"Conveyed quite away" : the necessity of maintaining the boundaries of otherness in the Amoret-Busyrane episode of Edmund Spenser's the Faerie queene

Nadine Weiss
“Conveyed Quite Away”: The Necessity of Maintaining the Boundaries of Otherness in the Amoret- Busyrane Episode of Edmund Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene*

by

*Nadine Weiss*

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*Advisor: Professor Louis Schwartz*
Despite receiving much attention from Spenserian scholars, the Amoret-Busyrane episode at the end of Book III of *The Faerie Queene* remains one of the most contentious and ambiguous in Spenser’s epic poem. This controversial response arises primarily out of two problematic features of the episode. First, it is difficult to find a moral resolution in (and to) the unnerving violence that colors the episode, specifically in so far as that violence seems designed to express Spenser’s negative attitude toward Petrarchism. Petrarchism, the poetic tradition that developed in wake of Italian sonneteer Francesco Petrarca’s *Rime Sparse*, was preoccupied, from Spenser’s perspective, with the poet’s sense of isolation or despair in response to the unavailability of the beloved. The speaker of the Petrarchan sonnet often presents the desired other or beloved as an emblem of perfection and likens his pursuit of her to a hunt. Spenser chooses to characterize Petrarchism in a particular way that serves his purpose of reflecting upon the potentially problematic continuities between the aesthetic and the real. Therefore, he engages a particular understanding of Petrarchism as a model for love as war. The second confounding feature of this episode is Spenser’s revision of the 1590 ending to Book III, in which he postpones the reunion of Scudamour and Amoret, entirely rejecting the image of the hermaphrodite as a figure for a perfect erotic union of male and female. Critics have responded to the first dilemma by offering an array of diverse readings, all of which seek either to diminish Busyrane’s sadism or to deny the anti-Petrarchan tone of the episode. Scholars largely regard Spenser’s excision of the 1590 hermaphroditic union between Amoret and Scudamour as a necessary alteration which allowed the poet to extend his narrative after having received political favor from his monarch. These approaches are limited, however, in that they do not perceive the full import and subtlety of Spenser’s critique of Petrarchan desire, as well as the significance of the agenda it implies with regards to the virtue of chastity and the other thematic concerns of Book III. In addition, such readings frequently neglect entirely and even downplay the significance of Spenser’s rethinking of the concluding hermaphroditic union between Amoret and Scudamour in the initial 1590 ending to Book III. This revision, however, was in fact crucial to Spenser’s full rethinking, not only of the nature of Petrarchan accounts of desire, but also of the dynamics of amorous union itself as a whole.
In addition to remaining divided over the extent of Spenser’s critique of Petrarchan desire, scholars also remain divided about some of the most basic interpretative issues relevant to the episode. For example, it remains unclear whether the House of Busyrane is a product of the male or female imagination. Some critics suggest the House of Busyrane represents a crystallization of the female fear of sexual union, while others suggest it arises out of the male mind. Still others, such as Harry Berger Jr., pinpoint a shift in gender perspective as the spectacle unfolds. The main limitation of the first sort of reading is that it absolves the reader of having to reject Petrarchan desire altogether. By proposing that Amoret’s tortured mind contains the ghastly House of Busyrane, the tortuous enchanter himself ceases to be a villain. This interpretation is generally viewed as an antiquated response to the previously male-centered interpretation of the episode. By contrast, the second reading, which situates the House of Busyrane wholly within the male psyche, too readily dismisses the House of Busyrane as a negative manifestation of Petrarchan desire. Much like the Bower of Bliss, the House of Busyrane possesses a unique purpose within Spenser’s story beyond merely existing to encounter eventual destruction and dissolution. Although haunting, the House of Busyrane remains a testament to the value of human art. The majesty of Busyrane’s aesthetic accomplishments thwarts both the progress of Spenser’s epic poem and Britomart’s journey. The sheer elaborateness of the poet’s indulgent descriptions of the artistic displays decorating Busyrane’s suite extends throughout much of the episode. In addition, the narrative is similarly lengthened by his female heroine, who, in a state of sensory rapture, consistently halts her forward movement (the progress of her quest) to relish in the grandeur of Busyrane’s artistry. Spenser does not intend for his readers to dismiss the House of Busyrane as merely a negative depiction of a specific kind of male desire, but rather to contemplate and indulge in its surroundings much like his female heroine herself does. The comingling of beauty and danger that characterizes Busyrane’s art must be confronted, in other words, by both Britomart and the reader before it can be critically and morally assessed, and finally, defeated.

The reading offered by Berger, who locates a shift in gender prospective at a precise moment during the episode, is the most compelling of the three sorts of reading I mentioned in the previous
paragraph. This is in small part because it accommodates a less fixed approach to gender and better explains some of the stranger and more ambiguous aspects of the episode. Nonetheless, Berger’s reading fails to consider how the House of Busyrane arises out of an active discursive exchange between the male and female. In general, critics have failed to note the extent to which the House of Busyrane is produced by just such an active exchange. Although Busyrane’s artistry arises out of his own flawed conception of erotic love, its psychological impact is intended for Britomart. As the female knight moves through the House of Busyrane, she encounters increasingly life-like forms of mimesis ranging from tapestry, solid relief, theatre, and finally, an explicit shift from representation to real life with the appearance of Amoret. This trajectory depicts a process of gradual metamorphosis, in which the male impulse for control transgresses the boundary between an art that remains a figure for an entirely inward experience of desire to becoming a model of behavior in the real world of human social activity. Spenser’s attention to this transformative process expresses the poet’s anxiety regarding the possibility that such art may become a model for behavior. The House of Busyrane reflects on how art and literature of this kind can evoke anxieties and misconceptions in both the male and female psyches and can, in action, have consequences in the external world. Therefore, the episode does not feature isolated depictions of the male or female psyches, but rather an active exchange of gendered fears aroused in response to a particular type of male art. For this reason, it is necessary to Spenser’s agenda that the anti-Petrarchan tone of Cantos XI and XII not be dismissed, but rather recognized and confronted by a critical reader.

I. Critical Perspectives: Gendered Approaches to the Amoret-Busyrane Episode

Certain common misconceptions have arisen in response to these polarized readings of the episode. The readings most closely aligned with the first interpretation, which identifies the House as a product of the female imagination, blame Amoret for creating the circumstances of her own suffering. A companion to the aforementioned sort of interpretation are those readings that suggest the episode draws from a variety of common Early Modern tropes and symbols, and therefore, is better understood if read as largely
metaphorical. The second reading of this episode as a figment of the male fancy has produced a variety of similarly misguided responses from critics. The most common are those which interpret Busyrane as a figure of lust and those which conceive Busyrane’s subjugation of Amoret as a projection of Spenser’s personal feelings of frustration towards Queen Elizabeth I. I will begin by examining the interpretations arising out of the first reading of the House of Busyrane and then address the latter readings of the episode. Finally, I will end with a discussion of Berger’s interpretation and its relevance to the 1590 ending to Book III.

As I noted earlier, one way in which scholars have explained Spenser’s critique of Petrarchan desire is to suggest that he invites us to “blame the victim,” Amoret. In *The Kindly Flame*, Thomas P. Roche identifies the House of Busyrane as an “objectification of Amoret’s fear of sexual union” (Roche 77). Maureen Quilligan similarly suggests that “the scene of Britomart’s rescue of Amoret is a scrutiny of female sexual fear” (Quilligan 197). Similar readings of the episode are expressed by Felicity Hughes and A.C. Hamilton, albeit to a lesser degree. Hamilton writes in his footnotes to the Longman edition of *The Faerie Queene* that the giant Ollyphant, whom Spenser unambiguously conflates with Scudamour, represents “Scudamour as he appears to Amoret’s tortured fancy” (389). Felicity Hughes notes that the whole episode is “a psychological allegory…[which] represents a psyche (Amoret’s) disturbed by passion” (Hughes 129). Hughes’ “disturbed” suggests that the episode arises in response to Amoret’s psychological anxieties rather than Busyrane’s skewed conception of erotic love.

Eggert reflects on this sort of interpretation, stating: “For some thirty years beginning in the mid-1960s, the dominant critical trend among Spenser scholars was to describe Amoret’s suffering as an externalized, allegorically expressed form of either her dread of sexual union with her brand-new husband, Scudamour…or her shock and shame at the magnitude of her own sexual desire. In these readings, the “‘worker’” of Amoret’s “‘smart’” thus proves to be not the sadistic Busyrane, but Amoret herself” (Eggert 1). As Eggert notes, in labeling Amoret the "worker" of her own “smart,” such reading dismiss the villainy of Busyrane’s actions. As the final image in a composite of fragmented depictions of female subjugation and sexual invasion, the torture scene unfolding in Busyrane’s innermost chamber
cannot be divorced from the violent images that permeate Busyrane’s artistic displays. The male presence in these displays is so predominantly associated with violence and forcefulness that it is difficult to distance the contribution of the male psyche.

A second kind of reading, closely associated with those I have suggested “blame the victim,” interprets the episode, including Busyrane’s violence, as figurative. This kind of interpretation relies primarily on the premise that the House of Busyrane and the actions unfolding within it are entirely metaphorical and refer largely to a set of common tropes with which an Early Modern audience would have been well-acquainted. Alastair Fowler suggests such a reading in *Renaissance Realism*. He notes that Amoret’s “wound has been taken as sadistic...[b]ut it may be better read allegorically as expanding into narrative certain familiar emblems of the heart” (Fowler 92). Fowler comments on the frequency of literary depictions of the heart transfixed with an arrow, concluding that this wound “symbolized the torment of unreciprocated, unequal, or frustrated love. Love’s pain, chastity’s moral ‘cruelty,’ and the punishment of passion are almost the expected norm” (Fowler 92-3). As Fowler concludes, “[t]hese sufferings do not necessarily indicate sadistic cruelty” (Fowler 93). Yet in integrating these common meanings into an interpretation of the episode, one need not necessarily assume the absence of sadism. After all, as Fowler himself notes, Amoret is led by the figures Despight and Cruelty into the Masque (Fowler 92). In addition, a wide range of other incidences throughout the episode also suggest the presence of sadistic intent. For example, C.S. Lewis cites the depiction of Cupid lifting his blindfold to bask in the suffering of Amoret, “Which scene, he much rejoiced in his cruell mind,” as such an instance of sadism (Lewis, “Images of Life” 21).

The second major class of interpretation identifies the House of Busyrane as the creation of the male psyche. A common reading arising out of this gendered approach interprets Busyrane as a figure solely representative of lust. Janet Spens classifies Busyrane as “the too lustful element in Scudamour’s passion” (105-6). Similarly, Dorothy Stephens refers to the House of Busyrane as a “lustful coercion,”
which she suggests is linked to Amoret’s experience in Book IV in Lust’s cave (Stephens 26).

Frederick Morgan Padelford notes that Amoret is not distressed by sexual surrender but rather from “susceptibility to the wiles of Busyrane—lust” (Padelford 326). Roche also comments on this kind of reading in The Kindly Flame. He writes: “The general assumption that Busyrane represents merely lust is usually accompanied by the tacit assumption that he is trying to possess [Amoret], but this need not be the case…Busyrane is trying to transfer Amoret’s love for Scudamour to himself by charms” (Roche 81). As Roche argues, Busyrane’s “love is not sexual but destructive—destructive of the will to love within Amoret herself” (Roche 81). Although Roche mistakenly identifies the masque as an objectification of the Amoret’s fear of “physical surrender which her marriage to Scudamour must entail,” he is right to resist interpreting Busyrane as merely an allegory of lust (Roche 81). Roche’s claim that Busyrane’s enslavement of Amoret is destructive of her will to love “within herself,” identifies the key paradox in Busyrane’s desire to forcefully transfer Amoret’s affections from Scudamour to himself, as if one could force free consent from the object of desire. Interpretations that reduce Busyrane to an allegory of lust miss the import of this paradoxical desire. Spenser did not intend for Busyrane to be viewed as a figure of unrestrained lust, but rather as a figure engaged in a misguided pursuit for consent. The negative evaluation the reader assigns to his tactics of persuasion reveals the danger associated with applying Petrarchan values to behavior in the external world.

Another limited reading associated with this male-centered conception of the House of Busyrane aligns Spenser himself with the figure of the sadistic sonneteer Busyrane. Many scholars have interpreted the prevalence of rape throughout the text as an expression of Spenser’s own ambivalent sentiments towards his queen. Susan Frye, along with Maureen Quilligan, asserts that Spenser’s thematic treatment of rape, especially in this episode, serves as an outlet for “all the displaced frustration and violence that

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1 Dorothy Stephens, *The Limits of Eroticism in Post-Petrarchan Narrative* (1998), 26 & 45. Donald Cheney comments on this perspective in “Spenser’s Hermaphrodite and the 1590 ‘Faerie Queene’” (1972). Cheney suggests “[m]ost readers have felt…that the patroness of chastity performs her ultimate task in liberating Amoret, a figure of goody womanhood from the forces of Lust…making possible a fruitful and proper marriage” (195). Although integral to Cheney’s reading is that such assumptions are limited in the 1590 edition of the “Faerie Queene,” and that the “Hermaphrodite image serves to emphasize the limitations of our understanding of Amoret and Scudamour as lovers” (196).
[he] feels towards his queen” (Frye 69). This interpretation falls short due to its dismissal of the House of Busyrane as nothing more than a negative depiction of a particular kind of male desire, in this context, a desire for female subjugation. Like the previous reading that interprets Busyrane as an allegorical figure for lust, this reading ignores Spenser’s explicit insistence that Busyrane’s actions are designed “all perforce to make her him to loue” (III.xii). Such readings misinterpret Busyrane’s principal motive, which is not to subjugate or enslave Amoret, not really in an important sense to rape her, but rather to persuade her to love him in place of Scudamour. That his action becomes violent is itself a figure for what is paradoxical and deeply misguided about the impulse to coerce free consent. Although Spenser’s private sentiments towards Queen Elizabeth are not fully understood, the supposition that he had complex and antagonistic feelings towards his female ruler, and that these feelings surface throughout his literature seems plausible. Nonetheless, in aligning Spenser so easily with the figure of Busyrane, critics discount the true nature of Busyrane’s desire and the significance of the methods he employs to attain what he wants.

I would like to conclude this introduction with a more extended discussion of Harry Berger Jr’s account of the episode, which as I stated earlier remains the most comprehensive and compelling account. In assessing Berger’s reading of the episode, it is useful to refer to his reflections on a specific passage cited by many critics as a confirmation that the House of Busyrane is a manifestation of the female psyche. After Britomart has observed the procession of Busyrane’s primary masquers, a number of unnamed maladies appear. Unlike the previous masquers, the significance of these new dancers is not explicit. Rather, they are merely described as “So many moe, as there be phantasies / In wavering wemens wit, that none can tell” (III.xii.26). This passage figures prominently in those reading that see the episode as a portrayal of the feminine psyche and more specifically, the feminine fear of sexual consummation. In contrast to such critics, Harry Berger Jr. offers a subtle, but important distinction. Berger does suggest that the stanza clearly “draws [these figures of malady] into the feminine psyche and associates them ‘with that Damozel’ Amoret” (183). However he differs in suggesting these lines alert the audience “to the possibility of the masque being imposed on [Amoret’s] mind” [italics mine] (Berger 183). Berger’s
use of the word “imposed” suggests the episode does not merely arise out of Amoret’s tortured fears of sexual encounter, but rather that the masque is designed to exploit whatever fears she may already possess, as well as incite new ones. Prior to Amoret’s appearance, Berger maintains that the episode assumes a male perspective, which displays the state of Busyrane’s, not Amoret’s mind. As Britomart proceeds further into the House, Berger claims the masque gradually advances towards and into the female mind until the fixed moment of entry in which Britomart first beholds Amoret. In suggesting that the episode is an expression of both the male and female imagination, Berger does not attribute the masque’s existence to the female alone, but rather to the dangerous fantasies of both the male and female minds. This interpretation, crucially, enables the reader to understand the masque as a consequence of a certain type of art which aggravates both male and female fears and expectations of erotic union. Although valuable, Berger’s reading still remains limited in that it does not allow for an assessment of the House of Busyrane as an active exchange between the male and female psyches. He locates a specific moment of transition between psyches, barring the two from ever achieving confrontation, and therefore does not attend sufficiently to the tense interplay between the female and male psyches at work throughout of the House of Busyrane, which I argue reaches the point of confrontation before they can arrive at or at least approach a resolution.

At the time, Berger’s reading of the Amoret-Busyrane episode offered a novel critique of the developing social and literary history depicted throughout Busyrane’s artistry. He successfully traced the evolving psychological perversion of the male mind as displayed by Busyrane’s artistry and presented a compelling interpretation of the initial 1590 ending to Book III. Berger’s reading recognizes the full import of Spenser’s depiction of erotic antagonism and the negative consequences of this view of erotic exchange upon Amoret’s bodily and mental integrity. In the “War Between the Sexes,” Berger underscores Spenser’s attention to the interactions of the male and female psyche, particularly as they relate to the literary history figured in Busyrane’s artistic displays. He suggests that Busyrane’s artistic rendition of courtly love is “put into place to convince Britomart of Busy-reigns’s power and to impress on her the sad range of possibilities offered male and female psyches by centuries of erotic
experience...as in the literature in which Spenser finds them reflected” (Berger 173). In addition, Berger perceives the possibility of moral irresolution in the hermaphroditic union of Amoret and Scudamour. As Berger concludes, the implicit danger associated with this negative vision of assimilation is that “the lovers attempt to abolish separateness by headlong convergence, not by the slowly and painfully won knowledge of self and other” (193). Although Berger recognizes the conflict associated with a “headlong convergence” of lovers, which is devoid of a reasonable process of familiarization and acquired knowledge of other, he fails to consider the larger failure of this model of romantic union as embodied by the figure of the hermaphrodite—namely an inability to value a free, subjective other as the only truly valuable object of desire or love. I will later show how Spenser’s revised ending establishes just this sort of the respect for the integrity of the other as a necessary feature of ideal romantic union.

Like Berger, Lauren Silberman recognizes the negative nuances of the hermaphrodite, yet persists in viewing Spenser’s portrayal of hermaphroditic union as neither flawed nor potentially problematic. She offers yet another way of accounting for the episode’s critique of Petrarchan desire. According to Silberman, Spenser presents a positive revision of the Ovidian monster by offering in it a figure of mutuality and sexual difference. Silberman argues that Britomart’s conquest of Busyrane reaffirms the notion of romantic union as “a shared enterprise,” which is symbolized by the hermaphroditic embrace of the lovers in the scene’s 1590 conclusion. In Ovid’s myth of the hermaphrodite, Hermaphroditus misperceives his own body, judging his coalesced form to be a condemnation to the realm of otherness or non-masculinity, and consequently, is trapped by his own misperception. Silberman perceives Amoret’s suffering as reflecting a similar misnaming of desire. She writes: “Amoret is assaulted by the art of Busyrane, who attempts to redefine her chastity in order to violate it. By misrepresenting Amoret’s chastity in reductively physical terms, Busyrane seeks to deny her desire” (Silberman 66). Silberman suggests that both Ovid’s Hermaphroditus and Amoret fall victim to a loss of bodily integrity; however, she fails to perceive hermaphroditic union as another instance of diminished autonomy and bodily integrity. She concludes that “[t]he lover’s union is a mutually defined relationship—not a monster—which accounts for sexual difference and sexual desire” (Silberman 70). Silberman’s reading too easily
dismisses the negative potentialities associated with this model of union and she does not account for Spenser’s revision to the 1590 conclusion to Book III. Amoret’s union with Scudamour does not result in the reconstitution of her autonomous form, but rather in a continued loss of bodily integrity. As I will now argue in the next section of this thesis, in drawing a parallel between the violent physical distortion witnessed upon Amoret’s form in both her interactions with Busyrane and Scudamour, Spenser seems to imply that this model of romantic union cannot serve as a replica for love in the external world. Whether Spenser intended to convey the negative and potentially dangerous aspects of hermaphroditic union in the 1590 version of the *The Faerie Queene* or merely revised his ending in hindsight is uncertain, yet Silberman’s failure to account for Spenser’s revision remains a substantial omission in her argument.

II. Spenser’s Multiple Conflations: The Emergence of the Two-Gendered Psychologies

In *Renaissance Realism: Narrative Images in Literature and Art*, Alastair Fowler comments on the perplexing nature of Britomart’s experience in the House of Busyrane and the inability of critics to arrive at a unified consensus regarding what occurs within the episode. He suggests this difficulty is closely related to an array of common misconceptions regarding Renaissance narrative convention. He writes: “Renaissance narratives seldom focus on integral characters as a main preoccupation. Characters are multiply represented, and have to be assembled from separate surrogates, or aspects hinted at in associated attributes” (Fowler 85). Fowler’s assertion suggests that we interpret the main characters of the episode as personae that figure, in different ways, two central psychologies. The figures of Busyrane and Scudamour represent the male psyche and that the figures of Amoret and Britomart can be similarly understood as representing the female psyche. Moreover, these pairs of character and their various interactions in the course of the Amoret-Busyrane episode present the two gendered psyches in multifaceted ways, ultimately presenting a richly complex portrayal of the male and female psyches in the context of sensual love.

In her dogged pursuit of the giant Ollyphant, Britomart inadvertently encounters the prostrate Sir Scudamour. Both Fowler and A.C. Hamilton agree that in this moment Spenser unambiguously conflates
the characters of Ollyphant and Scudamour. Fowler writes: “the giant Ollyphant….constitutes one presentation of the character otherwise known as Scudamour,” for, as Spenser’s narrator tells us, when the giant flees she ‘so long him followed, / That she at last came’ upon the despondent knight (Fowler 85). As Hamilton notes, the structure of Stanza 7, specifically the phrases “so long” and “at last,” implicitly associate Britomart’s chase of Ollyphant with her discovery of Scudamour. The text dithers regarding the nature of her “chance” meeting with Scudamour—the narration suggests the encounter is fortuitous, while the syntax and diction seem to imply this interaction is a necessary and direct consequence of her pursuit of Ollyphant. Nonetheless, the description of these events serves to collapse the boundaries of the two characters, and introduces Scudamour and Ollyphant as associated variants of a larger psychological presence. Hamilton notes that “the Giant of masculine lust is Scudamour as he appears to Amoret’s tortured fancy” (Hamilton 389). Fowler correctly refutes this interpretation, however, which goes along with a reading that locates the House of Busyrane within Amoret’s apprehensive or “tortured” mind. Fowler writes that “it will not quite do to psychologize the metamorphosis so easily. Britomart chases the giant; so Scudamour must appear Ollyphant to Britomart’s untortured fancy too” (Fowler 85). Fowler identifies an important inadequacy in Hamilton’s reading, yet his discussion of this puzzling opening scene ends here. In further developing Fowler’s observation that Britomart also perceives Ollyphant in Scudamour, I have arrived at a second reading of the scene. According to Fowler, the scene cannot be so easily psychologized as Britomart is capable of perceiving the presence of Ollyphant, yet what Fowler fails to consider is that the figure of Ollyphant may exist relative to the psychology of both female characters. The figures of Britomart and Amoret, in fact, converge in many instances throughout the episode suggesting that the two characters constitute a shared psychology. Such a reading makes possible a new type of interpretation of the episode that understands the happenings of the House of Busyrane as neither a product entirely of the male or female mind, but rather as a discourse between the male and female psyches.

By tracing the dissolution of the lustful giant Ollyphant and the emergence of an effeminate, dejected Scudamour, for example, this opening scene depicts the multiplicity of personalities that compose
the male psyche. This trajectory seems to parallel with unmistakable precision the course of Scudamour and Amoret’s romantic history. Scudamour’s forceful abduction of Amoret from the Temple of Venus imitates the unrestrained, lustful force of Ollyphant, while the final state of despair in which Britomart discovers Scudamour seems a consequence of his previous indulgence in immoral and even solipsistic abandon. As this reading equates Ollyphant with lust, it may resemble an interpretation mentioned earlier in my discussion that perceives Busyrane as also an allegorical figure of lust. As I also noted earlier, the limitation of such a reading is not that it associates lust with the figure of Busyrane, which Spenser certainly does when he writes that Busyrane kept Amoret “in bitter smart / Because his sinfull lust she would not serue” (IV.i.4.1-2). This reading is problematic, instead, because it reduces Busyrane to merely an allegory of lust and consequentially, fails to recognize the import of his paradoxical desire to forcefully extract free consent from his victim. An alignment of the three male characters suggests that Busyrane constitutes just one embodiment of a larger male psyche composed of a variety of amalgamated personae.

Several other details in the opening stanzas of the episode alert us to this amalgamation. For example, not only does Scudamour’s own violent abduction of Amoret from the Temple of Venus as conveyed in Book IV mirror Busyrane’s seizure of the same damsel on her wedding night, but Scudamour describes Busyrane’s enslavement of Amoret in terms too precise for an impartial non-observer of the spectacle. He notes that Amoret is manacled in “caytiue band”—an unnervingly accurate description of what is only revealed to us when Amoret is later described, “her small waste girt rown with yron bands, / Vnto a brazen pillour, by which she stands” (xii.30.8-9). In the same stanza, Scudamour makes yet another uncanny assumption, lamenting the loss of Amoret, he wails, “Why then is Busyrane with wicked hand / Suffered, these seuen monethes day in secret den / My lady and my love so cruelly to pen” (III.xi.10). Quilligan comments on Spenser’s punning on the word “pen” in these lines, writing, “Busyrane’s instrument of torture is his lyric pen, and a profoundly reverberating pun on this word insists on the sterile, prisonlike effect of his art” (Quilligan 198). Assuming Spenser intended for his readers to identify this dual meaning in the phrase “to pen” (to cage or imprison, but also to write with a pen) and to connect its meaning with the “strangue characters” Busyrane “wrate” upon Amoret in her own “liuing
blood,” which it seems he very likely did, his decision to make Scudamour the author of these words remains confounding. Scudamour’s inexplicable knowledge of the intricacies of Amoret’s torture remains a conspicuous omission in scholarly discourse, and the subtleties of his familiarity regarding the happenings unfolding in Busyrane’s “secret den” extend even further (xi.10.8).

In Book IV, the reader is first made aware of the circumstances of Amoret’s abduction. We are told that Busyrane brought a masque to the wedding feast of Amoret and Scudamour, which we are led to believe was the same “masque of love which late was showen” by the strange troop of maladies in the third chamber of the House of Busyrane (IV.i.3.6). Scholarly discussion fails to touch upon the subject of how Busyrane was able to come to the wedding and bring his “gift” without anyone thinking it strange or indeed thinking ill of it in any way, given the celebratory context in which the horrifying spectacle is performed. The masque is more than the usual merriment that attends a wedding feast. The absence of any uneasiness amongst the guests seems to reflect on the nature of the union between Amoret and Scudamour, which is realized through conquest or the traditional Petrarchan metaphor of love as war imaged in the masque, rather than mutual love. The wedding guests, “surcharg’d with wine,” were “heedless and ill hedded,” and far too concerned with the “bedding” of the bride to distinguish between what is initially perceived as a matter of sport, but is in actuality, the violent abduction of Amoret (IV.i.3). The drunken inattentiveness of the guests contributes to their inability to react to Busyrane’s seizure of Amoret; however, it is primarily their acceptance of her abduction as a facet of the spectacle that allows Busyrane to carry off the bride in plain view of the wedding audience. That Amoret is conveyed away via a visual medium is essential to Spenser’s desire to display the noxious capacities of artistic representation, specifically visual stimulation as an avenue to sexual enticement. Left unattended, Amoret is by the masque’s power soon “conveyed quite away to living wight vnkowen” (IV.i.3.9). Roche offers two possible readings of the line: the first is that “Busyrane took her away to a place not known to anyone at the feast” and the second that “Busryane took her away without being noticed by anyone at the feast” (Roche 77). Roche dismisses the former reading, noting, that it “seems unlikely because Scudamore does know where she is imprisoned” [emphasis mine] (Roche 77). Given Scudamour’s uncanny knowledge of
the events proceeding within the House of Busyrane, this line of reasoning doesn’t feel strong enough to convince an attentive reader. The real burden of meaning in this stanza rests on the term “living,” which supports the latter interpretation affirmed by Roche. The term “living,” if understood simply as the opposite of “dead,” would seem to be meaningless in the context of this scene. However, if we understand it as the antithesis of “artificial” or not-real, the lines can be understood as expressing a more subtle and interesting contrast. The “living” guests to whom the narrator refers in this line, became so absorbed in the drama of the masque that they enter into it, and thus react as fictitious characters who allow the bride to be abducted. The narrator then refers to all living individuals and specifically the audience of the masque, the wedding guests, when noting that Amoret is “conveyed quite away to living wight unknowen” [emphasis mine] (IV.i.3.9). The poet’s use of the descriptor “living” comments ironically on the behavior of wedding guests, who by their inability to perceive the distinction between a performance and reality, respond to the masque as though they were fictional characters themselves. In this line, the term “unknowen” is roughly equitable with “unobserved”—it is not so much that the no living “wight” knew that she was carried away, but rather that no one accurately observed the true import of the spectacle. As a result, the wedding guests do not react to as they would under normal circumstances if they were to observe the abduction of a bride from her wedding feast. Their ability to perceive and respond to an observation is obscured by their absorption into the masque and, as a result, they do not function as observers, but rather, as participants. Again, Spenser places a pronounced emphasis on the distinction between life and artifice, and the necessity of heeding the integrity of this boundary. Furthermore, Roche does not consider that this line is evidence of a glaring, but symbolic inconsistency in Spenser’s narrative. The descriptor “living” suggests that Scudamour, as one of the spectators of the wedding masque, should not know anything more than the last time Amoret was seen when “performing” in the masque. He might reasonably assume that Busyrane was the kidnapper, and indeed know the whereabouts of the enchanter, but this doesn’t account for his inexplicable knowledge of what Amoret has been subjected to since her abduction. If we grant Roche’s interpretation, we are still confronted with yet another glaring example of the inconceivability of Scudamour’s familiarity with the nature of Amoret’s experiences in the House of Busyrane. In addition,
the line is compressed and unclear in ways that suggest the details vexed Spenser, perhaps indicating some uncertainty or ambivalence on his part. Like the text, he seems to vacillate regarding the extent of Scudamour’s knowledge and involvement in the violence Busyrane inflicts on Amoret.

Busyrane and Scudamour also parallel one another in the violence of their abductions of Amoret. Both figures employ the misguided approach of romantic conquest, which models amorous relations after the Petrarchan tradition of erotic antagonism. The only discernible distinction between their stories is the fact that Amoret responds to Scudamour’s violence with mutual affection. According to Fowler, the House of Busyrane can be understood as the consequence of Scudamour’s aggressive, unrestrained “courtship.” He writes:

Some have seen Busyrane’s demonic cruelty to Amoret as indicating a tendency in Scudamour himself…But Renaissance conventions of multiple representations warrant a much stronger statement. Scudamour and Busyrane do not merely “converge,” but together constitute the same personage. For Amoret is abducted on the occasion of her wedding. After marriage, that is to say, lover becomes husband; the dominating Busyrane supersedes the winning Scudamour. Busyrane’s house is the place of such possessive, marital love as Scudamour’s forceful, overbold courtship leads to. (Fowler 86)

As Fowler suggests, Amoret’s suffering can be viewed as a direct result of Scudamour’s overbold courtship. Kent Hieatt comments on the import of Scudamour’s violent abduction of Amoret from the Temple of Venus, writing, “the garden and temple belong, of course, to love, but of a particular sort—concordant and harmonious love, the affection characteristic of friendship…formed by the art of friendship and intelligent molding of free spiritual partnerships between man and woman and man and man” (Hieatt 509). Hieatt implies that Scudamour’s violent seizure of Amoret from this “allegorical locus of concord and harmony” typifies Scudamour as an enemy to this model of love as a reciprocated desire for attuned partnership (Hieatt 509). From the nature of this abduction, Hieatt writes, it becomes evident that “[h]e does not understand love which depends on mutual freedom of choice and on concord…what he does understand is the imperious force of the love-deity who is imaged…in the Masque itself, and on his shield” (Hieatt 509). As Hieatt attests, Scudamour, like Busyrane, does not conceive of love as a shared enterprise
arising out of a mutual affection between lovers, but rather as a prize to be attained through forced persuasion. Like the Petrarchan sonneteer Busyrane, he understands love and romantic union as something which can be forcefully extracted from the object of desire—his pursuit of Amoret, therefore, can be likened to a rape of the desired other, which he deems an appropriate means to achieve his ends. Busyrane’s torture of Amoret figures this model of romantic exchange in physical terms. Amoret’s heart is “drawne for, and in a silver basin layd / Quite through transfixed with a deadly dart”—a poignant depiction of female penetration. Scudamour is unable to traverse the flames surrounding the House of Busyrane, because, like Busyrane, his “greedy will” (III.ix.26.3) desires to possess Amoret. A.C. Hamilton writes that Spenser’s usage of the term “prouoke” suggests “Scudamour’s approach arouses the flames” (Hamilton 392). As William Allen Oram notes, Britomart is able to pass through these flames, because “[her] aiding Amoret is a sisterly act, untainted by the desire to possess and obscurely linked with a self-liberation from the fears Busyrane represents” (Oram 11). This self-liberation to which Oram faintly alludes is the emancipation of the female psyche from the tyrannical male psyche, which seeks through artistry, to impose a slanted male-centered vision of erotic experience upon the manacled female mind. Scudamour, as merely another representation of the male psyche, is barred from passing through these flames which figure his own passion “inly swelt” (xi.27.1).

This pattern of conflations begins with the very first stanza of the episode. In the double apprehension of Scudamour/Ollyphant by a Britomart who is already also Amoret, Spenser reveals his narrative agenda to explore the complex interactions of the male and female psyches by modeling his characters into distinctive gendered psychologies. Spenser similarly aligns Britomart and Amoret as analogous figures that compose the female psyche. For, example, Britomart sustains a wound similar to the one Busyrane inflicts on Amoret’s. A.C. Hamilton writes that “[i]n effect, she suffers Amoret’s wound by Busyrane’s knife” (Hamilton 403). Even more striking is the similarity with which Spenser describes both scenes. Amoret’s exposed chest is characterized as “all naked, as nett yuory” and we are told “(The worke of cruell hand) was to be seene, / That dyde in sanguine red her skin all snowy cleene” (xii.20.1 & 8-9). In both descriptions, Spenser dwells on the whiteness of Amoret’s uncovered chest. In the latter
passage, he underscores the metamorphosed hue of her breast, which dyed the “sanguine red” of blood, attests to the work of Busyrane’s cruel hand. “Albe the wound were nothing deepe imprest,” Britomart suffers a similar wound in her breast with the identical weapon used to wreak injury upon Amoret’s mutilated body (xii.33.70). Spenser accentuates the fluidity of Busyrane’s transition between the two females, writing, “From her [Amoret], to whom his fury first he ment, / The wicked weapon rashly he did wrest, / And turning to the next [Britomart] his fell intent, / Vnwares it stroke in her snowie chest, / That little drops empurpled her faire brest” (xii.33.1-5). Just as Amoret’s breast is associated with pure or “nett” whiteness, Britomart’s is described as “snowie.” In the former passage, Spenser uses the same descriptor “snowie” to distinguish the modification of hue in Amoret’s now bloodied breast. In his description of Britomart’s “empurpled” breast, he similarly accentuates the transition of her once “snowie” chest to a shade of crimson. Scudamour names Britomart’s breast as the province of her chastity; he says, “[w]hat huge heroicke magnanimity / Dwells in thy bounteous brest” (III.19.2-3). Spenser’s classification of the female breast as the residence of chastity, by consequence, makes the wounds suffered by Amoret and Britomart emblematic of the violation of virginity—his emphasis on the blood-stained hue acquired by their white flesh undoubtedly signifies the female’s expense of blood in her first sexual encounter. Furthermore, the alacrity and ease with which Busyrane transfers his fury from Amoret to Britomart suggest his indifference regarding which damsel is made the present victim of his torment. This seeming impartiality is uncharacteristic of Busyrane, whose aim is not merely to inflict suffering upon the female body, but rather to relocate Amoret’s affection from Scudamour to himself. His inability to fully distinguish between the two maidens or even express notice regarding which female he engages affirms his perception of the two females as one and the same being and therefore, equally deserving of his hostility. Therefore, as far as Busyrane is concerned, no discernible difference exists between the two females—they are merely different representations of the same female psyche he desires to subdue.

These two woundings also tie these moments to other woundings that Britomart receives, including those she suffers by Gardante in the Malacasta episode and by Arthegall when she first encounters his image in Merlin’s mirror. In the Malecasta episode, Britomart defeats the six knights of
Castle Joyous and emerges from Malecasta’s home with her chastity intact. As she is leaving the castle, however, she is struck by an arrow of the knight Gardante. Again, Spenser describes in vivid detail the purpling of her white breast, writing, “drops of purpole thereout did weepe, / Which did her lilly smock with stains of vermeil steep” [italics mine] (III.i.65.8-9). As in the later wounding of Amoret and Britomart in the House of Busyrane, Spenser expresses a keen interest in the visual aesthetic of the female’s wound, specifically the gradually empurpled hue of her breast. The poet’s interest in the visual is echoed by the scopophilic aspects of Britomart’s encounter within the homes of both Malecasta and Busyrane. Like the House of Busyrane, Castle Joyous is decorated with a sumptuous, extravagant décor that operates upon the visual sense to incite erotic stimulation. Throughout the Amoret-Busyrane episode, Spenser will ruminate on the influence of sight, ultimately suggesting the danger artistic representation poses to human interactions in the external world. The second wound Britomart suffers is from Amoret’s torturer Busyrane. This wounding reveals another compelling similarity between Amoret and Britomart. As established earlier, Busyrane and Scudamour can be read as complementary characters who comprise a representation of the male psyche. According to this reading, Amoret’s torturer Busyrane is not a depraved, isolated offender, but rather an extension of her husband, Scudamour. Like Amoret, Britomart’s future husband Arthegall is implicitly associated with Busyrane. Britomart is described as “[v]nawares” that Busyrane’s knife “strooke into her snowie ch est” (xii.33.4). Upon first encountering Arthegall’s image in the mirror, Britomart is similarly described as in a state “vnawares” (ii.26.4). Furthermore, Britomart later identifies herself as “[v]unawares” that she has swallowed a “hidden hooke with baite” from Arthegall (ii.38.9). Britomart’s inability to recognize the intrusion of Arthegall’s hook accurately mirrors her ignorance of the wound she suffers from Busyrane’s knife. Moreover, in the stanza preceding this one, Britomart seems to draw a direct contrast between the wound both she and Amoret incur from Busyrane and that inflicted by her lover Arthegall. She announces: the knight’s “loue hath gryde / My feeble brest of late, and launched this wound wyde” (ii.37.8-9). Therefore, despite his absence from the House of Busyrane, Arthegall, like Scudamour, permeates the episode and constitutes yet another personage encompassed by the amalgamated male psyche.
All of this suggests the events that unfold within the House of Busyrane can be interpreted as a series of interactions between the multiply-represented male and female psyches. Britomart’s quest to locate and free Amoret can be likened to the liberation of the female psyche from the oppressive force of a specific kind of desire represented in a particular way. Busyrane seeks to infiltrate the mental and physical integrity of the female other in order to inspire forced affection where it may have been otherwise wanting. His artistry becomes not only the medium through which he conveys this vision of desire, but also a means by which this desire for forced affection is enacted upon the female psyche, as represented by the figures of Amoret and Britomart. Spenser’s multiple confluences result in the formulation of two gendered psychologies that enable us to understand the entire episode as a discourse between the male and female. On one level, this is a conversation between an the Petrarchan sonnetteer and the silent, always seen or figured, but never audible object of his artistry. The female beloved is not real in the sense that she is always merely an object or image molded by the artist. The subsequent frustration or tension, which Spenser understands as one consequence of Petrarchan poetry, arises in response to the constraint by which the poet’s artistry is invariably bound. The beloved’s image can be remolded, and in ways that answer to the lover’s desire to keep desiring, but this is not a free molding of something to the free needs or desires of the lover/artist. It is constrained, in part, because he can never satisfy his yearnings, and also by the fact that the only thing he can assert his will on is an image. The poet’s radical isolation from the beloved often manifests itself in imagined possessions of one kind or another, even, at moments, a sort of violence. This is still, nonetheless, a very real kind of violence done by representation. Spenser registers precisely how real such violence can become, even when it remains bound to figurative action. Spenser imagines this sort of fantasy as something that can become real in actual behavior, and for this reason, he cautions both the artist and the female onlooker. In a general sense, then, the House of Busyrane also depicts a dialogue between the male and female psyches—-one that never surfaces in what Spenser perceives to be the poet’s self-conscious dialogue, which is constrained invariably to a back-and-forth between the poet and himself. In contrast, the House enables a shared, both male and female, engagement with the problems of erotic union with which both genders might be concerned. A dialogue between the sexes
allows both genders to alter and guide the course of their relations through the exchange of ideas. It pleads the necessity of mutual communication as a means to eliminate the misguided and dangerous approach to amorous relations that results from the male’s engagement a self-aware fantasy. Before expounding on the multiple ways in which Busyrane’s art figures this kind of desire, it is of utmost importance to attend to the transformative character of the House of Busyrane. The images composing the first two chambers of Busyrane’s suite mirror an illustrious literary past as its images might issue forth from the sordid mind of an unrequited male lover. As Britomart proceeds further into Busyrane’s rendering of erotic experience, she witnesses the continued inflation of a male mind enamored with its own artistry and a desire to impose control upon the female mind through physical coercion.

III. Mimesis in the House of Busyrane Seen as a Transfiguration from the Fictive to the Real

Amoret’s fate at the hands of Busyrane is largely a comment on what happens when this sort of art becomes the model for actual behavior, rather than as something to be read, understood, and learned from at a safe distance from life, as in Britomart’s gazing. Spenser voices this concern by rendering a depiction of just this sort of transfiguration from the fictive to the real in the sequential chambers of Busyrane’s suite. In the first chamber, the walls are clothed with tapestries “wouen with gold and silke” in which “Cupids warres” and “cruel battailes” are displayed. A common theme uniting these images is the rape of human women by the Olympian gods. The tapestries depict a preponderance of mythic narratives in which male gods assume a diversity of metamorphosed forms in an effort to forcefully invade the female body. As Berger observes, Busyrane’s suite details centuries of erotic experience “from the mythic past of the first room to the latest and most immediate moment in the third room” or more precisely “in pagan, medieval, and Renaissance institutions” (Berger 173). Busyrane’s artistry celebrates the adventures of these figures in a set of compelling images and by subjecting the female psyche to a visual encounter with these images, facilitates their continued usurpation of the female’s integrity. Thereby, Busyrane’s art
enables these figures to reside in the temporal present. According to Berger, “the first two rooms present two corrupt forms of infinite love”—lust and false love (180). In this first room, Busyrane depicts the tyranny of lust, which, according to Berger, “leads to compulsive repetition of a momentary pleasure which yet fails to satisfy the inexhaustible appetite…[T]he tyranny of false love produces obsessive fixation not on a mere body or series of bodies but on the total psychophysical being of the person chosen as object” (180). The series of rapes figured in this room reveal the dangerous unrestraint that accompanies lust and, as Berger notes, the obsessive nature of a fixation that makes any arbitrarily selected object the victim of an unwavering pursuit for possession. Placed at the upper end of the room is a statue of the god Cupid, who “[b]lyndfold he was, and in his cruel fist / A mortal bow and arrowes keen did hold, / With which he shot at randon” (xi.48.1-3). Again, the god’s impartial bow reiterates the obsessive need for momentary satiety, which can be easily extracted without distinction from any person chosen as the object of fixation. In the following room, “[m]uch fayrer, then the former,” the walls are overlaid with pure gold and embossed “with wilde Antickes” or a “thousand monstrous formes” all depicting false love (xi.51.1, 5,7). Cupid displays his mastery over these “mightie Conquerours and Captaines” by hanging their broken “swords and speres and hauberques rent / And their proud girlonds of triumphant bayes, / Trodden in dust with fury insolent” all to “shew [his] might and merciless intent” (xi.52). These images of ruthless conquerors and captains are indicative of a shift in historical perspective from the former room. The subject of this art is no longer the gods of the mythic past, but rather human men preoccupied with another form of corrupt infinite love, false love, which Spenser explicitly likens to the Petrarchan model of “cruell loue” (xii.52.5). This love, however, presents a more threatening possibility to both Britomart and the female psyche than the depiction of false love in the former room. This model of love no longer applies to the inescapable exploits of divine rape, but rather to the unscrupulous sexual practices of the human being.

Soon after Britomart retires into sleep, she is awakened by the heralding of a trumpet and the entrance of Ease, a “graue personage / That in his hand a braunch of laurel bore with comely haueour and cont’nance sage, / Yclad in costly garment, fit for tragicke Stage” (xii.3.6-9). “[B]eckning with his hand /
In sign of silence, as to heare a play,” Ease, with his name ciphered in golden letters upon his robe, invites his spectator(s) to approach the stage and behold the ensuing drama. Clutching in his hand the laurel branch, a badge of conquest and specifically, the emblem of the poet, Ease celebrates the imminent victory of his performance upon the female psyche. After Ease, a company of maladies, each unique in form and name, ascend the stage; while, the concealed Britomart gazes with marvel upon the strange spectacle. Composing the colorful and peculiarly-arrayed band of masquers are Daunger, Feare, and Hope, followed by the complementary couples of Dissemblace and Suspect, Griefe and Fury, Displeasure and Pleasaunce, and finally, Despight and Cruetly, who guide a disheveled Amoret, her punctured heart extracted from a wide orifice in her chest and displayed for scrutiny within a silver basin. Scholars have offered a variety of interpretations regarding the purpose and import of each masquer. The primary point of conflict in scholarly discussion is the gender of the psyche from which the masque emanates. For example, of the figure Feare Roche writes, feare “may be either the man protecting himself from his lady’s disdain or the lady protecting herself form the figure of Duanger,” the malady which has preceded Feare and Hope (78). Eggert offers still another reading. Interpreting the masque as arising out of “an excess of misogynistic authorial zeal,” she writes: “[T]he masque presents no image of woman taking pleasure in erotic interaction, but rather just a series of standard figures…of women’s inviting and spurning men’s sexual advances” (Eggert 13). Fowler labels the masque “an imaginary performance” or more precisely a state of “dream-vision” that originates within Britomart’s mind. Citing as evidence Britomart’s “heavy eyes” (III.xi.55) and the unreal nature of the masque “in which everything merely seems,” he regards the midnight procession as a dream radiating from Britomart’s overwrought and fatigued mind (Fowler 91). Fowler is correct to recognize Spenser’s repetitive usage of the word “seems” in his description of the masquers, which invests the masque with an almost unreal or illusory quality, but, as I will later argue, there are other conceivable reasons for Spenser’s preoccupation with the “falseness” of the masque. Of particular note in Fowler’s reading of this scene, is his recognition that the coupled dancers constitute an interaction between the masculine and feminine. He writes: “the dancers illustrate, by their answering defects, the consequences of mutual distrust” (Fowler 174).
Although Fowler rightly indicates that the masque ought to be interpreted as an interface between the male and female minds, he does not discern the connection between this particular gendered exchange and the larger discourse that occurs between the male and psyches throughout the episode. W.C. Johnson expands further on this reading, detecting a correlation between the exchanges of the male and female psyches in the masque drama and Spenser’s sonnet sequence “Amoretti.” According to Johnson, “the couples progress in an allegorical courtship of which, depending on one’s male or female point of view, the descriptions are sonnet conventions (male) or distorted visions of sexual love (female)” (Johnson 112). Although Johnson fails to view the masque as an interchange between the psyches, he correctly anticipates the possibility of both a male and female perspective within the theatrical dialogue presented by the masque. In addition, he keys into the anti-Petrarchan tone of both “Amoretti” and the House of Busyrane. He suggests the masque contemplates “the antithetical pains and pleasures of love… [or] the paradox of all Petrarchan wooing, in which love is pain, pain is death, but such death is life” (Johnson 112). He locates a compelling parallel in Amoret’s paradoxical state of living death and the poet’s claim in “Amoretti” that “he will die in front of the Lady and ‘so dying live’” (Amor. 14) (Johnson 112). As Johnson argues, “[b]ehind the Masque figures, behind Cupid, behind the House itself, stands the enchanter who ‘figured’ them all, just as behind the Amoretti sonnets remains the lover who ‘figures’ the leaves, lines, and rhymes” (Johnson 115). Johnson’s reading of the masque suggests the presence of a discourse regarding literary convention, specifically as it relates to gendered perceptions of sensual love. Like my own reading, Johnson’s is aware of Spenser’s interest in engaging a discussion about the repercussions of desire represented in a specific kind of way. His reading guides us in the direction of a subtler understanding of the concerns Spenser raises not only in the masque, but also throughout the episode. Johnson’s recognition that masque essentially literalizes Spenser’s Petrarchan sonnet sequence, Amoretti, reinforces my own reading of the masque as a critical juncture in the House of Busyrane’s transfiguration from the fictive to the real.

As Elizabeth Heale contends, the masque figures can be interpreted as “literary personifications of psychological states of mind” (Heale 94). These psychological personages reflect a myriad of paradoxical
emotions and fears generated by the Petrarchan model of antagonistic love. They are neither strictly male nor female—in fact, it is their ambiguity which endows them with an agency that allows them to fluctuate freely between the extremities of the male and female psyches. As such, they are tendencies, and even defects, relevant to both sexes. They do not characterize an omnipresent male or female defect, but reflect upon the anxieties provoked by this particular model of love. Their ambiguous characterization as fictive personifications, played by living actors, classifies them as neither literary nor living. This is the result of the peculiar nature of the court masque itself, a genre in which real people play idealized versions of themselves or allegorical figures for virtues that they themselves are supposed to possess. Spenser’s choice to use a masque makes these maladies uncertain figures that occupy a space between the fictive and real, and as such, they constitute the intrusion of literature upon the external world. Their status as actors reinforces the ambiguous category of reality to which they are confined—theatre is the most living form of art, which by utilizing living actors transgresses static artistry and constitutes a form of living representation. Spenser certainly would have been aware that the medium of theatre itself foregrounds on the melding of the fictive and real. During the Early Modern Era, playwrights commonly inserted self-conscious assessments of theatre within their plays that often ruminated on the unsettling nature of character-assumption—the actor’s primary endeavor, in which he wills the audience and himself into believing he is someone other than himself. The ramification of employing Busyrane’s conception of love as a model in the external world is enacted in the living death that shrouds the figure of Amoret. Like the masquers, she appears to occupy an illusory realm between imagination and reality. Fowler recognizes this quality of the unreal in both the dancers and Amoret, yet mistakenly attributes it to Britomart’s immersion in a dream-state. He writes: “This Amoret, indeed, is hardly real…the masque is a false enchantment in which everything merely seems.” Fancy “seem’d…vain;” Desyre “seem’d of riper years;” Dissemblance was “seeming debonair;” Displeasure and Pleasance “seemed to be “ill matched;” Griefe was “seeming sad;” and Sorrow “seeming dead.” Finally, he notes that “even Amoret’s wound is imaginary. Her heart is ‘drawne forth’ and ‘Quite through transfixed with a deadly dart,’ but later is described as “Seeming transfixed with a cruell dart” (Fowler 91). As Fowler suggests, Spenser
deliberately establishes a sense of unreality in this scene. Even Amoret, Fowler writes, as a participant in the masque, appears false or less than real, in that Spenser renders her an abstract representation of her true living self. However, this unreality does not arise out of “a subjective phenomenon, the fantasizing subject being Britomart,” but rather another process of maturation that occurs within the House of Busyrane—the maturation from the fictive or literary to the real (Fowler 91).

In addition to depicting a developing chronological history, the House of Busyrane also details a transfiguration from the fictive to the real. While the woven images in the first room are described as “liuely” or merely lifelike, the figures adorned in high relief in the following room appear as though “they liuing were” (III.xi.30.8 and 51.6). In the third room, Britomart witnesses an even truer form of mimesis, a theatrical performance, which concludes with the height of Busyrane’s obsessed artistry, the dismembered Amoret. If the masque represents a distinctive juncture between the fictive and real, Britomart’s entrance into the innermost chamber of Busyrane’s suite signifies a cessation of artistic representation and commencement of reality. The command, *Be bold*, inscribed above the first two doorways articulates a distinctive message to both the male and female psyches. To the male, it recommends a continued obedience to Busyrane’s artistic course, specifically the progressive nature of his artistry, which in presenting ever truer forms of art approaches life. By contrast, to the female observant, this message is intended to provoke courage and to spur on her engagement of the male psyche. Of course, to Amoret, this inscription bears a second meaning—the necessity to retain bravery in her quest to meet and liberate the female psyche. The final inscription, *Be not too bold*, is the most ambiguous inscription and its meaning is heatedly contested amongst scholars. A possible reading, I would suggest is that it presents a unified message to both the male and female psyches—a forewarning of the danger relevant to each sex that is contained within the final room. Unlike the former inscriptions, this message is not evidence of the artist’s manipulation of his viewers, but rather seems to communicate his own absorption into the compelling spectacle he has created. Busyrane has himself been “too bold.” He perceives the error evident in his desire to make the object of desire something more than merely an object. As I’ve already suggested, his sadism is primarily a response to his limitations as an artist, who can only ever assert his will on an
image—a constraint he initially believes to be surmountable if he is able to successfully render a transfiguration of the object of desire from the fictive to the real. However, he comes to realize the impossibility of making the object of desire anything more than an object. The paradox of Busyrane’s desire to coerce free assent represents his mistake which occurs at the moment when he transfers his “artistic” strategies to a real relationship. However, the consequence of such strategies is not mutual consent, but rather, as Busyrane realizes, living death—he is killing the thing from which he desires reciprocal love. His intention to abuse the male and female psyches through visual persuasion has exceeded his control, as he too becomes subject to his own bastardized vision of the “living” Amoret, a conscious being devoid of physical and mental autonomy and, therefore reduced to what is merely a source of visual stimulation. The “living” Amoret of the final room embodies the artist’s failed attempt to make her into more than an object of desire, while retaining his previous model of interpretive control in order to delineate the nature of her being. For this reason, the final inscription may be read as a self-warning to the artist himself: he has transgressed the realm of representation and created a precariously real portrayal of life, which now utters its own omen in response to its author. In the innermost chamber of the House of Busyrane, Britomart witnesses the dissolution of the boundary between the fictive and real, and the concomitant disintegration of the separation between the male and female psyches. In presenting a single message to both psyches, this inscription attests to the gendered collapse housed in the following room.

The increasingly life-like modes of representation that decorate the House of Busyrane reveal a process of gradual metamorphosis, in which figurative action in art and literature to becomes a model for behavior in the external world. In the innermost chamber of Busyrane’s suite, both Britomart and the reader behold a precarious coalescing of the fictive and real. Fowler notes that Amoret’s heart is initially described as ‘Quite through transfixed with a deadly dart,’ but later depicted as “Seeming transfixed with a cruell dart” (Fowler 91). By categorizing this observation as another instance of Spenser’s attention to the falseness of the masque, Fowler disregards the placement of these subtly altered portraits of Amoret. Counter to expectation, the first description of a heart “[quite] thorough transfixed” is associated with the false Amoret of the masque; while the latter account of a heart “[seeming] transfixed” is attributed to the
living figure of Amoret. As every other description of a masquer is modified by the term “seems,” Spenser’s choice to characterize the true Amoret’s heart as “seeming transfixed” is inconsistent with his narrative pattern. The reader’s expectation is for the false Amoret to be described in uncertain terms like her fellow masquers; however, Spenser thwarts this anticipated correlation and describes the living Amoret with an ambiguity better fitted to a participant of the masque. Whatever Spenser’s purpose may have been for including this inconsistency, his usage of the word “seems” unambiguously aligns the true Amoret with the masquers of the former room by invoking a similar sense of unreality and uncertainty as it relates to her status as true or living. A possible response to this problem is to contemplate the import of Spenser’s subtle attention to the falseness of the masque, and how it may relate to this seemingly intentional discrepancy in his portrayal of a gradual maturation from the fictive to real. In accentuating the ambiguous status of the masquers, who are neither truly fictive nor strictly real, Spenser alerts the reader to the difficulty of differentiating between mimicry and that which is mimicked. His deliberate inversion of reader expectation underscores the reader’s inability to arrive at a logical assumption regarding the narrative’s progression, because the narrative, as all artistic expression, ultimately remains within the control of its author. The fundamental paradox of artistic expression is that if the artist successfully mimics reality in his creation, the viewer will no longer be able to differentiate between art and reality, and therefore, becomes vulnerable to the artist’s manipulation of reality. The author’s interpretive vision delineates the scope of his created world. The literary world an author, such as Busyrane, creates is a closed system, a cocoon unaffected by external influence, while the real world remains subject to perceptive ambiguity and the chaos of mortal existence. This flaw in the narrative sequence upsets reader expectation and reinforces Spenser’s as an absolute creator of reality within fictive realm he fashions. Such an assertion, reminds Spenser’s audience of the necessity of remaining critical of all art, as it is ultimately a rendering of reality that is subject to the laws of its creator alone.

This gradual progression from the fictive to the real is accompanied by the increasing presence of sadism within Busyrane’s artistry. The growing prevalence of sadism in the artist’s ever more life-like representations suggests that the type of desire modeled by Busyrane’s artistry is exacerbated in the
external world. While the statue in the first chamber depicts a blindfolded Cupid baring a “mortal bow…[w]ith which he shot at random” (xi.48.2-3), in the second room, the “winged God him selfe” appears as a masquerer, lifting his blindfold in order that “his proud spoil of that same dolorous, / Faire Dame he might behold in perfect kind, / Which scene, he much rejoiced in his cruell minde” (xii.1, 6-9). Unlike the former statue in which Cupid is figured, this living Cupid does not exercise random tyranny over a body or series of bodies, but rather over a particular object of his scrutiny. Uncovering his blindfold, he relishes in the sight of his victim Amoret’s suffering. Here, the miscreant god appears thrilled by his connectedness to his victim in viewing her torture. In this scene and many others throughout the episode, Spenser expresses a scopophilic emphasis on sight, specifically visual excitement as a means of sexual engagement. As mimesis advances towards and into life, the artist’s sadism is inflated by an escalating sense of involvement with his increasingly living victim. Although the artist’s sadistic impulse is most potent when his artistry extends beyond resemblance and approaches an absolute embodiment of the true or living form, Spenser suggests non- or less-living art, such as tapestry and raised relief, also possess the capacity to actively engage the viewer, even in a state of sensual rapture, through the medium of sight alone. For example, Britomart’s appreciation and awe for Busyrane’s artistry are provoked by visual rather than tactile stimuli. As noted earlier, Spenser’s extensive descriptions of Busyrane’s art seem an expression of the poet’s own indulgence in the creation of visual stimulation within his own mind and the minds of his readers. His subtle attention to the minutest characteristics of Busyrane’s art suggests that he did not intend for the House of Busyrane to be dismissed as a negative depiction of a certain kind of desire, but rather to be explored and confronted by both Britomart and “militant” reader. Busyrane’s art evokes mixed sentiments in the Knight of Chastity—she appears both ravished and terrified by various figures and scenes that compose its illustrated history. In particular, Britomart’s sense of sight seems inflamed in a state of orgasmic frenzy by the grandeur of Busyrane’s artistry. Upon beholding the golden reliefs of mighty captains and conquerors in the second chamber, she “[d]id great wonder, ne could satisfy, / Her greedy eyes with gazing” (xi.53.3-4). In this passage, Britomart’s ravenous eyes appear representative of her voracious sexual appetite which seeks satiety through visual, rather than tactile stimulation. The
sexual climax she approaches in the second room of the House is directly incited by visual rapture. Scudamour’s will to sexually and mentally possess Amoret, which disallows him from passing through the flame surrounding Busyrane’s home, is similarly described as “greedy” (xi.26.3). As in the previous context, the descriptor “greedy” acquires an explicitly sexual connotation. Therefore, we are made aware that Britomart’s visual encounter with the House of Busyrane is figured very prominently by Spenser as a sexual engagement.

The tapestries, in specific, reflect on the faculty of sight and the interconnected nature of visual and sensual stimulation. Hughes writes that they seem to represent “visual experience as an incitement to passion” (Hughes 131). She expands her critique further, noting that “the tapestries are…presented as an enticement to the ‘envious eye,’ teasing the viewer with an inextricable mixture of pleasure and frustration” (Hughes 131). The contrasting emotions of pleasure and frustration evoked by these attractive images of violence reflect the dilemma of Busyrane’s art, which is both beautiful and dangerous. Heales recognizes this paradoxical quality in Busyrane’s art, and she comments that Spenser “is aware of the danger as well as the achievements of art” (Heales 94). Spenser’s anxieties regarding the potentially noxious possibilities of artistic representation are closely tied to the poet’s interest in sight, most notably his conviction that visual experience can actively engage the viewer. According to Hughes, “[m]ost of the details picked out by the poet for special praise and attention concern the response of mortals involved in Jove’s affairs, especially their responses to what they saw” (Hughes 132). In relating Spenser’s attention to sight within the tapestries, Hughes cites another instance in which the poet expresses a heightened interest in scopophilic concerns. Hughes writes:

Europa, first, is presented as trembling when she saw / The huge seas under her t’obay her servaunt’s law (xxx). In the case of Danae, it is the vain watch kept by the ‘foolish garde’ that is emphasized (xxxi). Leda ‘slept, yet twixt her eyelids closed spyde’ (xxxii), while Semele died because she ‘did require / To see him in soveraigne maistee’ (xxxiii). Finally, the rape of Ganymede is presented through the astonishment of the shepherds who “after him did stare.” (Hughes 132)
The episode consistently reiterates the capacity of sight to provoke sensual engagement in the viewer. In each of these accounts, sight is essential to the sexual exploits of the gods—their acts of sexual violence are recorded through the visual experience of those who view their behavior, and their import in the temporal world is contingent upon modern spectators revisiting these acts through visual impression. In this way, the act of seeing becomes intertwined with the sexual violence that is figured within these tapestries and throughout the House of Busyrane. By exposing an audience to the overstated violence of his artistry, the author of these tapestries intends to incite visual delight within his viewers, despite the context of rape which permeates their narrative accounts. This capacity of the artist to depict the horrific as beautiful is one of the many dangers Spenser perceives in artistic expression. Whether the source of visual rapture is a static image or a living person, Spenser implies the impact of sight can be enormous upon the spectator. As Hughes notes, the message of these tapestries, and I would suggest more broadly of the entire episode, is that “[h]uman vision is fallible…and mortals should not believe all they see” (Hughes 132). Spenser’s emphasis on sight and the capacity of sight to engage the spectator considers the potential dangers art and literature may exercise in the external world. The whole display makes use of vision to provoke a strong emotional response within the viewer and to impose upon this viewer the artist Busyrane’s conception of erotic love. As Berger notes, Busyrane’s art presents a “slanted history” of erotic exchange between the sexes, and therefore, like all art, must be critically assessed before being deemed an accurate representation of reality (Berger 173). Much like the desire at work in Petrarchism, the desire figured by Busyrane’s art is grounded in the world of the visual, the merely imaged, and the merely seen and not touched. The real engagement at which Busyrane’s artistry ultimately arrives is sadistic, because it reifies a dynamic that has one meaning in art, but quite another if acted out without revision in the real. Therefore, Spenser’s ruminations on sight also reflect upon the appropriate ways in which desire should be artistically rendered. To ground this kind of desire in the fictive or represented does not necessarily make it innocuous, for as Spenser suggests, visual or imaged violence is a very real sort of violence, which can often be just as compelling as real violence inflicted in the external world. In
addition, the male can be tempted also in real life to establish the same kind of dynamic that is represented in art.

In the innermost room of Busyrane’s suite, Britomart encounters the dissolution of the boundary between the male and female psyches, and a concomitant coalescing of the fictive and real. The inscription above the final door, “Be not too bold,” articulates a unified message of caution to the male and female psyches concerning the precarious condition of the third chamber, in which Busyrane’s developing portrayal of the encroachment of the fictive upon the real is brought to fruition. While Britomart passes into the first two chambers without difficulty, her entrance into the final room of the House requires both patience and wit. After witnessing the masque procession exit the second chamber, Britomart proceeds to the same door through which the masquers passed to likewise enter into the final room, “but fownd it locked fast” (xii.27.7). In vain the heroine struggles “with rigorous vprore / For to efforce, when charmes had closed it afore” (xii.27.8-9). “Where force might not auaile, there sleights and art, / She cast to vse,” devising a plan to defy Busyrane’s charms and enter into the final chamber (xii.28.1-2). She resolves to wait for the masque’s reappearance on the following day and, having grown wiser to its course, to emerge from the hidden spot from which she first observed the masque, and, at the fringes of this company, to pass unnoticed into the final room. Britomart enters the third room expecting to encounter the same strange troop of maladies of the masque, but, to her astonishment, discovers “they straight were vanisht all and some / Ne liuing wight she saw in all that roome / Saue that same woefull Lady [Amoret]” (xii.30.4-6). Although this Amoret is explicitly described as living, her wound is characterized in ambiguous terms as “[s]eeming transfixed” (xii.31.5). As discussed earlier, this discrepancy in Spenser’s narrative progression asserts the poet’s authorial status and his claim to absolute power within the literary world he creates. In addition, this inconsistency alerts the reader to the emergence of a new relationship between the fictive and real as presented by the final room. The House of Busyrane depicts a process of transfiguration in which the object of desire is made the subject of a gradual transition from static, non-living representation to life. A living female possesses sentience and a sense of individual awareness familiar to all conscious beings; nonetheless, the artist Busyrane continues to apply the same artistic model to impose mastery over the
living lady, Amoret, as he formerly applied to the nonliving representation of that female in his art. The artist disregards the sovereignty of his female subject and mistakenly believes he can forcefully extract consent from a freely-functioning individual. Ironically, Busyrane himself generates or perhaps even births this final Amoret. Although this Amoret is living, she is not the same living Amoret who once occupied the external world. Extracted from this world, she is reduced to a source of visual stimulation within the artist’s grandiose spectacle. Almost devoid of speech and autonomy of action, she is pictured in a state Johnson accurately dubs a “living death” (Johnson 112). She occupies a controlled world in which her behavior and the general essence of her being are determined by her Pygmalion-like creator. Although living, she lacks the ability to exert a will or function independently, which ultimately renders her closer to an imitation of life. Busyrane’s endeavor as an artist is to produce verisimilitude, or to craft as near to a precise embodiment of life as attainable within artistic representation. Therefore, the greatest testament to Busyrane’s skill as an artist is the exhibition that is his own home and that flaunts in meticulous detail the artist’s capacity not only to imitate life, but also to recreate life by reinventing a living being according to his own artistic design. Busyrane’s art is initially a controlled, intentional display, which impresses his conception of erotic experience upon its spectators; however, what begins as a consciously-crafted experience evades his control. His design is not successful—the life he creates is not real and Amoret’s affections prove not to be transferrable by violence, for as Spenser’s narrator informs us, “Yet thousand charmes could not her stedfast hart remoue” (xii.31.9). Furthermore, Spenser’s narrator implicitly recognizes the reason for Busyrane’s failure: “Ah who can loue the worker of her smart?” (xii.41.6). Busyrane cannot induce Amoret to love him, because the violence implicit in such a desire to recreate the desired other is an indication of disrepute for that individual’s integrity as an autonomous being. The final discovery of the "real" Amoret confronts us with a series of problematic perspectives on desire, which make evident the flaws in Busyrane’s desire to inspire assent by violence. Busyrane’s mastery of Amoret is ultimately an expression of his narcissism, both in his desire to force her to love him and in his desire to love her only as part of a solipsistic response to desire. This Amoret is a self-aware fantasy—a being that
does not exist external to her creator’s fancy. And, as for Amoret: “[W]ho can love the worker of her smart?”

IV. Spenser’s Revision of the 1590 Ending to Book III and the Inadequacy of Hermaphroditic Union as a Model for Amorous Relations

Spenser’s rewriting of the ending to Book III only adds further complexity to the Amoret-Busyrane episode. The parallels between the gendered collapse of the third room and the hermaphroditic union of Scudamour and Amoret in the initial 1590 ending suggest that Spenser likely intended the hermaphroditic union to represent a positive revision of the precarious coalescing of the male and female psyches figured in the third room of the House of Busyrane. In Spenser’s original ending, Britomart returns with the lately liberated Amoret to the place “where late / She left Sir Scudamour in great distresse” (xii.43.1-2). Here, she finds the knight in the same prostrate position in which she left him. Scudamour runs “with hasty egernesse / Like as a Dear e, that greedily embayes / In the coole soile, after long thirstinesse” and the two lovers meet in a coalescing embrace that dissolves the boundaries of their separateness (xii.44.6-9). Spenser contrasts the merger of their previously distinct forms to a Roman statue of the Ovidian Hermaphrodite, writing, “Had ye them seene, ye would have surely thought, / That they had been that faire Hermaphrodite, / Which that rich Romane of white marble wrought, / And in his costly Bath causd to be sire, / So seemd those two, as growne together quite” (xii.46.1-5). Most critics accept the hermaphroditic union of Amoret and Scudamour as an unproblematic conclusion to the episode and explain away the alternate ending as a necessary alteration which allowed the poet to extend his narrative after having received political favor from his monarch and a generous pension for its completion. However, if we examine the hermaphroditic union of Amoret and Scudamour in the context of the larger reading that I have just presented, it becomes evident that Spenser’s modification of the ending cannot be so easily dismissed.
As I have argued, Busyrane’s art engenders an indistinguishable blurring in the separations between the fictive and real, and the male and female psyches. The dissolution of these boundaries is morally ambiguous, because it compromises the integrity of meaning and the autonomy associated with separateness. Spenser attempts to correct this mistakenness in the dissolution of boundaries that the last room figures with the reverberating image of the coalesced Amoret and Scudamour; however, for whatever reasons, Spenser seems to have later decided that this too was a mistake and consequently revised his original ending. Although the motive behind Spenser’s rewriting of the 1590 ending to Book III can only be speculated upon, it may have been in response to his growing awareness of its incongruity. The episode’s insistence on the necessity of maintaining distinctions is difficult to square with the original ending’s claim to the necessity of eliminating separateness at the moment of amorous union. In addition, the episode contains an array of subtly disconcerting suggestions regarding Scudamour’s understanding of romantic union. In their totality, these implications should make a reader hesitant to accept the idyllic unification of Amoret and Scudamour offered by Spenser’s initial 1590 ending. The poet provides no reason for readers to believe Scudamour has experienced an epiphany during Britomart’s brief sojourn in the House of Busyrane. In fact, by using the descriptor “greedily” to personify “the hasty eagernesse” with which he runs to Amoret, Spenser seems to suggest that Scudamour is just as much his previous self as ever. After all, it is precisely this same “greedy will, and envious desire” that disallows Scudamour from transgressing the flames encompassing the House of Busyrane in order to rescue Amoret (xi.26.3). The reader, therefore, is justifiably vexed to witness Amoret surrender herself entirely to Scudamour without a moment’s hesitation. Perhaps even more troubling, is the loss of bodily integrity associated with this coalescing of forms, which recalls Amoret’s previous violation of bodily integrity by the abusive Busyrane.

Among the many ways in which Spenser conflates the figure of Busyrane and Scudamour is his emphasis on their similar models of conquest as a means to attain the desired other. The mutual sacrifice of self that characterizes the nature of hermaphroditic union may seem to suggest that Scudamour has adopted a conception of love as a shared enterprise; however, a more subtle reading of the union between
Amoret and Scudamour reveals the contrary. Such a reading starkly opposes Silberman’s claim that Scudamour adopts a revised model for romantic union, which she implicitly expresses in remarking that “the hermaphrodite ending of 1590 version represents a vision of closure different from the alternating circuit of pursuer and pursued present though out Book III” (Silberman 49). Yet, upon reviewing the text, we find that Scudamour initiates the movement of the scene and is the only participant of the union to actively advance the joining of their separate beings. He straight “vpstart[s]” and runs to Amoret with “hasty eagernesse,” “clip[s] her twixt his armes twaine,” and “straightly…embrace[s] her body bright” (xii.44.7, 8 & 45.1,2). Amoret, is by contrast, stationary and even hesitant. She is portrayed as almost amorphous, for as Spenser’s narrator tells us, her only indication of consent is that she “did in pleasure melt” into the “sweet lodge” of his embracing arms (xii.45.6, 4). Amoret is rendered an object of submission by her own passivity. “Melting” into Scudamour’s sturdy, erect frame, Amoret, alone, is portrayed as malleable and inconstant in her willing abandonment of bodily integrity. Hamilton rightly notes that “melting” and “pourd out” suggest orgasm, but he misses the exceptionally corporeal nature of this language. The term “melting” suggests a dissolution of bodily integrity that extinguishes the boundaries of otherness and “pourd out” figures an emptying of the self. Yet, only Amoret is described as submitting her bodily integrity to the necessary process of an emptying or destruction of the self in order to synthesize the conjoined being of the hermaphrodite. Therefore, Silberman’s claim that “[t]he lover’s union is a mutually defined relationship” is markedly incompatible with Spenser’s characterization of their union (Silberman 70). As in her previous encounter with Busyrane, Amoret becomes the victim of a loss of bodily integrity, while Scudamour appears resolute in his self-affirming actions. In addition, Silberman, like many critics, attends to only one of the implications of hermaphroditic union. Donald Cheney dispels such a perspective, writing: “Spenser seems…to be echoing Ovid’s awareness that both dissolution and synthesis are portrayed” in the hermaphrodite figure (Cheney 193). However, Spenser seems to have experienced difficulty integrating this paradoxical coupling of experiences into the story of Amoret and Scudamour. The initial ending vacillates between rendering an image of destruction and an image of synthesis and in those brief moments in which the union seems to suggest destruction, Amoret appears to
be the only figure directly subject to a dissolution of self. Critics largely ignore the discrepancy in surrender demanded of the two lovers in their unification. Even Berger, who provides a subtle close reading of the initial conclusion, fails to perceive this incongruity. Like Silberman, Berger characterizes their union as a mutual “melding;” he writes: “It is as though the otherness between the two beings is dissolved by the mere act of physical embrace; their urge to melt into unconscious union and freeze eternally into that posture is traced by Spenser who first names the actual figure and then turns it to marble” (Berger 193). The greater sacrifice demanded of Amoret seems to reflect Spenser’s inability to square the mutual self-abandonment necessary of this model of union with the story of Amoret and Scudamour. All of this reflects Spenser’s own ambivalence regarding the union he so sincerely desired as a concluding emblem of his narrative, yet implicitly recognized as ill-suited to the lovers Amoret and Scudamour.

In interpreting this episode, scholars often attempt to redefine Spenser’s thoroughly anti-Petrarchan tone as a positive revision or modification of Petrarchan convention. For example, Maureen Quilligan argues that in presenting the episode from a female perspective Spenser resolves or “correct[s]” Petrarchan discourse. She writes: “In great part Spenser manages to correct this (male) art by viewing it from the opposite perspective of the lady, who usually merely peruses the lines of the poem” (198). Lauren Silberman also links an inversion of Petrarchan tropes with a positive modification of Petrarchan convention. She associates the reversal of traditional, Petrarchan imagery at the end of Book III, in which Scudamour is compared to a “Deare, that greedily embayes / In the coole soile, after long thirstinessse” with the resolution she finds in the original hermaphroditic union of Amoret and Scudamour (xii.44.7). Silberman comments on the simile’s negation of traditional Petrarchan imagery, which traditionally figures the female as a doe and the male as a hunter. She writes: “Replacing the Hermaphrodite’s denial

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2 See Maureen Quilligan in *Milton’s Spenser* (1983), 198. Of course, this interpretation also assumes that the episode is viewed from a solely female perspective. As Alastair Fowler suggests in *Renaissance Realism: Narrative Images in Literature and Art* (2003), scholars remain divided as to whether Masque of Cupid is a product of the male or female imagination (87). For example, Berger concludes in *Revisionary Play: Studies in Spenserian Dynamics* (1988) that the viewpoint is masculine until Britomart’s first appearance (183).
of sexual difference is an androgynous reversal of roles” (Silberman 70). She continues: “This ravishment is not the violation attempted by Busirane, but physical and emotional transport, which Spender renders with great circumspection” (Silberman 70). Silberman implicitly associates this gender inversion with the alternate vision of amorous union offered by Spenser’s portrait of the coalesced Amoret and Scudamour, which, according to Silberman, figures a significant departure from Busyrane’s misapplied artistic (Petrarchan) conception of amorous union. However, as Hamilton notes, Spenser uses the same simile to describe “their first union at IV.x.58 where again, in a reversal of the usual roles he is the deer and she is his refuge” (Hamilton 405). After having excised the original ending to Book III, including this passage, Spenser chose to attach the same inversion of Petrarchan imagery to their first encounter, which is achieved not through mutual concord, but rather as a direct consequence of Scudamour’s Petrarchan conception of love as war, which prompts the knight’s forced removal of Amoret from the Temple of Venus. We can assume that in applying this simile to the lovers’ first combative meeting, Spenser did not intend for it to signify a positive modification of Petrarchan desire.

Spenser accurately employs the classic Petrarchan hunter/doe motif in sonnet 67 of his sonnet sequence Amoretti, which was published in 1595. The typical Petrarchan version of this motif is of hopeless, never ending hunting. The hunter is never actually able to attain the doe either because she is dedicated to God, not real, or already belongs to another man. In sonnet 67, the speaker, “[I]yke a huntsman, after weary chace,” manages finally to take and tie his female prey, the pursued “gentle deer,” but only after he has given up the chase. The “deer” is notably not “taken” and “tied” by the actual aggressive act of the speaker’s hunting. She allows him to take her “by her own good will” once she has “returned” to slake her thirst in a nearby brook, an image echoed in Scudamour’s thirst. However, Spenser amends this motif in his 1590 ending, such that the chase culminates with the hunter actually obtaining the doe, and a compelling sense of closure—an alteration, which negates the whole notion of a “hunt.” In addition, in the narrative sonnet sequence, Amoretti, the couple must endure another separation before they are later unified in marriage. Whether Spenser intended for this departure from Petrarchan tradition to represent a resolution to the errant wanderings endured by the Petrarchan speaker, who, by a
rule, never “gets” the unattainable beloved, is uncertain. Nonetheless, Spenser’s portrayal of Scudamour as an imbibing doe that submits itself to the hunter is starkly inconsistent with the image he offers in the following stanza, in which Scudamour takes “[Amoret] twixt his armes twaine” (xii. 45.1). The latter passage figures Scudamour as the huntsman, who takes the doe by her own passive consent. These contrasting images suggests the difficulty Spenser encountered in his attempt to locate a resolution to Busyrane’s Petrarchan model of love in a modification of that same tradition. His final decision to pair this image with the original encounter of Amoret and Scudamour in Book IV seems to indicate that his perspective on hermaphroditic union has evolved, in that he has come to understand this model of amorous relations as closer to Scudamour’s Petrarchan conception of militant love than a perfection union of male and female.

Next, Silberman addresses a simile just a few lines later; Spenser writes: “No word they spake nor earthly thing they felt, / But like to two senseless stocks in long embracement dwelt” (xii.45.9). Silberman concludes the meaning of this simile is that both “the lovers have gone beyond earthly things and that the onlooker is not privy to their experience” (Silberman 70). Yet, the public nature of this spectacle suggests just the opposite: Although the onlookers of this union, Britomart and Spenser’s readers, do not participate per se in their unification, we are nonetheless quite drawn into their experience. Cheney rightly notes that the concluding image of the hermaphrodite invites “interpretive zeal” and consequently, I would suggest, a contemplative movement towards the experiential nature of this bizarre melding of separate personae. Cheney astutely recognizes that “the image is introduced by a formula which occurs elsewhere in The Faerie Queene: “‘Had ye them seene, ye would haue surely thought…’”… [which] [e]sewhere Spesner uses…to tempt the reader’s interpretative zeal” (Cheney 196). Cheney concludes:

[T]he spectacle is for Britomart a source of mixed feelings: the language suggests that as the two become one, the one outside is divided in her own awareness…So conspicuous is the emphasis on “seeing” in this episode that we are made constantly aware of the public nature of the incident. The lovers in their ecstasy become the object of scrutiny, both as
an emblem of marriage and as an index of Britomart’s divided role, as an expert of Chastity but a novice in love. (Cheney 196)

Cheney correctly situates this highly public spectacle within the framework of Spenser’s conspicuous emphasis on sight; however, his assertion that Britomart’s only response is a feeling of disconnect is limited. Cheney disregards one of the central tenets of Spenser’s understanding of human experience: our capacity to participate in the world through our senses, specifically sight. We already know Britomart to be particularly susceptible to visual stimulation. Indeed, she does seem to suffer a feeling of disconnect, but this is chiefly due to her role as a spectator, which classifies her as both external to the action and participatory in the experience through the visual sense. Just as hermaphroditic union portrays both a creation of distance (from the previous self) and an elimination of distance (from the other), so the observer experiences a similar sensation of connectedness and isolation from their union. Cheney’s inability to perceive anything beyond a sense of isolation in Britomart’s reaction to the scene discounts her emotional response, one of jealousy, which indicates a level of emotional involvement that contradicts his supposition of mere isolation.

Although Spenser may have initially intended for the hermaphrodite to constitute a positive model for romantic union, his excision of the 1590 ending to Book III seems to suggest that he eventually found this model to be flawed and inconsistent with the quintessential meaning of the episode. One critical perspective offered by Spenserian scholars is that Spenser intended for the hermaphrodite to figure the Genesis account of Christian marriage. According to Lewis, the Biblical account of the pre-lapsarian union between Adam and Eve in which the two are conceived of as “one flesh” in Genesis II.24 is undoubtedly the source for Spenser’s conception of the hermaphrodite as an emblem of restoration and completeness. A similar account of the hermaphrodite appears in Aristophane’s dialogues in *Symposium*, which, like the Genesis story, suggests man was created as a hermaphrodite and later separated into the distinctive categories of male and female. Spenser also would have been familiar with Augustine’s preoccupation with pre-lapsarian union. As James Grantha Turner notes in his compelling article, “The
Incorporation of Eros: Sexuality and the search for Paradise in Augustine, the Reformation, and the English Revolution,” Augustine was adamant in his “search for the paradisal state of ‘one flesh’ promised to Adam and Eve but forfeited by sin” (Turner 41). Spenser’s initial ending attempts to reduce Scudamour and Amoret to Adam and Eve, the predecessors of humankind according to the Christian worldview, by likening their union to the unfallen state in which Adam and Eve dwelt. Turner perceives a most interesting parallel in the concern both Spenser and his successor Milton express regarding the extent to which an individual ought to retain separateness or converge with the significant other. He states somewhat ambiguously that Spenser “considers” the idea of the hermaphrodite, while “Milton rejects this notion, [as] the idea of primeval androgyny is quite foreign to Milton’s literalism and his love of sharply differentiated gender” (Turner 63). Spenser certainly contemplates the concept of hermaphroditic union in his 1590 ending, but ultimately abandons this approach in favor of a resolution more in keeping with Milton’s reverence for gender distinction. Spenser comes to appreciate the unsuitability of hermaphroditic union as a paradigm not only for Scudamour and Amoret, but also for all romantic relations. Britomart’s insistence upon retaining her armor at the culmination of her search for Arthegall underscores her desire to preserve separateness between herself and her partner. Unlike Amoret, as portrayed in Spenser’s original ending to Book III, Britomart resists integration and dissolution into the romantic other. This rendering of Britomart epitomizes Spenser’s belief in the necessity of conserving the integrity of the self within an amorous relationship. Like Milton, Spenser realizes that the error of hermaphroditic union resides in its inability to value a free other as the only truly valuable object of desire or love. Hermaphroditic union is “a vision of ‘double narcissism,’” but not for the reason Berger observes: “each love desires a union which amount to absolute possession, for each wants to assimilate the other—wants to become both—entirely on his/her own terms; and neither wants to surrender his/her sovereignty”(Berger 194). Rather, it is each lover’s inability to respect the sovereignty of the other individual and his or her desire to view the other as an extension of the self that makes this vision narcissistic. As Hieatt counters, “happy marriage…[can] be gained in Spenser’s estimate only by the superimposition of free yielded and mutually willed spiritual friendship” (Hieatt 510).
In his treatise *Difference and Subjectivity*, the French philosopher Francis Jacques points out the inherent impossibility of self-abandonment in human relations:

Admittedly, when we enter into a relationship, we experience it as a renunciation of our ability to turn in on ourselves. Conversely, once this turning-in behavior begins again, the existence of the other person will no longer be accepted in any other way than as part of my own experience, as one mode of existence of my own *I*. It is clear that without a true conceptual model of a relationship we are condemned to oscillating between the primacy of the Other or that of the Self. With a sort of fraudulent payoff, as in a court case in which one of the parties is given everything that was taken away from the other. In fact, it is more than possible that a person who believes he or she is introducing the primacy of the Other will in fact end up confirming that of the Self. (Campbell 50-51)³

Initially, Spenser offers the hermaphrodite as a “conceptual mode,” which in holistically integrating the self into the other, would resolve the inevitable tension between partners, and the eternal oscillation “between the primacy of the self and other.” However, it would seem that Spenser comes to perceive this model as flawed. The belief that we are able to so completely assimilate another into ourselves through love and still respect the integrity of that person is false. Such a relationship is closer to infatuation, in which we project onto another our own desires and needs, and therefore, our perception of that person is really a reflection of ourselves. Subsequently, Spenser offers a more realistic model for romantic union in the story of Britomart and Arthegall, which accounts for the human impulse towards narcissism. A model that does not seek complete immersion into the other allows for the preservation of a free self. Spenser’s depiction of Amoret as being consumed by Scudamour at the moment of union belies the poet’s inability to capture something through representation which cannot exist in reality. Free mutuality is unreachable in a union that disregards the boundaries of separateness. Their coming together has to be at the detriment of one of the two parties as Francis Jacque puts forth in his metaphor of a “court case in which

³ See W. Gardner Campbell, “Hierarchy, Alterity, and Freedom in 'Paradise Lost’” (2005): This quotation is drawn from Campbell’s article, in which he applies Francis Jacque’s observation to a discussion of alterity and the dialectics of self and other in Milton’s “Paradise Lost.” His article is relevant to much what I have said here.
one of the parties is given everything that was taken from the other.” This observation underscores how uncomfortably similar Busyrane and Scudamour’s methods of attaining the desire other truly are. Like Busyrane’s desire to coerce free assent from Amorret, the yearning to abolish separateness, which is manifest in hermaphroditic union, inflicts violence on the autonomy of a free other. For this reason, both models are unsuccessful, as is any such attempt to recreate the other as a solipsistic response to desire.

Spenser’s interest in the dialectics between the self and other is corroborated by the pervading presence of this concept in his hymns, specifically “An Hymn in Honor of Love” and “An Hymn in Honor of Beauty.” In the following stanza from “An Hymn in Honor of Love,” Spenser reflects on the self-serving aspect of love:

Such is the powre of that sweet passion,
That it all sordid basenesse doth expel,
And the refined mynd doth newly fashion
Unto a fairer forme, which now doth dwell
In his high thought, that would it selfe excell;
Which he beholding still with constant sight,
Admires the mirror of so heavenly light (Stanza 32, 4-7)

This stanza implies that there is no definitive way to discern whether the lover’s devotion to the beloved emanates from a genuine respect for the free other or is merely a means to achieve personal transcendence. The first two lines suggest that the act of loving purifies both lover and beloved. The refined image of the beloved, however, is shortly thereafter perceived by the poet as the lover’s self-serving attempt to refine himself. Yet, again Spenser’s observation reflects the interpretation of love arrived at by Francis Jacques: “[I]t is more than possible that a person who believes he or she is introducing the primacy of the Other will in fact end up confirming that of the Self.” William Allen Oram echoes this reading of the poem stating that “such idealizing may encourage solipsistic worship of a fantasy…it is unclear whether the lover admires the beloved or himself.” The love both Busyrane and Scudamour offer Amoret is invariably one that answers only to their own desires. Each can only love her as an extension of himself and therefore, neither male presents Amoret with a model of amorous union.
that responds to her own desires as an autonomous being. To both males, she is a “fantasy” that emulates their own needs in a desired other. The Amoret, whom each male invents, does not necessarily possess any continuity with that actual female. As a result, neither male truly wants to enter into a romantic union with Amoret so much as he wishes to satiate his own desires and wants. If Scudamour becomes “whole,” in Aristophanic terms, by entering into a hermaphroditic union with Amoret, it is, at least from his perspective, because he has advanced towards his own estimation of what he ought to be and what he would be if he occupied a more perfect form.

In “An Hymn in Honor of Beauty,” Spenser further expounds upon his previous query regarding whether amorous relations are capable of quelling our narcissistic tendencies:

Thereof he fashions in his higher skill,
An heavenly beautie to his fancies will,
And it embracing in his mind entire,
The mirror of his owne thought doth admyre. (Stanza 29, 1-7)

The lover’s ability to create a transcendent image of the beloved is a testament to his artistic skill, and thus, a means by which he vaunts his prowess. The fourth line of the stanza suggests that the artist becomes so enamored with his own talent that the act of creation usurps the primacy of the created. The final line reveals the vanity inherent to all artistic expression, in that it inevitably becomes a mirror in which the artist himself is reflected. I would argue that Spenser locates precisely this sort of narcissism in both Busyrane and Scudamour’s desire to recreate Amoret, such that she responds only to their own respective desires. The final, compelling truth suggested by this poem is the following: If artistic expression is inevitably narcissistic, then any model for amorous relations which arises out of an artistic rendering of romance is limited. In more concise terms, this means that any relationship, which has as its model a conception of love manifest in the aesthetics of a particular type of art or which makes use of artistic strategies to re-make a significant other, can never be an emblem of free mutuality. Furthermore, such a configuration of love as an object of affection molded by the lover to fulfill his desires ultimately
results in the mistreatment (even to the extent of violence and torture) of the beloved, as depicted in this
disfiguration and dismemberment of Amoret.

The Amoret-Busyrane episode is prompted by the abduction of Amoret, which only occurs because the audience has been successfully duped into believing that what is really occurring is a performance. This incident depicts the nefarious consequences which can result when a spectator can no longer differentiate between an artistic model and reality. Spenser initially adopts the Hermaphrodite statue as a perfect model for amorous union. However, he later rejects this model, perhaps realizing that no artistic rendering can or should ever serve as a model for human behavior. Just as a work of art reflects the narcissism of its creator, so too does romantic love often mirror the lover’s preoccupation with self. Let us thus be like Britomart, both in our interactions with art, and in our amorous relations with the romantic other. Let us respect the integrity of the free other by retaining our armor and preserving the separation which protects us from complete integration and dissolution into the other, be it in love or in art.


Frye, Susan. “Of Chastity and Violence: Elizabeth I and Edmund Spenser in the House of


