilled. Such jealousy is also static, for it does not contribute to productive married chastity and the circular nature of time, making it especially undesirable in women whose role it is to do these very things. Spenser describes Gelosy in these terms: "Yet he can never dye, but dying lives, and doth himself with sorrow new sustaine, that death and life attonce unto him gives" (3.10.60). Gelosy does not produce anything outside of himself. Spenser, through the character of Malbecco, gives noble ladies an example of what can happen if female sexuality is cast aside.

In Cantos i, vi, and x, Spenser uses Ovidian authority and feminist coding to instruct women about lust, love, and the denial of sexuality. Canto x concludes Spenser's instruction in female sexuality, and in cantos xi and xii, he tests both Britomart and Amoret on the knowledge of married chastity they have gained throughout their experiences in Book III. In order to do so, Spenser makes further use of Ovid's authority and codes his messages to Amoret and Britomart through trivialization. Both Britomart and Amoret would be unable to read the

messages without their prior experiences, and the women of the court would be unable to read them without knowledge of Ovid. In Canto xi Britomart enters the House of Busyrane, an enchanter, who has kidnapped Amoret, one of Chrysogone's twin daughters. Amoret is currently engaged to Sir Scudamore, and Britomart leaves him behind at the entrance to go retrieve Amoret. Britomart must pass into the third room in order to rescue Amoret, whom Chih-hsin Lin identifies as Spenser's idea Protestant wife, for she refuses to submit to Busirane's sexual will.

In the first room of the Busirane's castle, Britomart encounters a variety of tapestries that depict scenes from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The focus of these scenes is the triumphs of Cupid over the gods. As Syrithe Pugh has noted, all of tapestries show the gods in a beastly fashion (146). Jove is depicted as a physical animal in most of his conquests over human maidens. Examples include the rape of Europa, where Jove is shown as a white bull, and the rape of Leda, where Jove takes the form of a swan. While other gods, such as Neptune, may not be shown in the guise of an animal, their actions are animalistic due to the violent nature of their sex acts. The tapestries show the gods as subhuman; love is the supposed culprit for their descent into violence. The tapestries in the House of Busirane demonstrate Busirane's attitude towards love, which Britomart rightly recognizes as lust. She is able to read the code in the tapestry and see the difference between love and lust.

Glancing about the room, Britomart then notices the writing upon the lintel, "Be Bold." While Britomart is able

to read the tapestry, she is puzzled over the meaning of the writing. Spenser notes, "She oft and oft it ouer-red, Yet could not find what sence it figured" (3.11.49). As she progresses through the room, the writing builds, ending with "Be Bold, Be Bold, But Not Too Bold" (3.11.53). Although Britomart is tested on her knowledge through indirection in the tapestries, the writing on the lintel serves as a form of appropriation for Spenser's female readers. Written words are associated with masculine authority in the sixteenth century, connected with literature and law, two practices generally undertaken by men, but the written words on the lintel are appropriated for women. "Be Bold" calls Arthur Golding's translation of Ovid's *Venus and Adonis* to mind, for he was the primary translator of Ovid in the sixteenth century. Venus, who represents love in Ovid's tale, warns Adonis "Bee bold. . . forbear too bold to be" (Golding 551-3). While Ovid applies the phrase to hunting game, Spenser adapts it to use for female sexuality. Married chastity occurs when a woman is bold to her husband in bed, but not too bold. She is chaste because he is her only partner, and she has enthusiasm and love for him in their sexual union that is devoid of lust and dominance. Britomart's test, however, lies in the tapestry and she chooses to follow through because of the falsehood she has seen in the depictions of Cupid. She is not afraid, and she "was no whit thereby discouraged, from prosecuting of her first intent, but forward with bold steps into the next roome went" (3.11.50). Britomart passes the test in the first room of Busirane's house and is able to progress into the next room through her own knowledge of

married chastity and her reading of Spenser's twisted Ovidian tales.

Amoret too has learned the proper expression of productive chastity from her time in the Garden of Adonis. She is kidnapped from her wedding to Scudamour by the enchanter Busirane and taken to his castle. W.C. Johnson, Lauren Silberman, and Chih-hsin Lin have three differing perspectives on the function of the House of Busirane in cantos xi and xii. Johnson argues that the house of Busirane itself represents the mind of lovers. For him, the house is a projection of Amoret's fears about her marriage to Scudamour. Both Busirane and Scudamour represent two parts of a whole—one is righteous love, the other burning passion. Following his argument, Amoret's suffering is a result of her own fears about her impending sexual relationship with her husband. Lauren Silberman locates the site of Busirane's castle within the tradition of older Catholic religious viewpoints in larger Renaissance society ("Hermaphrodite" 213). In the Catholic view of chastity, all sexual expression is beastly and meant for procreation only, and engaged women may be seen as lustful and improper. Busirane then becomes an expression of a disapproving society; he tortures Amoret as a means of social control. Chih-hsin Lin challenges both of these positions by locating Busirane and his castle within the courtly love tradition (317). Amoret resists Busirane because she has learned the lesson of productive chastity. His attempt to literally possess her heart by violence is ineffective, and Amoret is not fooled by his masque. Her suffering is akin to that of a Christian martyr, who must

suffer as Christ suffered for her beliefs (Lin 317).

IV.

The influence of Ovid on Spenser is unquestionable. Time and time again, Spenser draws upon Ovid as source material for his characters in *The Faerie Queene*. Representations of Venus from Venus and Adonis in Book X of the *Metamorphoses* appear in Britomart, Chrysogene, and Amoret. Spenser rewrites Ovid, and the differences and parallels between the respective texts allow Spenser to detail his messages to aristocratic Elizabethan women. Through rhetorical androgyny, he positions himself as an instructor on the nature of proper married chastity.

Although Spenser champions the notion of married chastity as a solution to the problem of the spiritual and physical worlds encountered in the change from Catholicism to Protestantism, he further defines married chastity as that which is productive. This is not to suggest that he defines righteous sex as progeny under a Catholic context. However, he does suggest that sex should always be productive by increasing the feelings of love between spouses and the production of spirituality within a Protestant marriage. In other words, married chastity mirrors the endless love Christ has for his church by constantly affirming the marriage vows of honor, loyalty, and regard. Certainly productive married chastity may lead to progeny, but progeny is not necessary in Spenser's notion of production. It is enough that a wife builds a sexual relationship with her husband that increases their devotion to one another through a spiritual connection to

righteousness. Sexual congress is positive in the light of married chastity, for the shared passion and pleasure of the lovers increases their love and union with one another.

Because Spenser's instructions to women are coded, it is useful to look at one of Spenser's later works that expresses a similar theme to Book III of *The Faerie Queene*, for his original ending of *The Faerie Queene* in 1590 featured the union of Scudamour and Amoret into a complete hermaphroditic being. Johnson suggests that it is "Spenser's great theme—that human love must be a human experience, and that primarily through experiencing 'right love,' with its proper integrations of masculine and feminine, of human and divine, that one can become fully human" (104). We can see this idea too in productive married chastity, for the balance in a sexual relationship between husband and wife edifies and strengthens the other's love. His *Epithalamion*, published in 1595, is a marriage hymn for his wife, Elizabeth Boyle. The hymn is similar in content to Book III of *The Faerie Queene*, for it too concerns sexuality, marriage partners, and weddings. Marriage hymns are typically sung by an onlooker, but Spenser states, "So I unto my selfe alone will sing" (1). Spenser vaguely references the private Mount of Venus here. The reference is made much clearer during the marriage consummation scene: "The whiles an hundred little winged loves, / Shall fly and flutter round about your bed" (20). The flying cupids that hide the marriage bed from public view recall the interlocking tree branches that cannot be blown apart by the wind on top of Mount Venus (3.6.44). Spenser also calls to mind the circular temporality

in the Garden of Adonis through the format of the *Epithalamion*. The work has 365 lines and 24 stanzas, signaling the repeating process of days and years. Though the emphasis of the hymn is on the now, the work itself stands as a continual recreation of the experience, as Spenser tells us in the last stanza: "Song made in lieu of many ornaments, /. . . Be unto her a goodly ornament,/ And for a short time an endlesse monument" (24). Production in the *Epithalamion* occurs both through the reading of the work and the act of marriage congress, for the cupids who surround the bed share in the love and delight of the marriage partners: "Their [the cupids'] pretty stealthes shal worke, and snares shal spread/ To filch away sweet snatches of delight/ Conceald through covert night" (20). Even progeny is sought for eventually, as Spenser asks Venus "Encline thy will t'effect our wishfull vow,/ And the chaste wombe informe with timely seed" (21). Spenser's request occurs after the marriage consummation, and he calls his wife's womb chaste. Therefore, we may infer that he does believe in married chastity. Furthermore, the sex act in itself was productive without progeny, as it fed the little cupids.

Spenser is open about productive married chastity in the *Epithalamion*, and his openness considered alongside the lack of direct reference in *The Faerie Queene* makes it possible to suggest that Spenser is actively coding for an aristocratic female audience. Radner and Lanser state, "Such forms of coding raise complex questions about the creator's conscious and subconscious intentions and about the interpretations that may be constructed both by the

original receiving community and by outside observer-analysts like ourselves" (6). Thus, it is impossible to know for certain if Spenser is coding, for the very nature of implicit coding means that the presence of coding is always contested. If everyone knows the coding is there, it ceases to be a functional code.

Spenser combines subject matter from Ovid's tales and Ovid's authority as a sixteenth-century moralist with feminist coding strategies in an effort to champion productive married chastity as an ideal Protestant virtue. Productive married chastity is not only the development of sexual relations between husband and wife; it is the development of sexual congress in a way that produces increased love, honor, and deeds as Christ loves his church. By arguing for productive married chastity, Spenser addresses the problem that Astrophil faces in Sidney's sonnet sequence. The physical slaking of desire within the confines of marriage allows both the lady and the lover to ascend the Neo-Platonic ladder and reach newer heights in virtue.

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