"Her Excellence to Marre": The Problem of Feminine Authority in Spenser's "Faerie Queene".

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"Her excellence to Marre": The problem of feminine authority in Spenser's "Faerie Queene"

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The Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical Col., 1990

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"Her Excellence to Marre": The Problem of Feminine Authority in Spenser's Faerie Queene

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in

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by

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**ABSTRACT** ........................................... iii

**CHAPTER**

1. Queen of Love and Beauty: Elizabeth . . . . 1

2. Authority and Gender: Britomart . . . . . . 28

3. Identity and Absence: Amoret . . . . . . 124

4. *Semper Eadem*: Belphoebe . . . . . . . . . 165

**CONCLUSION** ........................................... 191

**WORKS CITED** ........................................... 195

**VITA** .................................................... 202
Abstract

Spenser has difficulty expressing an acceptable version of his queen's authority in The Faerie Queene. He must valorize her monarchy and its power; but his uneasiness about female political authority emerges throughout the text. Like the Petrarchan poet who fictionalizes his abject devotion to his lady while he also creates and so controls her through the same fiction, Spenser praises the queen's authority while at the same time he attempts to control it and contain it in the poem. This uneasy process is exemplified in the figure of Britomart: Spenser initially presents her as the near-perfect champion of Elizabeth's signature virtue; yet he eventually criticizes her assumption of the very authority which exemplifies her virtue and makes her a potent compliment to Elizabeth.

Spenser moves beyond the Petrarchan dynamic of fictionalized subjection and aggression to explore its implications. In the story of Amoret and Scudamour, he examines the nature of courtly love and, in Amoret, the results of the total lack of feminine authority, a lack
which patriarchy demands. The Petrarchan exchange which characterized Queen Elizabeth as the "cruel fair," the beloved lady whose favors the court pursues, is then undercut by Spenser's portrait of the obdurate Belphoebe. She enters into a Petrarchan relationship with Timias—she is the unobtainable object of desire, he her adoring slave who "calls it praise to suffer tyranny" (Astrophil and Stella, 2)—but neither noble deeds nor ennobling spiritual love appears to be forthcoming for Timias, and Spenser's final word on the squire emphasizes his abandonment of his lord, Arthur.

Britomart is the most fully-drawn figure in The Faerie Queen, but her complexity still fails to bridge the gap between the forceful Belphoebe and the formless Amoret. When the virgin knight must prepare to cast off the armor which has signaled her authority and take up her womb's burden, the transition seems untenable: the ideal, the "excellence" of femininity within the patriarchal system, is marred by the monstrosity of feminine authority and becomes inexpressible for the poet who desires to praise his queen and yet explore the implications of her power.
Chapter One

Queen of Love and Beauty: Elizabeth

In July of 1596, Queen Elizabeth's Privy Council ordered all public officers to assist the Serjeant Painter in seeking out and destroying those portraits of the queen which were "to her great offense."¹ The "vile copies" of one "ill Painting" were chopped into kindling, providing the cooks at Essex "with Peels for the use of their Ovens" for several years.² This act was the culmination of more than thirty years of sporadic attempts on the part of the crown to control the production of images of the queen, attempts whose urgency increased as the great queen aged. Roy Strong claims that Elizabeth never sat again for a painter after the early 1590s, perhaps in part because of her displeasure with the realistic paintings which Marcus Gheeraerts and Isaac Oliver produced during that time. Strong suggests that their "searching realism ... provoked the decision to suppress all likenesses of the Queen which depicted her as

² Ibid., 16.
being in any way old and hence subject to mortality."

Thereafter, the crown promoted a simplified and formalized "Mask of Youth" developed by Nicholas Hilliard in which the queen's features, far from being presented realistically, were "reduced to only a few schematic lines."³

It might be possible to attribute the ban on realistic portraiture merely to the vanity of an aging queen, except that the overall history of the queen's portraits suggests that such concern about control of the royal image began early in Elizabeth's reign. For example, in 1563 there was an attempt to limit copying of the official portrait pattern only to artists licensed by the crown. This early concern, present long before old age became an issue, suggests that Elizabeth understood the political importance of maintaining control of her image, the representation of her person and her rule. Furthermore, she had definite ideas about what kind of image should be presented. According to Strong, the queen preferred a rather simplistic representation of her actual person: she was disturbed by the new method of chiaroscuro which added detail of shading and tone to her face in the Ditchley portrait, detail which was all but erased when the chiaroscuro was softened (presumably by royal dictate) in the versions produced after the original

³ Ibid., 147.
by Gheeraerts' studio. But if Elizabeth desired such simplistic depiction of her person, obviously she did not demand equally spare settings, for royal portraits featured increasingly complex symbolism in the queen's dress and surroundings as Elizabeth's reign progressed. An obvious example is the Armada portrait, which shows Elizabeth holding the globe, an imperial crown above it. The attack of the English ships and the subsequent wreck of the Armada appear simultaneously behind her. Her fantastic costume, covered with pearls and ribbons, reflects her status as queen of beauty and exemplar of chastity. Strong identifies a point in Elizabeth's reign when her portraits became elaborately allegorical: the first appeared in 1579. Interestingly enough, this was the year it became virtually certain that Elizabeth would never marry. Elizabeth was forty-six, so the hope that she might produce an heir was fading, but when she and the Duke of Alencon renewed their courtship in 1578, some people optimistically commented that the queen's good health and strong body might allow her still to bear children. The possibility of such a marriage had died by the end of 1579, however, killed by Parliamentary hesitation over approving a match (which was, realistically speaking, unlikely to produce children)

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4 Ibid., 16.
5 Ibid., 41.
between their queen and a Catholic. And it was during this
time of fading hope for an appropriate match, the years
immediately before and after 1580, when the ingredients of
"the cult of the Virgin Queen" were very rapidly put
together, even deliberately orchestrated, according to
Strong.\(^7\)

Thus we can connect some distinguishing features of
Elizabeth's portraits painted after this period—simplistic,
stylized facial representation and elaborate allegorical
settings—with the distinguishing feature of her monarchy:
she was an unmarried female ruler of a patriarchal society.\(^8\)

These later portraits, particularly those of the 1590s,
reflect the importance she attached to maintaining this role

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6 J. E. Neale, *Queen Elizabeth I* (London: Jonathan
Cape Limited, 1934; repr., Garden City, NY: Doubleday &

7 Strong, 42. Interestingly, Allison Heisch in her
groundbreaking study of Elizabeth's speeches identifies the
eighties as the period in which the circulation of some of
Elizabeth's addresses also began to be carefully
orchestrated. Before her speech to the Parliament of 1584-
85, Elizabeth sometimes gave copies of her speeches to
friends or relatives (rather as souvenirs, Heisch suggests),
but the suppression of some speeches and circulation of
others became a sophisticated manipulation of public opinion
beginning with the 1585 speech concerning particularly the
matter of religious reform. See "Queen Elizabeth I:  
Parliamentary Rhetoric and the Exercise of Power," *Signs:  

8 See Lawrence Stone for a discussion of early modern
England as a patriarchal society in which the family
structure—father the head of the household—is closely
linked to the centralization of political authority. *The
Family, Sex, and Marriage in England, 1500-1800* (New York:  
as beautiful, desirable lady; but they also reflect in their increasingly complex symbolism her subjects' attempts to ward off their anxiety about her perpetuation of that role. This anxiety had two causes: practically speaking, as long as she remained a virgin, unattainable object of desire, there could be no heir and thus the future of the throne remained uncertain. And on a subtler level, the cultural conflict between patriarchal ideology and woman's rule emerges most starkly when it becomes apparent that she will not marry and in so doing accept a masculine authority in her personal life. Instead, she will remain Eliza, feminine object of desire and yet (oxymoronically) a feminine authority as well. Her portraits therefore attempt to separate her person (unmarried female) from her role (prince), or, in other words, her natural body from her political body.\footnote{Ernst H. Kantorwicz offers a fascinating study of the philosophy of "the king's two bodies," the body natural and the body politic. See The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1957).} Her rhetoric attempted a similar division: in speeches and proclamations she represented herself through the language her culture used to represent woman. "She only" was the "queen of love and beauty," in the terms of a song by John Dowland; she was tantalizing object of desire; conversely, she was wed to her country and mother to her people. But at times she also represented herself
through masculine images and epithets, as Leah Marcus has observed. Thus she called herself "prince," and, as she grew older and physically frailer, she referred to herself with increasing frequency as "king." She used androgynous language to palliate her subjects' discomfort with her femininity, as for example in the famous Tilbury speech on the occasion of the defeat of the Spanish Armada, when she declared, "I have the body of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a king." Despite Elizabeth's rhetorical agility, her ability to place herself within all roles both feminine and masculine, and despite the philosophical logic behind her division of herself into masculine ruler and feminine person, the fact remained that she was a woman, and there would have been no need to apply these complex rhetorical manipulations if that fact had not caused some anxiety.

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12 Louis Adrian Montrose discusses Elizabeth's rhetorical manipulations in terms of how available cultural constructions of gender shaped Elizabeth's image: she "was more the creature of the Elizabethan image than she was its creator" (310). "The Elizabethan Subject and the Spenserian Text" in Literary Theory/ Renaissance Texts, ed. Patricia Parker and David Quint (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 309-10.
This study examines the way in which Spenser's *Faerie Queene* reflects these ideological conflicts surrounding Elizabeth's reign. Written during the last two decades of the sixteenth century, the time when those anxieties expressed in the portraiture were coming to a head, *The Faerie Queene* can be read as another portrait of Elizabeth which ultimately evolves into an examination not only of the anxieties surrounding her reign but also of the anxieties surrounding the whole question of feminine authority. Like the portraits of the 1590s, *The Faerie Queene* seems to offer a simplified and flattering portrayal of Elizabeth's person placed within a complex allegorical setting. In fact, an anxiety which Spenser expresses again and again in *The Faerie Queene* concerns exactly that issue: what is an appropriate and acceptable way for the artist to depict his sovereign in a work dedicated to her greater glory yet deeply concerned with problems surrounding her throne?¹³

An attempt to answer that question requires a look at the author's letter to Sir Walter Raleigh, dated 23 January, 1589, and appended to the 1590 edition of Books I-III. This oddly inconsistent and yet suggestive letter has provided

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¹³ Almost any time Spenser alludes directly to or addresses Elizabeth, he expresses his fear that he cannot do justice to her glory, beauty, and so on. Thomas H. Cain calls this the "topos of inability" and identifies it as one of Spenser's rhetorical strategies. See *Praise in The Faerie Queene* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1978), 10 and following.
critics with several resonant phrases to describe the poem (a "darke conceit"), the poem's purpose ("to fashion a gentleman"), and the poem's subject matter ("the most excellent and glorious person of our soveraine the Queene," who "beareth two persons"). Spenser's letter provides us with more, however; for it is here that we find an initial caginess about how Queen Elizabeth is represented in the poem. Spenser explains that Gloriana, the eponymous Faerie Queene who remains conspicuously absent throughout the work, represents Elizabeth, and yet, he says, "in some places els, I doe otherwise shadow her." While implying here a variety of figures who "shadow" Elizabeth, he immediately goes on to describe a simple dichotomous representation: "For considering she beareth two persons, the one of a most royall Queene or Empresse, the other of a most vertuous and beautifull Lady, this latter part in some places I doe expresse in Belphoebe, fashioning her name according to your owne excellent conceipt of Cynthia." The ambiguity here recurs in the proem to Book III, where the poet begins by asserting that, although he will write of chastity using examples "from Faery," in fact the prime example of that virtue is Elizabeth herself. Since Britomart is chastity's representative in this book, according to its title ("The

Legend of Britomartis, or, Of Chastity”), we are led to expect that Elizabeth will see herself "in colourd showes" shadowed in Britomart. However, Spenser once again disappoints our expectations by claiming that Elizabeth may find her image in only two figures: "But either Gloriana let her chuse,/ Or in Belphoebe fashioned to bee:/ In th'one her rule, in th'other her rare chastitee" (III.proem.5.7-9).

Given the possibilities, we wonder who does represent Queen Elizabeth in The Faerie Queene. The confusion increases when we return to Spenser's letter and find that, in fact, even Gloriana cannot be said unequivocally to mirror simply Elizabeth's public self, since Spenser here also claims that the Faerie Queene means "glory" in his "generall intention." Susanne Woods makes a case for reading "Gloriana" as the name for Elizabeth's public self and "Tanaquill," a name twice given to the Faerie Queene in the poem, as the name for Elizabeth's private self.\(^{15}\) However, this parallel runs into problems when we discover that Tanaquill was a famous Roman matron—renowned for her chastity, true, but a matron all the same and so at best a problematic representative for the private side of the virgin queen.\(^{16}\) So in the end Spenser seems obliquely to

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acknowledge several possible portraits of Elizabeth within his poem: Gloriana represents the idea of glory but also the glorious Queen Elizabeth in her public persona as monarch; Tanaquill, another name for Gloriana, must also represent Elizabeth and perhaps signifies (uneasily) the queen's private self; Belphoebe represents Elizabeth's private self, and may also represent the idea of Elizabeth's chastity. Further, as Spenser himself points out in the Letter to Raleigh, "Phoebe" is another name for Diana, and since Diana actually appears as a character in the poem, we must assume that here is another surrogate for Elizabeth-Gloriana-Tanaquill-Belphoebe. The odd thing about all this is not that Elizabeth should have so many representations in The Faerie Queene: the poem is written explicitly in her honor; she is invoked in every proem. Further, Elizabeth was a complex person and her regency was a complex phenomenon, not easily reduced to a single allegorical figure. What seems curious, rather, is Spenser's hesitancy to proclaim the queen's myriad representations in his poem and his insistence on limiting his acknowledged portraits of Elizabeth essentially to two figures, Gloriana (also called Tanaquill) and Belphoebe (a reflection of Diana). And most puzzling of all is Spenser's failure to acknowledge Britomart as one of Elizabeth's avatars since, in her chastity and her androgyny, she clearly suggests the person of Elizabeth. Furthermore, she is central to the poem in a
way that none of these other figures is; she is one of the six knights each of whom serves as the main protagonist of a book. She is so well-developed a figure that we might even call her a character, if that term can be applied to the beings who people a work like *The Faerie Queene*. I suggest that the depth and breadth of development Spenser brings to Britomart may be the very reason he is reluctant to highlight her role as Elizabeth's "shadow" in the poem; like the "Mask of Youth," the flat character is most likely to please the queen.

The figures Spenser does willingly acknowledge as types of his queen are indeed sparsely drawn: Gloriana-Tanaquill is absent almost entirely from the poem, and Belphoebe, though a stronger presence, is still a fairly limited character and thus a far safer vehicle for the poet's compliment to Elizabeth than is Britomart. For one thing, Belphoebe upholds the narrow definition of chastity, that is, virginity, which Elizabeth embraced for herself. Britomart, although not a matron *per se* like Tanaquill, searches for and finds her destined mate with whom she will establish a line of heirs to the British throne. That Spenser in 1590 presents the development of chastity as a quest for marriage and progeny makes his Knight of Chastity an awkward compliment to the queen, since by this time a fruitful marriage was no longer possible for Elizabeth. Furthermore, Britomart is a flawed character, for like all
the central protagonists of the books of *The Faerie Queene* she develops into an exemplar of her virtue; she does not begin that way. Perhaps Belphoebe, a comparatively static figure, is on the surface a safer compliment to the queen. In fact, although Belphoebe seems to reflect a more exalted ideal in her established virginity than does Britomart in her evolving chastity, the language Spenser uses to depict the virgin huntress, even in the long panegyric devoted to her at the end of III.v, implies a subtle criticism. He critiques her very perfection by characterizing her virginity as rigidity in the story of her relationship with Timias, and by undercutting his supposed paean of praise through the language he uses; for instance, he describes her virtuous example as "dead" (III.v.54) at the end of the canto. It is hard not to think of the Mask of Youth in relation to Belphoebe: both insist on the queen's perfection at the price of her reality as a human being.

Such perfection is inimical to Spenser's mode of representation in *The Faerie Queene*; both the form and content of his epic romance reflect his preoccupation with mutability, especially growth, development both individual and societal. His stated purpose in writing the poem is "to fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline," that is, to promote human development within a social order, and the structure of *The Faerie Queene* reflects this purpose as it moves from an examination of the
growth of personal virtues such as holiness and temperance to the growth of more social virtues such as justice and courtesy. The method he employs, allegory or "dark conceit," allows for reading on many different levels while challenging a reader to develop the insight required to understand all the implications of the text. Yet, while these attributes of the poem encourage movement toward an ideal self and society, these ideals remain ultimately unattainable. The heroes of the poem undertake quests for perfection that never can be accomplished, as we see in the ending of each book: to use the most familiar example, the Red Cross Knight must return to serve the Faerie Queene rather than remaining with Una at the end of Book I. The knight cannot complete his quest any more than a human being can actually reach perfection in earthly life, and ultimate perfection must be unattainable in order for the quest to continue. And continue it must, for of course the quest is life itself.

Obviously, given this context, a fixed figure such as Belphoebe, one who appears to maintain perfect virtue, must be "dead" either in a perjorative sense or in the sense that she is somehow otherworldly, above the realm of mutability. In this latter sense she is a goddess and thus serves as a supreme compliment to Elizabeth but hardly as a reflection of the queen's "personal" identity, despite Spenser's suggestion that she represents the lady rather than the
queen. A questing character such as Britomart might seem a better figure to valorize the queen's personal identity except that, as we have seen, any realistic human representation of Elizabeth is problematic. Thus we have an initial tension in The Faerie Queene between the poet's stated aim, manifest content, and chosen form on the one hand, and the poem's ideal reader and her preferred version of herself on the other.

Why is a lifelike representation of the queen so threatening? Why does it seem necessary to the Privy Council to suppress realistic portraits of the queen, and similarly, why does it seem necessary to the poet to suppress any parallels between his realistic, developing heroine Britomart and his queen? If the poet understood the iconography of Elizabeth to reflect simply a fear of depicting the queen as old, then he would have no reason to avoid the comparison between Britomart and Elizabeth, since Britomart is a young maiden. What do his depictions of the queen, both acknowledged and unacknowledged, tell about his understanding of the reasons behind this growing gap between the reality of a woman Elizabeth and the myth of a great queen?

I read the problem this way: the person Elizabeth must be effaced and dehumanized as much as possible after a certain point in her reign not only because she is growing old and so can no longer realistically exist as the queen of
beauty, but also because, as an unmarried female ruler, she defies a basic cultural understanding about the role of women in sixteenth-century England. Through rhetorical strategy, she tried to claim all roles for herself, as we have seen, even the male role of prince. But she was not a man, as her people knew, nor was she wife and mother, other titles she sometimes claimed. Therefore, it was important that her person recede into the background, because an overt juxtaposition of her "natural body" and her "political body" served as an anxious reminder of an ideologically threatening situation. Spenser cannot point directly to Britomart as a figure of his queen partly because she is destined for marriage and childbearing, but even more urgently, he cannot acknowledge a relationship between the queen, whose "rare chastitee" (III.proem.v) is an exemplum for all, and the knight of chastity, who is his most engaging heroine, because the most salient feature of Britomart's character is her authority. Many of the rhetorical and iconographical strategies of Elizabeth's rule sought to avoid this very problem of feminine authority by widening the gap between the queen's personal image, which is feminine, and queen's monarchical image, which is often depicted as masculine.

Of course, Belphoebe too is an authoritative figure: she is described at her initial appearance in the poem as seeming "a woman of great worth,/ And by her stately
portance, borne of heavenly birth" (II.iii.21.8-9);
Trompart, the first person in the poem to meet her,
addresses her as "Goddesse" (II.iii.33.2), an estimation
supported by the poet's description of her in the same
imento. But this is an authority sanctioned within
patriarchal tradition: the authority of a goddess is not
the same, not as threatening, as the authority of a human
woman. In a Christian patriarchy, a goddess lives and acts
in a fictive realm and so poses no real challenge to the
political structure; in fact, figures like Venus and Diana
(upon whom Belphoebe the virgin huntress is modelled) are
known to Elizabethan England through the works of male
authors such as Homer, Virgil, Ovid, and Apollodorus; these
goddesses could thus be described as male creations in the
first place. The same could be said for that version of
feminine authority found in the figure of the unattainable
woman of Petrarchan convention: Sidney's Stella, for
instance, supposedly controls the destiny of the adoring
Astrophil, the poet-persona of the sequence, but in truth
she is his creation and thus in a very real sense he
controls her.¹⁷ Maureen Quilligan has identified a similar

¹⁷ Arthur Marotti makes a similar point about
Astrophil and Stella in "\'Love Is Not Love\': Elizabethan
Sonnet Sequences and the Social Order." He argues that
sonnet sequences are a way for courtiers to express
political ambition: desire for the lady's sexual favors
expresses desire for the queen's political favors, and the
sequence also enacts the fantasy of masculine control over
the woman who is his object. English Literary History 49
(Summer 1982): 396-428. For an in-depth discussion of the
dynamic in Spenser's depiction of Diana: the poet rewrites familiar myths, such as the Diana-Actaeon story, in a comic vein which undercuts the goddess's power and makes it subject to the poet's containment.18 And both the goddess and the Petrarchan beloved in some sense dwell outside the earthly realm: the goddess is by definition superhuman, and the Petrarchan lady's beauty and virtue are superhuman. In Petrarch's case, the lady actually becomes a reflection of the Christian goddess, the Virgin Mary. Belphoebe incorporates aspects of both these versions of feminine authority: she is depicted and perceived as a goddess, and she ultimately plays the role of the eternally unobtainable lady to the squire Timias. Elizabeth herself used both of these manifestations to articulate her power: she was a goddess and a "cruel fair," as we see strikingly illustrated in Sir Walter Raleigh's sonnet in praise of The Faerie Queene, where Elizabeth is a celestial Faerie Queene who outshines even Petrarch's Laura.19 These are acceptable versions of feminine authority because, like Elizabeth's

way these sexual politics work in Astrophil and Stella, see also Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass, "The Politics of Astrophil and Stella," Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900 24 (Winter 1984): 53-68.


later portraits which denature her person while they elaborate her surroundings and costumes, they remove the authoritative woman out of the human realm: in Raleigh's sonnet, the locale is Laura's tomb and the action involves souls and celestial figures rather than living people. Ultimately, the goddess and the Petrarchan lady are male creations, set safely outside the everyday realm.

But Britomart's authority is different altogether. She is very definitely of the human, and specifically political, realm: far from being unobtainable, she actively searches for her mate; far from being removed from the political structure, she will, according to Merlin's prophecy, initiate the future line of British monarchs. So the story of Britomart is one of human development, and rightly so, because Britomart's role as questing knight requires that she develop into a more perfect representative of her virtue, chastity. In *The Faerie Queene* this virtue does seem primarily to refer to holy, fruitful, wedded love rather than to virginity, since the knight of chastity is a future wife and mother.  

But although Britomart's chastity develops in a different direction from the one Elizabeth's had taken by 1590, still there are compelling similarities between the two. Britomart of all the figures in *The Faerie Queene* this virtue does seem primarily to refer to holy, fruitful, wedded love rather than to virginity, since the knight of chastity is a future wife and mother.  

20 For a similar definition of Britomart's chastity and a discussion of its origins in Spenser's sources, see Graham Hough, *A Preface to the Faerie Queene* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1963), 170.
Queene most strongly suggests Queen Elizabeth's linguistically-composed androgyny; Britomart's androgyny is expressed symbolically, through her phallic spear and her very feminine golden hair which constantly threatens to break out of its confinement and reveal her as woman. Just as Queen Elizabeth at times invoked notions of patriarchy to represent her authority, so for Britomart the masculine side of her androgyny is in fact the expression of her authority: her magic spear which empowers her so that she cannot be defeated in battle. The efficacy of Britomart's knighthood is indeed a kind of political authority, especially since within the context of Book III her knighthood involves the enforcement of her virtue upon those with whom she comes in contact.

But Britomart's chastity is more than a policing action; it is also a developing virtue and as such encompasses the growth of Britomart as a subject, that is, a self. For even as Britomart meanders through Book III, encountering and battling various representations of unchastity, she is moving toward a destiny that has been revealed early on: she will find and marry Arthegall and produce a line of progeny who will be British monarchs. Thus, along with Britomart's current political authority exists a future political involvement specifically maternal in quality: Britomart will not rule Britain herself; she will produce heirs to do the job. The story of Britomart is
therefore the story of her movement from the androgyny of forceful knighthood toward the acceptance of a culturally-inscribed woman's role: wife and mother. So Britomart's developing chastity is in a sense her slow acceptance of a feminine sexuality defined by a patriarchal culture.

Britomart's sexuality, her feminine gender as defined by this patriarchal culture, cannot coexist with the authority of her knighthood; such a juxtaposition would challenge the Elizabethans' most basic assumptions about femininity. Yet such is precisely the situation Spenser is faced with: he must compliment Elizabeth the Queen and valorize her power, but at the same time his definition of chastity as married love requires that he depict his Knight of Chastity as a woman destined for a traditional role which demands meekness, obedience, and subjection. These two demands on the figure of Britomart are in constant conflict throughout The Faerie Queene and lead to an exploration of the development of feminine identity and the relationship of identity to authority, both personal and political.

Spenser's depiction of Britomart's developing identity results ultimately in his exploration of the way in which personal identity is constituted in response to authority. In the Lacanian terms which I have found helpful for reading The Faerie Queene, gender originates in language rather than biology, and language is a phallocentric construct based on
the "Law of the Father." This law is the patriarchal authority which "authors" meaning: if we understand language as an infinite chain of signification, then meaning exists only in reference to this phallus, but the phallus is always only an imaginary authority, the transcendent signifier to which all signifiers ultimately defer.\footnote{Although Lacan's ideas are nowhere presented in a systematic or paradigmatic fashion, several basic texts are key to coming to terms with his ideas, including Jacques Lacan, Ecrits: A Selection, ed. and trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977). The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton, 1973). Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis, trans. Anthony Wilden (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986). Also Lacan and the école freudienne, Feminine Sexuality, ed. Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose, trans. Jacqueline Rose (New York: W. W. Norton, 1985). Two helpful commentaries on Lacan's theories are Mitchell and Rose's introductions and Anthony Wilden's commentary in the above text.} Thus "meaning" itself is a suspect concept, and so is the idea that gender is something innate or biological or in any way fixed. Similarly, "identity" is constituted within language and thus through an other; therefore, identity is fluid, perhaps even unstable, and certainly beyond the control of the subject. These concepts are especially relevant to the story of Britomart, who exemplifies the linguistic origins of gender. Her sexual identity, far from being determined by her physical femaleness, becomes so ambiguous when she adopts symbolic masculinity (i.e. knighthood) that even the narrator at times refers to her by the masculine pronoun (see for example III.ix.12-20). Her identity is far from
fixed and its fluidity is to a large degree beyond her control. She is subject to the mistaken "identifications," or misrecognitions, of others and her quest, which is a quest for identity, is based on the ambiguous appearance of a stranger's image which replaces her own in her father's mirror.

Thus, not only Elizabethan ideas about femininity but also his own growing doubts about the nature of authority handicap Spenser in his attempt to valorize this authoritative woman. Therefore he cannot name Britomart as the queen's avatar; to do so would call attention to his struggle and ultimate failure to depict an integrated feminine authority, a failure which would have troubling political implications in the 1590s. Furthermore, I believe that through his attempts to unravel the difficulties inherent in the concept of "feminine authority" Spenser eventually comes to question the reality of other cultural authorities and their role in the constitution of selfhood. Such doubts seem to develop gradually in Spenser's work, but they become more urgent with time and resonate throughout the final disillusioned and weary books of the poem.

Spenser wrestles with these problems and contradictions throughout The Faerie Queene: the constitution of identity, particularly sexual identity, is central not only to Book III but also to the story of Britomart and Arthegall in Book V. Reversal of gendered roles is the hallmark of this
section: Radigund, the Amazon who along with her followers has "shaken off the shamefast band,/ With which wise Nature did them strongly bynd" (V.v.25), plays the masculine role of tyrant; Arthegall, as her captive, is forced to wear "womans weedes" and spin for his supper; and Britomart sets forth once again attired as a knight and wielding her phallic spear, this time in order to rescue Arthegall and overthrow the rule of women. These role reversals create a kaleidoscope of potential and possibility which the poet presents as a confusion, a disorder that must be reordered. Britomart and the problem of her development into a gendered subject lie at the center of the confusion, as her dream at Isis Church lies at the midpoint of Book V. Her experience in the church is a climactic point which seems also to overturn all the gendered role reversals (including her own) and establish conformity within the patriarchal structure. But doubts about the nature of personal authority and attendant problems in expressing political authority linger and color the conclusion to Britomart's story.

Spenser's attempt in The Faerie Queene to depict a feminine authority acceptable to both the court and himself seems to have reached some kind of crisis between the publication of Books I-III in 1590 and the subsequent publication of the entire work as we have it now, Books I-VI, in 1596. This crisis is reflected in the figure of Amoret, who is the key character in the concluding episode
of Book III that Spenser rewrote for the 1596 edition. The rewritten ending casts into doubt the triumph of chastity itself, since the new version allows Britomart only a marginal victory in her quest to save Amoret from the enchanter Busirane and reunite her with her true love, Scudamour: Amoret is saved, but she and Britomart have both been wounded, and when they emerge from Busirane's house, Scudamour is gone. I read this climactic episode with its rewritten ending as Spenser's investigation of what a complete lack of authority might mean in terms of human identity, for the center of this episode is Amoret, surely the least authoritative figure in *The Faerie Queene*. She is his most traditional female character, neither warrior nor goddess nor huntress but merely a beautiful woman who has been reared in "true feminitee" by Venus in the Garden of Adonis. She rarely speaks and she never appears except under the protection of or in the possession of someone else: Venus her guardian, Scudamour her lover, Busirane her captor, or Britomart her protector. The failure of her union with her own destined mate, Scudamour, is one of the most curious plot lines in *The Faerie Queene*; Spenser ultimately leaves the story hanging, seemingly unable to find an appropriate conclusion for it.

By juxtaposing Britomart and Amoret in the episode of Busirane's House, Spenser brings together the androgynous woman and the wholly feminine woman; he sets side by side
the woman trained from the beginning in "true feminitee" and the woman whose quest is in part a struggle to accept the role of "true feminitee" for herself. The episode in Busirane's house shows why the struggle is a difficult one for Britomart; the tapestries she views on her first day in the house and the pageant of the second day which features Amoret as the sacrificial lamb both act as emblems for the objectification and victimization of woman in a patriarchal culture. Amoret's entire history, as it is reported in Books III and IV, is an examination of feminine identity as it is constituted within patriarchal culture. What her ordeal in Busirane's house symbolically reveals is that Amoret has no identity as such: she is completely without authority, defined only by the male who possesses her, and if that allegiance disintegrates she is nothing but the absence symbolized by the gaping wound which marks her in Busirane's house. Further, as we learn from Scudamour's response to Amoret's captivity and from the story he tells in Book IV about how he won her in the first place, masculine identity also relies on this possession of the woman; when Scudamour loses Amoret, his identity as the knight of Cupid becomes tenuous.

Spenser's attempt in The Faerie Queene to formulate an acceptable expression of feminine authority thus leads to an examination of the larger issue of human identity. For Spenser, the personal and the political are densely
intertwined: holiness, temperance, and chastity, the personal virtues of the first three books, lead to friendship, justice, and courtesy, virtues of and within the polis. Just so, his examination of feminine authority from within the political context of Elizabeth's reign leads to an interrogation of feminine identity and its repercussions in the personal realm of sexual relationships, and finally to doubts about the stability of human identity. My study of Spenser attempts to follow his closely intertwined personal and political concerns by reading The Faerie Queene both psychoanalytically and historically. Particularly I read from a psychoanalytical point of view those episodes which call for such a reading because they appear most clearly to be about the human psyche. For example, a critical consensus exists about certain episodes like the one in Busirane's castle at the close of Book III: whereas critics might differ over the "meaning" of the episode, all read it as a reflection of Amoret's and/or Britomart's psyche, or as a commentary on the psychological tensions inherent in love. Certainly Busyrane and his house of horrors has never been read in direct relation to Elizabeth and the political setting. On the other hand, it is neither desirable nor possible to divorce completely the psychological from the political: even Busirane's house has a political side in the sense that it shows the psychic terrors and tensions of love in relation to courtly love,
and particularly the Petrarchan tradition so popular in Elizabeth's court. My reading of Spenser attempts to take into account both the personal and the political, to acknowledge that Spenser is at times reflecting more heavily on one than the other, but to show that, finally, the two are inseparable in *The Faerie Queene*. 
Chapter Two
Authority and Gender: Britomart

Spenser presents Britomart differently than he presents his other knights, and in this bald statement lies the essence of the problem with Britomart: she is different, and in searching for a way to acknowledge the feminine difference that patriarchal ideology demands while valorizing the martial prowess Britomart's role demands, Spenser finds his most complex challenge. Even Britomart's initial entrance into the text suggests this problem. Presented mysteriously and obliquely, her identity and an explanation of her quest withheld for the entire first canto of The Faerie Queene, Britomart is an exception to the general rule that structures the books of Spenser's epic. Yet for the reader coming to Book III for the first time, Britomart may appear to exemplify sameness: she seems different from her male compeers only in that her prowess exceeds theirs.

Book III opens with an encounter between Britomart and Sir Guyon, knight of temperance, lately come from the intemperate and ruthless destruction of Acrasia's Bower of
Bliss. The "rigour pitilesse" he has shown at the conclusion of Book II (II.xii.83) still characterizes him when we meet him at the start of Book III: the narrative emphasizes his hardness three times over. Acrasia has been sent under guard to the faery court as witness to Guyon's "hard assay"; Guyon himself has gone his own way "to make more triall of his hardiment"; and in fact he has achieved "many hard adventures," according to the narrator (III.i.2-3). Yet this hard, experienced, even ruthless campaigner is promptly unseated by Britomart when they joust two stanzas later (III.i.5-6). All this has the effect of impressing upon us Britomart's great strength and martial prowess; she actually replaces Guyon as the embodiment of a phallic power, for after his defeat at her hands his "hardiment" has become "hard fortune" (III.i.8), and Britomart carries an enchanted spear, described as a "weapon keene,/ That mortal puissance mote not withstand" (III.i.10.5-6). "Keen" of course bears the suggestion of sexual arousal, and the fact that other weapons, and the fallen Guyon himself, cannot stand up to Britomart's spear emphasizes the phallic depiction of power in this book.

We are told from the start that Britomart is searching for her love, for when the narrator identifies her after she unseats Guyon, he encapsulates the story he will dilate later in canto ii:

Even the famous Britomart it was,
Whom strange adventure did from Britaine fet,
To seeke her lover (love farre sought alas,)
Whose image she had seene in Venus looking glas.
(III.i.8.6-9).

But the focus of the canto lies elsewhere, not with
Britomart's love but with her prowess, which seems to act in
part as a critique of traditional masculine forms of power:
Britomart beats the men at their own games but at the same
time avoids negative aspects of this enactment of power
which Spenser criticizes in the male characters. For
example, when Guyon becomes angry after his defeat by
Britomart, his anger must be assuaged in a moment described
in terms of a still-current stereotype: that of the man,
embarrassed because he's been bested in sport, complaining,
"the sun was in my eyes":

By such good meanes he [the Palmer] him
discounselled,
From prosecuting his revenging rage;
And eke the Prince like treaty handeled,
His wrathfull will with reason to asswage,
And laid the blame, not to his carriage,
But to his starting steed, that swarv'd asyde,
And to the ill purveyance of his page,
That had his furnitures not firmly tyde:
So is his angry courage fairely pacifyde.
(III.i.11)

The next stanza describes the reconciliation of the knights,
which is accomplished through the virtues they strive to
perfect ("Thus reconcilement was between them knit,/ Through
goodly temperance, and affection chaste"). This is followed
by an authorial interjection which on the surface seems a
paean of praise for this golden age of chivalry, but in
conjunction with the humorous description of Guyon's rage and eventual pacification can only be read ironically:

O goodly usage of those antique times,
In which the sword was servant unto right;
When not for malice and contentious crimes,
But all for praise, and prove of manly might,
The martial brood accustomed to fight:
Then honour was the meed of victorie,
And yet the vanquished had no despight:
Let later age that noble use envie,
Vile rancour to avoid, and cruell surquedrie.

(III.i.13)

Of course, Guyon has been nothing if not rancorous and despightful until he is calmed by hearing blame for his defeat placed on his unhappy steed and page. Furthermore, the idea that "proove of manly might" equals "right" receives emphasis in the rhyme scheme and, thus brought to our attention, invites us to question it. The misdirection of blame which Arthur and the Palmer use to soothe Guyon when his "manly might" is called into question does not strike us as particularly admirable; rather, it is presented humorously in a way that belittles Sir Guyon and challenges the whole tradition which suggests that "proove of manly might" is a praiseworthy reason to fight. Further, the next narrative turn, Guyon and Arthur's sudden abandonment of Britomart in order to give impulsive chase to the ever-pursued Florimell, belies the idea that for these knights "honour" is "the meed of victorie"; Spenser brings home the contrast between the chivalric ethic he has described and the behavior of the knights by explaining that they run to
Florimell's rescue not to win the meed of honour but because they "hope to win thereby/ Most goodly meede, the fairest Dame alive" [i.e. Florimell] (III.i.18.8-9). Britomart's behavior appears in direct contrast to Arthur's and Guyon's, and yet the fact that she is a woman makes the terms of the contrast a little unsettling:

The whiles faire Britomart, whose constant mind,  
Would not so lightly follow beauties chace,  
Ne reckt of Ladies Love, did stay behind,  
And them awayted there a certaine space  
(III.i.19.1-4).

The narrator seems momentarily to have forgotten that Britomart is not a man but a woman: knowing that she is a woman, we would not expect her to feel Florimell's allure as do Arthur and Guyon, but the narrator ascribes her response to her steadfast and loyal virtue rather than to any obvious, gendered difference between Britomart and the two men.

Why does the narrative highlight Britomart's masculinity, even to the point of effacing her actual gender? Britomart, as the representative of chastity, bears a special responsibility in an epideictic work— that is, one designed to display the virtues of a great man, or in this case, a great woman, Elizabeth I.¹ Chastity was Elizabeth's

¹ For a full discussion of The Faerie Queene as an epideictic work in which each virtue may be understood as an attribute of Queen Elizabeth, see Robin Headlam Wells, Spenser's Faerie Queene and the Cult of Elizabeth (Totowa, N.J.: Barnes and Noble Books, 1983).
premier virtue, the quality that exemplified the virgin queen, the virtue which she, for good political reasons and perhaps also as a result of personal preference, made her hallmark. The opening of Book III displays this virtue with all the fanfare it deserves in a work dedicated to Elizabeth I: Britomart's first two acts are to defeat Guyon and rescue Red Cross, a program which establishes her and her virtue, chastity, as the most powerful yet to appear in the Faerie Queene while also offering a humorous critique of the essentially masculine tradition of chivalry. Yet this attempt on Spenser's part to establish a "feminine authority," a power based on a feminine virtue in opposition to a masculine tradition, rapidly deconstructs in the episode of the Castle Joyeous.²

Britomart at the beginning of her encounter with Malecasta and the Castle Joyeous still seems to be the unambiguously virtuous and powerful purveyor of right, standing in opposition to a coercive, masterful sexuality. Such maisterie is the theme of the Castle Joyeous, whose lady sends six knights to waylay passing strangers and compel them by means of physical force to give allegiance

² It is worth explaining that chastity is a "feminine" virtue in the sense that it is recommended for men but of paramount importance for a woman. Ruth Kelso, in her study of women in the Renaissance, states, "Let a woman have chastity, she has all. Let her lack chastity and she is nothing." Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1956), 24.
and worship to her. When Britomart first encounters the inhabitants of the castle, Red Cross Knight is under attack by all six of Malecasta's knights at once because he has refused to repudiate Una and love Malecasta instead. Britomart lectures the perpetrators of this felony in the famous echo of Chaucer's Franklin: "Ne may love be compeld by maisterie;/ For soone as maisterie comes, sweet love anone/ Taketh his nimble wings, and soone away is gone" (III.i.25.7-9). Then she proceeds to conquer all six by means of her "mortall speare" (III.i.28.6.), and so she and Red Cross are welcomed to Castle Joyeous as their reward.

Once the narrative moves inside the castle, the focal point becomes a tapestry depicting an archetype of female mastery, Venus in her relationship to Adonis. Britomart and Red Cross examine this tapestry, which the narrative describes in great detail. It depicts first Venus's anguish when she falls in love with Adonis, and then their relationship after she brings him to her bower. At this point the narrative voice clearly emphasizes Venus's domination of the "Boy," as he is called. The description of the tapestry projects an overwhelming sense of enclosure and entrapment: Venus leads Adonis into a "secret shade" where she hides him from heaven's view; in this "covert glade" she spreads her mantle over him while he sleeps and "secretly would search out every limb," watching him bathe. However, she cannot forever enjoy him "in secret unespyle,"
for his destiny ordains that he must be fatally wounded by a wild boar; yet even the scene wherein Venus gives Adonis eternal life by changing him into a flower suggests not liberation from death but rather further entrapment: according to the narrator, "Him to a dainty flowre she did transmew" (III.i.38.8), suggesting confinement in a mews rather than a freeing transformation.³

Against all these emblems of maisterie stands Britomart, who despite her depiction as a powerful, even masterful figure, represents a clear contrast to the symbolic maisterie of the Castle Joyeous. Where Venus, in her mastery of Adonis, encloses and envelopes, Britomart opens and exposes. The conceit employed to describe the effect of Britomart's lifting up her visor delineates this opposition between Britomart and Venus:

As when faire Cynthia, in darkesome night,
Is in a noyous cloud enveloped,
Where she may find the substance thin and light,
Breakes forth her silver beames, and her bright
hed

Discovers to the world discomfited;

Such was the beauty and the shining ray,
With which faire Britomart gave light unto the day. (III.i.43)

Cynthia is of course another name for Diana, Venus's rival and opposite; and in direct contrast to Venus, who covers Adonis with her "mantle, colour'd like the starry

³ I am indebted to Hamilton's gloss for this reading of "transmew." The Faerie Queene, 312.
skyes" (III.i.36.2), Britomart, like Diana, "discovers" herself and so sheds light and chases away the dark night.

But along with this implicit argument in the text—the seemingly clearly delineated opposition between the enveloping, masterful Venus and the opening, liberating Britomart—we find some terms that do not so neatly support such an opposition. For one thing, Britomart may raise her visor enough to expose some of her beautiful face, but that is all she exposes until she finds herself alone at bedtime. In fact, she maintains her disguise as a man even when confronted with Malecasta's deluded desire for her. Indeed, Britomart's disguise is both an emblem of her power and an actual defense; armored and hidden, she can see but avoid being seen herself. Lacan analyzes voyeurism as just such a position—that of insisting on the role of one who sees while rejecting the role of the seen. Freud in his essay "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes" suggested that looking is the visual mastery or possession of an object. But because instincts, including the scopophilic instinct, have their related vicissitudes, that is reversals, looking normally involves not only the mastery implicit in this subject role but also a shift from the subject's viewpoint to the object's viewpoint, a repositioning in which the subject becomes the object and thus relinquishes the power implicit in seeing for the vulnerability involved in being seen. Thus Freud characterizes an instinct (or "drive" as some
would prefer to translate Freud's word Trieb) as "a series of separate successive waves"; that is, the instinct is always changing from active to passive form, reversing itself and "turning round upon the subject." Lacan's reworking of these Freudian ideas suggests that voyeurism is a rejection of that shifting, relative stance: voyeurism is the attempt to see without being seen.

Maisterie then, as it is practiced in Castle Joyeuse, often takes the form of voyeurism; as we've seen, the emblem for maisterie, the Venus-and-Adonis tapestry, shows Venus as a voyeur, "secretly . . . search[ing] each daintie lim" of Adonis with "her two crafty spyes." But like a voyeur, she is not looked at while she looks: she enjoys Adonis "in secret unespyde," and even the reciprocity we might expect between the gazes of lovers is absent here, for Venus bathes Adonis's eyes with ambrosial kisses which place his eyes in a position of total passivity and effectively render him blind. Thus Venus is the object of no gaze, even though her own ability to look is the source of her pleasure. The narrative similarly emphasizes Malecasta's "look" in conjunction with her sexual pleasure: for instance, her

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name is derived in part from the idea of "casting" glances, specifically lustful glances. This lust, which she implements through mastery, is often expressed through a look: "Askaunce/ Her wanton eyes, ill signes of womanhed,/ Did roll too lightly, and too often glaunce,/ Without regard of grace, or comely amenaunce" (III.i.41.6-9).

But Britomart also is implicated in this mastering voyeurism because like Venus she avoids the looks of others, hiding within her armor, yet she too is portrayed as looking from her very entrance into Castle Joyeous. The long description of the tapestry of Venus and Adonis is predicated upon Britomart's and Red Cross's gaze: we see the tapestry in the detail that their long look provides. Britomart stares at the goings-on in Castle Joyeous "with scornefull eye" (III.i.40.7), full of disdain for the loose and lascivious ways of her hostess. But when Malecasta begins to "rove at her with crafty glaunce" (III.i.50.6), Britomart "would not such guileful message know"—she "dissembled it with ignoraunce" (III.i.50.9 and 51.9). Oddly ambiguous, the narrative seems to assert that Britomart's innocence prevents her from understanding Malecasta's intent while simultaneously suggesting that Britomart willfully dissembles, refusing to be the object of Malecasta's desire by pretending the desire does not exist.

6 See Hamilton's gloss, The Faerie Queene, 312.
Thus Britomart claims the role of subject and rejects the role of object in Castle Joyeous, a position which Spenser undercuts in several ways: by depicting such mastering voyeurism, which looks insatiably but hides from the look of others, as suffocating and imprisoning in the Venus-and-Adonis tapestry, and even more overtly by linking the hero Britomart with the villain Malecasta. He depicts both as voyeurs but goes beyond that implication actually to confuse their identities in a typically Spenserian ambiguity of pronoun references. The "she" throughout stanza 55 is clearly Britomart confronting Malecasta's confession of "love":

For thy she would not in discourteise wise,
Scorne the Sfaire offer of good will profest;
For great rebuke it is, love to despise,
Or rudely sdeigne a gentle harts request;
But with faire countenaunce, as beseemed best,
Her entertaynd; nath'lesse she inly deemd
Her love too light, to woee a wandring guest:
Which she misconstruing, thereby esteemd
That from like inward fire that outward smoke had
steemd. (III.i.55)

Therefore we continue in stanza 56 to understand the referent as Britomart:

Therewith a while she her flit fancy fed,
Till she mote winne fit time for her desire,
But yet her wound still inward freshly bled,
And through her bones the false instilled fire
Did spred it selfe, and venime close inspire.

(III.i.56.1-5)

By the time we reach the sentence's end, we realize that "she" is now Malecasta, but the momentary confusion suggests
that a reevaluation of Britomart might be necessary. Especially in light of what we later learn about her—that she herself loves a stranger, like Malecasta whom she criticizes as "too light" for doing just that—the similarities between the two loom larger than do their differences.

At the start of Book III, Spenser puts strong emphasis on Britomart's prowess, to the extent that she becomes the embodiment of phallic authority in the book. But by the close of the very first canto, that authority has been undercut: Britomart has been implicated in the voyeurism and maisterie of Castle Joyeous in that her stance as hidden watcher recalls the stance of the negatively portrayed Venus of the tapestry, although Venus looks lustfully at Adonis and Britomart looks scornfully at the inhabitants of Castle Joyeous. But her attempt to scorn the maisterie of lust which surrounds her seems to fail: she is linked to Malecasta through the characteristic Spenserian devices of parallelism and pronoun ambiguity; further, the end of the episode clearly signals some sort of downfall, since at this point Britomart is "despoiled" (to use Spenser's term of III.i.58.6), that is, unarmed and ultimately wounded in a fracas involving Malecasta's knights.

Britomart's wounding in Malecasta's house has been a subject of discussion in many studies of the Faerie Queene; the incident is most often thought to provide an external
sign of the internal wounding Britomart suffers when she falls in love with Arthegall's reflection in the enchanted mirror. And the parallels between the internal and external wounds do exist, as do parallels between Britomart here and Malecasta, whose "wound still inward freshly bled" because of her passion for a stranger (Britomart). But Britomart's wound at the hands of Malecasta's knights also resonates with the issue of voyeurism in this canto, when we look at voyeurism as a stance which symbolically asserts a powerful self-sufficiency not dependent on the construct of the other for its selfhood. According to Lacan's understanding of and expansion upon Freudian ideas, the concept of such autonomy must be a fiction because the self is constituted only through the other, specifically the language of the other and the absence of the other. From Freud's discussion of voyeurism in "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes," Lacan develops his idea of the Gaze, a concept relevant here. The gaze embodies both the instinct and its vicissitude—as discussed earlier in the case of voyeurism—for the gaze both sees and shows. It attempts to

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7 See, for example, Alastair Fowler, "Six Knights at Castle Joyeous," Studies in Philology 56 (October 1959): 583-99. Another traditional explanation of Britomart's wounds is that they represent initiation into the world of experience; they signal that she is maturing and will outgrow the naivete we see in canto ii. See Thomas P. Roche, The Kindly Flame: A Study of the Third and Fourth Books of the Faerie Queene (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), 69-70.
capture and define the other through seeing, but at the same
time the gaze reveals desire to the onlooking world. The
gaze embodies the continuous shifting between subject and
object, neither of which is a self-sufficient, unified
state, but both of which, rather, exist only in relation and
reaction to each other.\(^8\) The episode in the Castle Joyeous
exemplifies this situation in that, despite various
characters' attempts to maintain the stance of the voyeur,
all find themselves in the object position as well. Venus
in the tapestry, despite her attempt simultaneously to "spy
out" Adonis and yet hide from the world's view, is in fact
the object of any number of gazes: Britomart's, Red
Cross's, the inhabitants of Castle Joyeous, and ours. And
Britomart, despite her attempt to hide from the gaze of the
world while still peering out on the world through her
baldrick, cannot ultimately maintain pure subjectivity and
escape objectification. She does become the mistaken object
of Malecasta's desire and it is through that desire that she
is wounded. In the final stanzas of canto i, Malecasta
attempts to seduce Britomart, whom she believes to be a man,
by sneaking into her chamber and into her bed. Britomart
awakens to find Malecasta there, leaps up, draws her sword,
and when Malecasta shrieks in terror her knights come

\(^8\) Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-
Analysis*, 67-90.
running and in the ensuing ruckus Britomart is wounded.\textsuperscript{9} Notably it is Gardante, the knight who represents vision's role in the ladder of love signified by Malecasta's knights, who wounds Britomart.\textsuperscript{10} Her wound tells us that there is no original wholeness, no impervious subjecthood. Britomart cannot avoid being the object of desire and cannot avoid being wounded as a result of the gaze which casts her in that role.\textsuperscript{11}

By the end of canto i, the powerful Britomart has been implicated in the evils of \textit{maisterie} and wounded as a victim of \textit{maisterie} as well. In keeping with her role as exemplar of Elizabeth's special virtue, chastity, Britomart initially embodies a complete authority, a power not found in any other knight in \textit{The Faerie Queene}. But immediately, it seems, an uneasiness arises as a result of her prowess, and

\textsuperscript{9} James Nohrnberg notes an aspect of the relationship of Britomart and Malecasta here which supports my earlier point that the two are doubles: Britomart makes the same mistake about Malecasta at this moment that Malecasta has made about her. "Each believes the other to be a male." James Nohrnberg, \textit{The Analogy of the Faerie Queene} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 445.

\textsuperscript{10} Various scholars have identified Malecasta's knights as representations of the steps in the ladder of love (or lechery). Alastair Fowler goes further: he links Britomart's wounding at Gardante's hands with the wound of love inflicted "through the eyes," as it were, when she sees Arthegall's image in the magic mirror. Fowler, 598.

\textsuperscript{11} As Jonathan Goldberg puts it when discussing Britomart's and Amoret's wounds, "The shared wound would seem to mean that an 'I,' the self, exists only in relationship to another whom the 'I' lacks." \textit{Endlesse Worke}, 79.
her "masculine" stance is undercut and her invulnerability questioned. She is the only knight who suffers such a rapid downfall, wounded when her journey in Book III has hardly begun. The narrative turn at this point suggests a similar repudiation of the Britomart we see at the start of the book, for the story now moves to fill in the background behind Britomart's quest: now we are given Britomart the girl, an innocent and sheltered maiden—a characterization which forms a striking contrast to the inexorable force of Britomart the knight of Book III's beginning.

Even within the second canto itself we find that contrast present, for its opening reminds us again of Britomart's martial prowess while neatly skirting any uncomfortably close comparison of Britomart and Elizabeth in regard to power. Here Spenser offers an interesting explanation of why martial women no longer exist: because men not only through envy refuse to give women their share of arms and chivalry but also through censorship efface the memory of the deeds of past women. In a neat pun, he sums up the problem: men in their praise of "brave gests and prowesse martiall" are "not indifferent to woman kind" (III.ii.1.3.). "Indifferent" here bears the meaning "just," but it also bears the suggestion of actual difference—men do not treat women indifferently, meaning that they do treat them differently, inscribe them as "different" although they are, as the expression "woman kind" implies, in fact "kind"
or kin, sharing the same origins and nature as the men who "maken memorie" (III.ii.1.5) through their writing about the past and who have excluded the deeds of brave women, creating a history that inscribes women as different.

Since men coined laws to curb the liberty of women in the past, thus excluding them from battle, women eventually turned to other pursuits: "Yet sith they warlike armes have layd away,/ They have exceld in artes and pollicy" (III.ii.2.7-8). Thus Spenser carefully delineates the difference between Britomart and Elizabeth:

Of warlike puissance in ages spent,
Be thou faire Britomart, whose prayse I write,
But of all wisedome be thou precedent,
O soveraigne Queene, whose prayse I would endite.

(III.ii.3.1-4)

The distinction is necessary and yet tactfully presented. Britomart's prowess, her achievements in realms traditionally masculine, need not discomfit Spenser's contemporary reader: the poet is not advocating a course of such aggression for his queen, nor is he suggesting that she does in fact resemble the puissant knight. But neither does he openly denigrate Britomart's prowess; rather, he suggests that it is all a matter of time. Elizabeth's expression of power is appropriate for her era, Britomart's for hers, and by means of this explanation the depiction of a female invested with physical and immediate authority is safely relegated to the distant past.
This passage is central to various critical discussions about Spenser's attitude toward the rule of women: sometimes, of course, critics present these lines as evidence of the poet's unequivocal approval of feminine authority. Other critics find in Spenser a reflection of the more conservative position in the debate over woman's rule. Even before Elizabeth's ascension, debate about gynecocracy had come to the fore because of the two Catholic queens, Mary Tudor and Mary Stuart. The most ferocious and infamously ill-timed entry in the debate was John Knox's 1558 First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women, an invective against gynecocracy aimed at Mary Tudor but taken by Elizabeth, who ascended to the throne in that very year, as an attack on her regency as well. Anglican supporters of Elizabeth hastened to defend

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For example, see Susanne Woods, "Spenser and the Problem of Woman's Rule." Woods finds the issue of women's rule problematized only in Book V; in reviewing this passage from the opening of III.ii (among others from Book III) she asserts that "the evidence from Book III strongly suggests that women are perfectly capable of power and authority by nature, and . . . particularly skilled in . . . governance." pp. 141-145. For a contrasting argument, see Harry Berger, who hears negative overtones in Spenser's portrayal of the martial women of antiquity but attributes this negativity to Spenser's attitude toward love itself in earlier eras: "During the early phase depicted in III, when eros was manifested primarily as hostility, they [women] were forced to express themselves on alien grounds and to compete with men in physical warfare." See "The Faerie Queene III: A General Description" in Essential Articles for the Study of Edmund Spenser, ed. A. C. Hamilton (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1972), 399. For a discussion of Berger's ideas about Spenser's attitude toward earlier historical eras, see below p. 85.
her rule, arguing that women are naturally endowed with the qualities necessary to rule and that they are called by God to do so. These responses to Knox, the most famous being by John Aylmer, usually muster the same list of historical precedents to support their argument: Deborah, Zenobia, Semiramis, and Boadicia, to name a few. On the other hand, Calvinists trying to undo the harm done to their cause by Knox (who confessed, "My FIRST BLAST hath blowne from me all my friends in England") argued that women's rule is indeed unnatural and normally contrary to God's law, but they found in Elizabeth an exception, especially, even miraculously, approved by God. James E. Phillips contends that Spenser upholds this moderate Calvinist position in his depiction of woman's rule: Lucifera, Duessa, and especially Radigund are unfit and unsanctioned rulers, but Mercilla, Britomart, and Gloriana are virtuous and anointed exceptions.

Pamela Joseph Benson comes to a similar conclusion through a detailed and perceptive reading of two encomia

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14 Ibid., 6 and 18.


celebrating Elizabeth in Book III: the passage discussed above from canto ii and a later one from the start of canto iv. Benson finds that the passage from canto ii in which Spenser traces men's exclusion of women from martial glory diverges notably from its source in Ariosto in that Spenser seems to accept the decline in women's status as a given rather than predicting a reemergence of women's fame.\(^\text{17}\)

Spenser does differ somewhat from the Calvinists in that he describes a Golden Age in which women did accomplish great things in the traditionally masculine arena, but when he readily accepts the fact that those days are gone and that a new order reigns, he in effect comes to the same conclusion: women are the weaker sex now; therefore (it is implied) Elizabeth's rule is exceptional.\(^\text{18}\) Further, Benson argues, when Spenser in canto iv uses what has become a familiar device of the Anglican apologists for woman's rule, the list of precedents, we are prepared for the traditional comparison of Elizabeth with these great women of the past and surprised when the comparison does not emerge:

\begin{quote}
For all too long I burne with envy sore, 
To heare the warlike feates, which Homere spake
\end{quote}

\(^{17}\) Pamela Joseph Benson, "Rule, Virginia: Protestant Theories of Female Regiment in The Faerie Queene," English Literary Renaissance 15 (Autumn 1985): 285. She notes that Spenser also differs here from Anglican supporters of gynecocracy who argue that in modern times the distortion of women's achievement in traditionally male realms should be corrected. Spenser, of course, suggests nothing of the kind.

\(^{18}\) Ibid., 285-86.
Of bold Penthesilea, which made a lake
Of Greekish bloud so oft in Trojan plaine;
But when I read, how stout Debora strake
Proud Sisera, and how Camill' hath slaine
The huge Orsilochus, I swell with great disdaine.

Yet these, and all that else had puissance,
Cannot with noble Britomart compare,
As well for glory of great valiaunce,
As for pure chastite and vertue rare,
That all her goodly deeds do well declare.
Well worthy stock, from which the branches sprong,
That in late yeares so faire a blossome bare,
As thee, O Queene, the matter of my song,
Whose lignage from this Lady I derive along.

(III.iv.2 and 3)

Benson argues that Spenser, in failing to make the expected comparison between Elizabeth and the ancient heroines (two of whom, Penthesilia and Deborah, were used to figure Elizabeth in contemporary accounts), changes the values used to judge women by shifting into a discussion of Britomart's "pure chastitie and vertue rare." He is thereby able to set Elizabeth apart as the only woman, ancient or modern, who may claim descent, and thus exceptional virtue and talent, from Britomart. He avoids traditional Anglican defenses of her rule based on precedents from the past, but he flatters her all the same by depicting her as a special case without precedent, "a solitary representative of the glory of womankind."19

Whereas Benson is surely right in her claim that Spenser is no Anglican apologist for woman's rule, and while her reading of the passages in question is perceptive and

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19 Ibid., 290-92.
fruitful, her account of these two moments of authorial comment might be amplified and to an extent corrected. For one thing, Benson's tendency to equate women's martial prowess and women's rule is problematic; as Phillips demonstrates by reference to contemporary definitions of monarchy, a good ruler was thought to need martial strength along with a host of other qualities: moral and intellectual virtues such as temperance, wisdom, valor, and clemency. Therefore, when Spenser in the opening of canto iv separates his praise of Elizabeth from his description of women at war--Penthesilia slaughtering Greeks and Deborah leading the Israelites in battle (and by conflation, Jael killing Sisera)--he is not only disavowing the notion that there are historical precedents for women's rule, although that may be one effect of the structure of this encomium, given that Penthesilia and Deborah were two commonly used precedents for women's rule. But he is also carefully separating Elizabeth from a martial tradition, just as he does at the start of canto ii where he describes not the erosion of women's rule but the erosion of women's martial power. In this earlier encomium Spenser equates Britomart with that tradition of women's physical power and authority, but by canto iv he seems anxious to differentiate clearly between his knight of chastity and the female warrior spilling lakes

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of Grecian blood: no other historical figure can match her puissance, he declares, but his mention of Britomart's nobility and valiance in the abstract cannot compare in vigor and enthusiasm to his graphic depiction of her predecessors' deeds.\(^{21}\) Spenser devitalizes Britomart's portrait as heroic warrior, emphasizing instead her "pure chastitie and vertue rare," in order to accommodate the stanza's culmination in Elizabeth, whom he not only sets apart from a "tradition" of gynecocracy, as Benson suggests; in fact he removes her completely from the specific tradition which valorizes female warriors.

I suggest that these maneuvers on Spenser's part signify other than a methodical attempt to express a philosophy about gynecocracy; they signify rather an uneasiness with a narrative situation in which an extremely powerful female knight threatens our sense of patriarchy and suggests, through her unacknowledged representation of Elizabeth, that the queen's rule does the same. Benson and others who analyze Spenser's attitude toward gynecocracy want to read the shifts and seeming contradictions in the narrative attitude as somehow consistent with a coherent ideology. The assumption that the poet is always in perfect control of his poem and its expression of ideas colors most

\(^{21}\) Benson makes a similar point about the first encomium: the deeds of past women are described in active terms, but present women who excel "in artes and pollicy" are described by vaguer, less assertive verbs. Benson, 285.
critical commentary on *The Faerie Queene*. Even a recent discussion of Spenser's attitude towards women's rule that admits its inconsistencies still insists (implicitly) that the text is a completely reliable reflection of a coherent authorial ideology; this critic concludes, rather ingeniously, that the seeming contradictions in Spenser's stance are there on purpose, a "poetics of choice" which transfers the burden of decision about the rightness of women's rule to the reader. I think a more likely explanation is that the caginess and contradictions we sometimes notice in the text are there because Spenser is dealing with issues which, both publicly and privately, cannot be resolved simply. To figure Elizabeth is an anxious task, fraught with the danger of scandal, both as we popularly imagine it—scandal meaning the operation of public disapprobation, the loss of opportunity for advancement and patronage—and scandal too in the sense of that which violates and calls into question the ideological system itself. Elizabeth maintained power at least in part through careful and canny representation of herself as many things but never one thing. Her personal self was effaced

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22 Woods, 155. She finds Book III unambiguous in its praise of women's authority, as I noted earlier. But the contradictions which lie between the attitudes expressed in Book III and those of Book V, as well as the internal ambiguities about women's rule in Book V, Woods finds "delightfully ironic." "The reader must interiorize value by choosing it," she asserts.
in order that her public, overtly constructed self could be used as was necessary to solidify her power, increase her popularity, manipulate her court and Parliament, and in general accommodate the desire of the public. Therefore, she could represent herself publicly as mother, as object of courtly love, even as prince or king, and any of these roles at a given moment might operate in her favor. But represent herself as warrior she rarely if ever did probably because this avatar is too much of an incursion into traditionally masculine territory, and if we can identify one aim in all of Elizabeth's rhetorical manipulations, it is to make herself as female monarch palatable to her subjects without attenuating her power. Thus Britomart, who initially seems to oppose and defeat patriarchy, cannot stand as an acceptable avatar for Elizabeth, and soon her own martial prowess becomes unacceptable as well, in part because it is too risky in association with Elizabeth and in part because it is difficult to reconcile this side of Britomart with her eventual destiny, in which her power is recast in terms of generation. A similar recasting occurs in the encomium of

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23 At Tilbury, on the occasion of the defeat of the Spanish Armada, Elizabeth did ride on horseback carrying a truncheon to review the troops. As far as I know this is the only occasion when she presented a martial image through her dress or language. Neale, 308. It is perhaps notable that this excursion into bellicosity came only late in her reign and at the moment of the most important military victory of her reign, perhaps the most important victory of the century.
canto iv discussed above, when Spenser praises first women's martial deeds, then their inner virtues, and then a different kind of power, the mention of which is somewhat awkward in association with Elizabeth the virgin queen: the power of generation. Spenser depicts Elizabeth's signature virtue, chastity, as originating in a warrior's force and culminating in a wife's fruitfulness—and both roles make uneasy vehicles for praise of Elizabeth.

In fact, any representation of Elizabeth is difficult because of her own myriad public manifestations which substituted for an absence at the heart of her regency: the absence of the phallus, the embodiment of an authority which is more readily imagined (for the Elizabethans and for us) in the possession of a man. I use the term "phallus" in its Lacanian sense to mean "the privileged signifier." The phallus is that which seems to transcend signification and contain, in its essence, meaning. Here lies our ultimate authority, according to Lacan: our identities are authored in relationship to the phallus because we come into subjecthood through our reference to the phallus, which is in a place where we imagine that certainty, truth, exists (that is, the realm of the Other). In his discussion of the castration complex, Lacan takes concepts from Freud which we have tended to read literally (the boy fears that he

literally will lose his penis; the girl believes she literally has lost hers) and explains them in terms of language and power. The child perceives the desire of the mother to be the phallus and so wants to be the object of the mother's desire, the phallus itself, which means not an object which suggests a relation in reality, and "even less the organ, penis or clitoris, that it symbolizes."²⁵ It is the child's realization that he or she cannot fulfill the mother's desire (and that, indeed, desire [that is, lack] exists in the place of the Other) which signals his or her initiation into language and thus subjecthood. That entrance is predicated on alienation, a recognition that lack exists and that prohibition exists, both of which the phallus stands for. Language, through which identity is constituted, does center on the phallus, but the phallus is a fraud. Thus Lacanian theory understands language as the way in which we signify a lack, a desire, which we imagine nostalgically might be filled; we believe our signifiers point directly to meaning, what [we think] is signified, but in fact signifiers point only to each other and meaning is a matter of exchange between signifiers in arbitrary positions relative to each other. Put succinctly by Jacqueline Rose, "Meaning is only ever erected, it is set up and fixed. The phallus symbolises the effects of the signifier in that

having no value in itself, it can represent that to which value accrues." I would argue that the reign of a woman in a patriarchal culture might bring the recognition of a fundamental lack at the center of our "systems of meaning" uncomfortably close to the surface, because the phallus, which we have endowed with our nostalgia for an [imagined] original unity and wholeness, is most emphatically absent. Woman's reign lacks our symbol of ultimate authority, both political and personal.

Jonathan Goldberg has made much of the absence at the center of The Faerie Queene, arguing persuasively that this is a "writerly" text which exemplifies the impossibility of escape from the chain of signification. He finds the desire of the text, the absent presence, symbolized in Gloriana, the Faerie Queene who is the origin of all quests and the culmination of all quests, who yet cannot appear within the text. We tend to read the poem as though there were an outside of the text to which the narrative points, but there is no outside, because there is only language with no fixed meaning beyond it. It is this realization that Elizabeth's rule brings closer to the surface for Spenser, I believe, because as a woman she embodies a lack where she ought to embody an [imagined] authority.

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27 Goldberg, Endlesse Worke.
Two seemingly opposite anxieties about representing Elizabeth thus create two poles between which Spenser's text vacillates: it is equally problematic to depict the queen as lacking the phallus (authority) or to depict her as the embodiment of that phallic authority. The latter portrait presents a challenge to the patriarchal notion that authority is something biologically phallic, invested in the male at every social level (from the family to the polis to the spiritual kingdom). But the former depiction is potentially treasonous, a threat to the stability and safety of the realm as well as to Elizabeth herself. And the rhetorical compromises between the two which Elizabeth used frequently as she fashioned herself and her regency draw attention to the fiction on which patriarchal ideology is based: the authority of the phallus. Spenser's portrait of Britomart initially moves between these two poles: the extremely authoritarian Britomart of canto i and the innocent and helpless maiden of canto ii stand in stark contrast to one another. The two possibilities for Britomart come face to face with each other in one of the most resonant episodes in Book III when Britomart, the naive
young princess, looks into the enchanted mirror and sees the image of "the prowest knight, that ever was" (III.iii.24.7), Arthegall.

This incident, strikingly ambiguous in several aspects, powerfully suggests many of the problems and anxieties connected with feminine authority. We are led to the narration of the mirror episode through Britomart's duplicitous story which she produces for the Red Cross Knight's benefit when he asks, after their escape from Castle Joyeous, how she comes to be wandering about disguised as a man. She answers that she was raised to be a warrior and that she, like other knights, seeks fame and adventure. But she also pretends to have suffered shame and dishonor at Arthegall's hands in order to hear Red Cross Knight defend the knight she by now knows is her future husband. Her story is of course false in the literal sense, but when she describes Arthegall as "one, that hath unto me donne/ Late foule dishonour and reprochfull spite" (III.ii.8.7-8), her words may echo a resentment she does indeed feel against the man who she later says "hath me subjected to loves cruell law" (III.ii.38.5). Thus the story of Britomart's encounter with the enchanted mirror is introduced by a deception, a tale of wrongs committed and revenge sought.

Such an introduction is appropriate for an episode which is replete with the suggestion of conflict and
illusion. On the surface, it is a simple story in which a young princess looks into an omniscient magic mirror which her father, the king, uses to foresee danger to his kingdom. While gazing into the mirror, she wonders whom she will eventually marry, and in answer the mirror shows her the figure of a powerful knight. Spenser recounts the incident in a brief ten stanzas; the rest of the canto describes what might at first seem the more important part of the story: Britomart's love-sickness after the image of her future husband is implanted in her mind, and the way in which her nurse, Glauce, tries to alleviate her suffering. But the mirror episode, brief as it is, is notable for its ambiguity and its suggestion of a dark underside to this predictable story of love and magic. The first odd note has to do with the mirror itself, which was earlier called "Venus looking glas" (III.i.8-9), suggesting a mirror in which one sees a reflection of oneself, a traditional attribute of Venus. But as we discover now, the "looking glas" is not a mirror in the usual sense but rather a "glassie globe," "round and hollow shaped" like "a world of glas" (III.ii.19.8-9). And the purpose of this looking glass is not to see oneself (although it does show Britomart only her own reflection at first), but to see the world. Spenser wants to suggest here a dual function for this glass, I think: although it appears to be an instrument for looking out on the world, it is also, at the same time, an instrument for looking within.
The self is not constituted in a vacuum but instead, as in this episode where the development of Britomart's identity begins, the self is constituted through the otherness of the world. The moment when Britomart sees Arthegall in the mirror initiates her search for him, but it also initiates her search for herself; her identity in the poem rests on the role of knight she adopts in order to find Arthegall and on the very different role of wife and mother she will eventually adopt when she does find him. One way of looking at what happens in this mirror episode is to see that Britomart does not so much search for Arthegall as she becomes him, for in order literally to find him she figuratively finds him by becoming herself what she has seen in the mirror: the "prowest knight that ever was."

This closely woven relationship between Britomart's vision of an other, the powerful knight she sees in the glass, and her enactment of a self in imitation of what she sees in the mirror, shares similarities with the Lacanian explanation of an important developmental process which the child undergoes, a process called "the mirror stage." Lacan describes this stage by means of a representative moment when the child sees his own image in the mirror. His jubilation at perceiving himself Lacan explains as resulting from his initial recognition of himself as a self, an autonomous being whose autonomy is illusory because the mirror image freezes a fragmented moment into a seeming
perfection and wholeness; in fact, at this point the child has little control over his motor functions and is completely dependent on others even to place him in a position where he can see his image in the mirror. But the child in the mirror stage "assumes an image," according to Lacan, wherein "the I is precipitated in a primordial form before it is objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other, and before language restores to it, in the universal, its function as subject."¹ But this primordial form "situates the agency of the ego ... in a fictional direction"; the mirror image, being a fiction in its frozen perfection, prefigures the imaginary other on whom the subject's identity will eventually be predicated. This is of course similar to what Britomart sees in the enchanted glass: a self and an other in the image of the knight she will seek as an other and adopt as a self. Lacan also describes the future of the "I," whose formation begins in this "mirror stage," in terms relevant to Britomart's development, for according to Lacan, "This development is experienced as a temporary dialectic that decisively projects the formation of the individual into history,"²--a perfect summation of Britomart's experience wherein her

² Ibid., 4.
vision of Arthegall leads to her encounter with Merlin in which he unfolds for her not only her individual history, but also the history of Britain which will result from her individual quest for love and, concurrently, identity. But the providential succession of British monarchs comes at the price of fragmentation for Britomart. Her developing identity follows a course resembling the one Lacan charts as the typical course of all human identity: for Lacan, the "I" begins with the illusion of an autonomous self; for Britomart, identity begins with the illusion of masculine power, and the process becomes increasingly conflicted as she builds an identity in response to that mirror image which is other, a spectre which represents a potential power masculine by definition and thus ultimately culturally prohibited for Britomart. What Lacan describes as the "deflection of the specular I into the social I,"\(^3\) with its attendant movement into identification with the imago of the other and the constitution of identity through the imagined desire of the other, for Britomart will occur as a gradual process of rereading Merlin's presentation of her future as wife and mother of kings, and eventually moving toward her place in this chronicle written by an other. Her alienation, glimpsed in the Castle Joyeous where she was unable to maintain her role as voyeur and was wounded

\(^3\) Ibid., 5.
despite her supposedly impervious and authoritative stance, begins at the point where she adopts that fictive identity: the moment when she sees the powerful knight in the enchanted glass. Lacan depicts the subject in the mirror stage as moving towards "the assumption of the armour of an alienating identity"—which, by the end of canto iii when she dons the armor which will identify her as male and sets out on her quest, is precisely what Britomart has done.

Spenser's uneasiness with the invincibly armored female knight who emerges from the mirror episode surfaces even during the episode itself. For in a curious stanza, almost a non-sequitur in his description of the mirror, Spenser compares the enchanted glass to a wondrous Egyptian tower:

Who wonders not, that reades so wonderous worke?  
But who does wonder, that has red the Towre,  
Wherein th'AEgyptian Phao long did lurke  
From all mens vew, that none might her discoure,  
Yet she might all men vew out of her bowre?  
Great Ptolomaee it for his lemans sake  
Ybuilded all of glasse, by Magicke powre,  
And also it impregnable did make;  
Yet when his love was false, he with a peaze it brake. (III.ii.20)

"Such was the glassie globe that Merlin made," continues the narrative, but in what ways are the two are similar, the glassie globe in which King Ryence views his enemies and the glass tower from which Phao looks out on all men? Except that both provide the viewer with magical powers of vision, there is not a great deal of similarity, certainly not enough to justify an entire stanza describing the history of
the tower in an episode otherwise notable for its brevity. Most critics remain silent on the matter of Phao and Ptolemae's tower: apparently the source for the story (or stories, since it is unclear whether Phao is Ptolemae's leman mentioned in line 6) has yet to be discovered. Even James Nohrnberg, in his exhaustive study of Spenser's sources, makes no mention of Phao, Ptolemae, or the tower. A. C. Hamilton's notes tell us that "Phao" is from the Greek ἕξως, light, and signifies erotic gazing on all men. Notes in the Variorum and the Norton suggest that the Ptolemy referred to is Ptolemy II, famous for his magical skill with glass and a particular magic tower made of steel-glass and placed on summit of a tower near Alexandria. No mention is made of Phao, however, and no explanation as to whether

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4 Nohrnberg has little to say about Britomart's vision in the enchanted glass, except that her encounter with the mirror may suggest a variation on the theme of narcissism: her vision substitutes the opposite sex for a narcissistic (and so potentially incestuous) vision of the same sex; therefore, he feels that "such a mirror might symbolize not so much the threat of incest, as the heroine's endangerment by an ultimately imprisoning absorption in her own adolescent bisexuality" (433). Nohrnberg is interested in psychological interpretations of The Faerie Queene and finds Oedipal dramas in the various episodes wherein "an older person imprisons or incapacitates a younger person of the opposite sex" (436). He reads Britomart as an embodiment of the energy of the genital stage (437) as well as the penis envy of the Oedipal stage (448). His reading of Britomart could not be called systematic but is suggestive in its various possibilities.

5 Hamilton, The Faerie Queene, 320.
Ptolemy II was also thought to have been betrayed by a faithless paramour.⁶

Whatever its origins, the description of the tower suggests the fragility of that phallic authority which is the source of Britomart's identity. The tower is initially associated with voyeurism and resonates with the episode in Castle Joyeous in canto i. Phao is a voyeur in that she hides from the gaze of others while gazing out at all men; unless we assume that she has somehow been coerced into this position by Ptolemaee, then her choice links her to Britomart in Castle Joyeous: both reject the object role and try to assert a purely autonomous subjecthood.⁷

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⁷ Lauren Silberman, in the only extensive commentary I know of on this passage, follows Kathleen Williams' analysis of Merlin's mirror as a model for Spenser's poetic enterprise and reads Ptolemy's tower as "a phallic image of artistic creation that will not stand up against woman's autonomy." See "Singing Unsung Heroines: Androgynous Discourse in Book 3 of The Faerie Queene" in Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe, ed. Margaret W. Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan, and Nancy J. Vickers (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 259-271. Silberman interprets Phao as Ptolemy's object rather than a voyeuristic subject; thus the tower is a symbol for the Petrarchan poetics and Platonic metaphysics she thinks Spenser is critiquing, and the mirror is a symbol for "subjective participation in the object," an "engaged subjectivity in which admitting the danger of illusion is the price of vision." This latter "vision" is the remedy, she implies, which inspires the "act of courage"--Britomart's quest--which stands also for the act of reading.
tower which makes Phao's position possible strongly suggests the literal phallus as well as the idea of phallic authority: it is made to be impregnable and built by "Magick powre" wielded by "great Ptolemaee," presumably a monarch, since Ptolemy was the name of all the Macedonian kings of Egypt. But his power is wrecked by his inability to control a woman, his unfaithful love whose infidelity causes him to destroy the tower, which is made of glass and can be broken "with a peaze," traditionally glossed as with "a heavy blow." "Peaze" is indeed a variation of the word "peise," which can mean a blow, but it is also a variation of a more common word, "pease," meaning simply a pea, one of the smallest and most laughably harmless objects imaginable. "Pease" or "peaze" is often used in this period to express "something of very small value or importance," as in this 1598 example offered by the OED: "Yet neither is . . .

(261–263).

I cannot concur with this reading for several reasons, one of which is a basic problem of textual evidence: it is not at all clear from the text that Phao is Ptolemy's "leman," and certainly there is no mention in the passage of his "objectifying" her: the emphasis is all on her position as voyeur, that is, subject. I also think that Silberman's reading of Britomart's "act of courage"—seeking the original of an image which might be (but of course is not, she implies) "a subjective, Narcissistic fantasy"—as a wholly positive enterprise ignores the darker implications of such a quest. Silberman's a priori assumption is that subject and object are autonomous enough so that we can discuss the possibility that Britomart's vision is either an other or a Narcissistic fantasy with the assurance that the two are discrete possibilities rather than inextricably bound.
worth a peaze.\textsuperscript{8} The double meaning possible in "peaze" suggests that the tower is so frail that it can crumble at the most insignificant threat. Thus Merlin's enchanted glass is immediately associated with a phallic structure which has proved fragile, a tower of glass which might initially seem to embody authority but which collapses easily as a result of its own fallibility. As we already know, Britomart's "armour of alienation," her voyeurism echoed here in Phao, has proved vulnerable, just as has Phao's tower. At this point, it is impossible to know whether Spenser distrusts the notion of phallic authority itself or only its adoption by a woman, but his imaginative rendering of power and authority as the fallen tower of glass suggests a pessimism about the process Britomart is undergoing, a process originating in this mirror episode.

In the third canto we can continue to observe Spenser's uneasiness with the power and authority Britomart eventually wields. In this canto, Glaucus and Britomart seek out Merlin, creator of the magic mirror and the one who has "in Magicke more insight,/ Then ever before or after living wight" (III.iii.11.8-9). Merlin tells Britomart that she has seen her vision of Arthegall not by chance but by fate, in accordance with her destiny, which is to marry Arthegall

\textsuperscript{8} See the Oxford English Dictionary, volume VII, the entry for "pease" on pp. 594-95, and the entry for "peise" on pp. 620-21.
and with him help defend the Britons from "the powre of forrein Paynims" (III.iii.27.9). But soon her "wombes burden" (III.iii.28.6) will call her from the field of battle, and the son she bears will eventually rule the Britons, and his descendents will also be kings of Britain. The history Merlin recounts follows the long struggle of the Britons against Saxon invaders and the eventual victory of the Saxons. The emergence of the Tudors approximately eight hundred years later he depicts as the reemergence of the original British blood, in accordance with the popular myth that the Tudors descended from the Trojan Brutus and the imperial British line he engendered.9 Two points about Merlin's chronicle are relevant to my thesis that Spenser's depiction of Britomart's quest is tentative and that he is not altogether comfortable characterizing her as possessing the authority and power warranted by her implicit status as Elizabeth's avatar. First, the emphasis in Merlin's conversation with Britomart lies on her importance as a passive vehicle for engendering this dynasty. This role is completely opposed to the one we have seen her play at the start of Book III, the role of puissant knight she adopts as a result of her love sickness for Artheagall and her visit to

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9 Frances A. Yates, *Astraea: The Imperial Theme in the Sixteenth Century* (London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), 50. "When the Tudors ascended the Throne of England, so runs the myth, the ancient Trojan-British race of monarchs once more resumed the imperial power and brought in a golden age of peace and plenty."
Merlin. But this passive role fits her characterization in cantos ii and iii, where Spenser depicts her as a naive and helpless maiden, a victim of the vision in the mirror. She is a "silly Mayd" who does not understand what her own sighs and sadness mean; love is unknown to her as yet (III.ii.27). She experiences love as victimization: the "tyranny of love" feeds on her life and "suckes the blood" from her heart (III.iii.37 and 39), and she is helpless to resist or take any action on her own. It is Glauc who identifies the ailment, tries (admittedly ridiculous) charms and potions to reverse the love sickness, and then takes her young charge to Merlin for help. Britomart utters not a word during the entire encounter with Merlin, except to ask after the fate of the conquered Britons when Merlin reaches that part of his chronicle. This characterization of Britomart as helpless victim rather than forceful knight is in part necessary to dramatize the power and danger of love itself. Books III and IV demonstrate that love is an overpowering energy with the potential for good but with the potential for evil as well; this idea is part of the theme of *discordia concors* which informs Book IV even more completely, where chaos resolves into concord over and over. But the characterization of Britomart as a silly and helpless girl also undercuts her earlier role as the embodiment of authority, just as Merlin's chronicle, while briefly acknowledging her activities on the battlefield,
implies that the activity of her womb is far more important: "For from thy wombe a famous Progenie/ Shall spring, out of the auncient Trojan blood" (III.iii.22.5-6). The contrast between the vigor of the progeny, "springing" forth, and the passivity of Britomart, who is reduced to a reproductive organ, is striking. Even the terms the magician uses in urging Britomart to fulfill her destiny turn an active quest into a passive submission:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Ne is thy fate, ne is thy fortune ill,} \\
\text{To love the prowest knight, that euer was.} \\
\text{Therefore submit thy wayes vnto his will,} \\
\text{And do by all dew meanes thy destiny fulfill.}
\end{align*}
\]

(III.iii.24.6-9)

That Britomart should fulfill her destiny by herself becoming "the prowest knight, that ever was" is never suggested by Merlin; the passive Britomart of these two cantos does not seem remotely capable of playing such a part.

The contrast takes its clearest shape in the moment when Merlin, to Britomart's embarrassment, tells her and Glauce that he knows them despite their disguises and that he knows why they have come:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Ne ye faire Britomartis, thus arayd,} \\
\text{More hidden are, then Sunne in cloudy vele;} \\
\text{Whom thy good fortune, hauing fate obayd,} \\
\text{Hath hither brought, for succour to appele:} \\
\text{The which the powers to thee are pleased to reuele.}
\end{align*}
\]

The doubtful Mayd, seeing herself descryde,
Was all abasht, and her pure yuory
Into a cleare Carnation suddeine dyde;
As faire Aurora rising hastily,
Doth by her blushing tell, that she did lye
All night in old Tithonus frozen bed,
Whereof she seems ashamed inwardly.
(III.iii.19-20)

Britomart's blush marks her as young and vulnerable, and it is described, as is the transparency of her disguise, in terms that recall an earlier description of Britomart. In canto i, Spenser compared her to Cynthia, the moon, who "her bright hed/ Discouers to the world discomfited" (III.i.43.4-5), bringing comforting light to a dark world. Here Britomart is twice likened to the sun rather than the moon, and the focus lies not on her power to enlighten the world but rather on her inability to hide herself. This opposition between hiding and revealing oneself suggests again the theme of voyeurism, and Britomart's inability to hide even when she wants to underscores her vulnerability.

Merlin tells her that she is about as well hidden as the sun behind a veil of clouds, and the comparison is pushed further in the following simile where Britomart's failure to hide her love is likened to the dawn, Aurora's guilty blush on arising from Tithonus's bed.¹⁰ Britomart's bright beauty which beams forth from beneath her visor at various times

¹⁰ Nohrnberg asserts that Britomart's blush signals "an irreversible metamorphosis into sexual consciousness," 443. He also implies that the reference to Aurora and Tithonus (a father and daughter) suggests the Oedipal drama in which the child's emerging sexual impulses are directed toward the opposite-sex parent. In fact, Britomart's mother is never mentioned but her father plays an important role in the story even though he never appears: it is his closet and his mirror through which Britomart's quest is impelled.
throughout the poem is one of her hallmarks and surely signifies the power of her virtue. But at this point, when she does not want to be a beacon, her transparent disguise and her blush mark her as vulnerable, in contrast to the seemingly invulnerable knight we see in canto i.

Spenser predictably reports Britomart's transformation from "silly Mayd" to hardy knight in ambivalent terms. She is following Merlin's advice in seeking to fulfill her destiny when she and Glaucé decide to search for Arthegall in the land of Faery. However, it is the nurse's idea that they should go disguised as a knight and his squire, and she is labeled "foolhardy" by the narrator when she suggests this plan (III.iii.52.1). Even odder, she convinces Britomart to model herself upon a Saxon warrior, Angela, whom Glaucé has seen do battle against Uther's army at Meneuia. As fortune would have it, in a few days a suit of Angela's armor becomes available, brought to King Ryence as Saxon plunder. Why should Britomart, directly after hearing the chronicle of her country's future in which the Saxons figure as Britain's primary enemy, follow in the footsteps of a Saxon warrior, even to the extent of wearing her armor? Why does Spenser choose a Saxon for Britomart's model, especially given the fact that Angela, far from being a famous female warrior, appears to have been an obscure
figure seldom mentioned in the histories? One possible answer places Spenser squarely in the Calvinist camp in the debate over the legitimacy of woman's rule and suggests that his portrait of Britomart is far less laudatory than we often assume. Merlin's chronicle offers this explanation for the Saxons' eventual victory over the Britons:

> For th'heauens haue decreed, to displace The Britons, for their sinnes dew punishment, And to the Saxons ouer-giue their gouernment.  
> (III.iii.41.7-9)

This version of the Saxon conquest parallels Calvin's position on the rule of woman:

> Concerning female government, I expressed myself to this effect, that, seeing it was contrary to the legitimate course of nature, such governments ought to be reckoned among the visitations of God's anger. . . . the government of a woman . . . is like the government of a tyrant, which has to be borne till God put an end to it.  

Both Saxon rule and woman's rule are legitimate in the sense that they reflect God's will, but they are punishments for the sins of a people and so hardly a cause for rejoicing.

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11 Carrie Anna Harper, The Sources of the British Chronicle History in Spenser's Faerie Queene. (Ph.D. diss., Bryn Mawr, 1910; reprint, New York: Haskell House, 1964), 165-68. The chronicle sources Harper studies mention Angela occasionally but offer little information about her beyond the fact that she was a Saxon virgin and the disputed idea that her name is the source for the name "England." But as Harper points out, Spenser may have known a more detailed story about Angela that is now lost to us.

By having Britomart take as a model a Saxon warrior, Spenser implies a connection between a woman in authority and Saxons in authority: both are unfortunate but unavoidable states made necessary by the sins of a people. Thus Britomart's role as questing knight takes on a different cast: perhaps Spenser finds it merely a necessary evil but is unable overtly to characterize it that way for fear of giving offense to Elizabeth. Or perhaps the implicit parallel between Britomart and the Saxons simply suggests Spenser's uneasiness with and uncertainty about the issue of feminine authority.

Certainly the portrayal of Britomart throughout the rest of Book III is ambiguous: the hero of the book is notable most for her absence after canto iii. She does appear briefly at the start of canto iv, following cantos ii and iii wherein the background of her quest is explained. The start of canto iv picks up her story where we left off at the beginning of canto ii: the Red Cross Knight and

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13 Thomas P. Roche offers another interpretation of Angela's armor which would surely be Spenser's official explanation: it symbolizes the eventual unity of the British and Saxon lines. See Roche, 62. This mention of Angela's armor, however, is the only reference to the Saxons in connection with Britomart in the whole of The Faerie Queene: Merlin's chronicle and the history recounted in Malbecco's house (canto ix) are clear attempts to place Britomart within the Tudor myth of the reemergence of a Trojan-Briton line. Coming as it does on the heels of Merlin's negative portrayal of the Saxons, Britomart's assumption of Angela's armor is placed in a problematic context which makes my reading a likely sub-text.
Britomart are discussing Arthegall, whom Britomart has falsely represented as one who has dishonored her. The two knights part company, and in our last look at Britomart before her reappearance at the end of the book, she encounters and wounds Marinell on the ocean's shore. The episode is ambiguous in several ways, not only in its portrayal of Britomart. For one thing, the poem shifts here into a more allegorical mode, appropriate for the introduction of Marinell and later in the canto Florimell, two figures almost completely allegorical in presentation. In the previous two cantos where the background to Britomart's quest was given, the allegory had receded and a sort of psychological realism in the story of love's inception in Britomart, as well as a historical-epic tone in Merlin's chronicle, had prevailed. But Marinell and Florimell lack these psychological and historical dimensions; rather, they are types linked closely to the natural world. Florimell is not so much a beautiful woman as she is beauty itself, connected through the "flora" root in her name to vegetation and the earth; Marinell is obviously connected to the ocean since he is the son of a sea nymph and a marine creature as indicated by his name. Further, as A. Kent Hieatt points out, his name is a pun on "marry he will not" -- "marry-nill" -- since he has been
raised to shun the love of woman. Florimell in her pursuit of him may also represent form's pursuit of matter; Humphrey Tonkin notes that the first letters of their names may suggest their correspondence to form and matter.

As an appropriate introduction to these figures, Britomart at the start of this canto also seems to move into a more allegorical mode. Her complaint in stanzas eight through ten merges the literal and the allegorical, according to A. C. Hamilton; she reads nature, specifically the ocean, as reflecting her own inner turmoil in the best allegorical tradition, but the inner turmoil has been presented to us in a psychologically realistic way. Read allegorically, the episode in which Britomart administers a life-threatening injury to Marinell makes perfect sense: Marinell is "loves enimy" (III.iv.26.9); his mother Cymoent, having learned from Proteus that her son would be killed or "dismayed" by a virgin, has raised him to shun woman's love. He is Britomart's natural adversary then, if we understand her to represent the opposite impulse towards fruitful and holy love; furthermore, he is something of a stand-in for

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16 See Hamilton, The Faerie Queene, 337, on the merging of the literal and allegorical in Britomart's complaint.
Arthegall at this moment, who (it is suggested in IV.vi.28.9) disdains woman's love as well until he is overcome (again, through the allegory of battle) by Britomart. And when Britomart defeats Marinell, she may also be defeating her own passions (represented by Marinell in his role as embodiment of oceanic turmoil) that have led her to a dangerous self-absorption and self-pity in her preceding complaint.17

However, several aspects of this episode suggest that we can read it less allegorically and more realistically without doing damage to the poem or the poet's expression of ideas. For one thing, to read allegorically (or more precisely symbolically) is portrayed as an error in this episode. Cymoent makes that mistake in the way she understands Proteus's prophecy. He tells her that Marinell "of a woman ... should haue much ill," that "a virgin

17 This last is Harry Berger's reading of the episode. "The Discarding of Malbecco: Conspicuous Allusion and Cultural Exhaustion in The Faerie Queene III.ix-x" in Revisionary Play: Studies in the Spenserian Dynamics (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 158-60. He regards Britomart's tendency to ferocity in this and a later episode involving Paridell as a result of her immaturity: she is "in an early phase of her own--as of the world's--development" (158). This might be true of Spenser's view of Britomart: he depicts her as developing into a figure who can accept a very different role, a role which requires acceptance of the erotic expressed in the will of another unto whose ways she must submit, according to Merlin. It is in her transition from ferocious, defensive subjectivity to open, even passive objectivity that certain vexed questions about woman's proper demeanor and place, as well as larger issues about the constitution of human identity, arise to trouble the narrative.
strange and stout him should dismay, or kill" (III.iv.25.8-9). Rather than taking the literal meaning and understanding that a woman may kill him, Marinell's mother warns him every day "the love of women not to entertaine" (III.iv.26.2), apparently assuming that her son is in danger of dying from a broken heart. Britomart is actually the literalization of a scenario that Cymoent reads symbolically. Further evidence that we should emphasize the literal here is the depiction of Britomart's state of mind, presented with more realism in this canto than it is at any other point in the book. As she sits by the shore watching the waves crashing and comparing herself to a "feeble vessell crazd, and cract" (III.iv.9.1), she does indeed "feed her wound" as the narrator expresses it in canto vi. In so doing she works herself into a state of anguish which must, and does, find expression. Before Marinell has a chance to challenge her she is already angry: she sees him riding towards her and "her former sorrow into suddein wrath,/ Both coosen passions of distroubled spright,/ Converting, forth she beates the dustie path;/ Loue and despight attonce her courage kindled hath" (III.iv.12.6-9). In another mix of allegory and psychological realism, Spenser uses the now-familiar meteorological metaphor to describe Britomart's venting her sorrow and frustration through battle:

As when a foggy mist hath ouercast
The face of heauen, and the cleare aire engrost,
The world in darknesse dwels, till that at last
The watry Southwinde from the seabord cost
Upblowing, doth disperse the vapour lo'st,
And poures it selfe forth in a stormy showre;
So the faire Britomart hauing disclo'st
Her clowdy care into a wrathfull stowre,
The mist of griefe dissolu'd, did into vengeance powre.

(III.iv.13)

All this description of Britomart's wrathful vengeance
occurs before Marinell has said a word; his challenge when
it comes is indeed rudely threatening, but Spenser clearly
shows the real reason for Britomart's fierce response.

Read literally rather than allegorically in this
episode, Britomart does not come off particularly well; and
again, her portrayal apparently reflects some ambivalence on
Spenser's part about her power, particularly her martial
power. His ambivalence about woman's exercise of martial
power has already appeared in conjunction with this episode,
for canto iv opens with the catalogue of woman warriors
which was discussed earlier, an encomium directed to
Elizabeth, and descriptive of Britomart as well, in which
both women are carefully removed from the martial tradition
of the female warrior. And Britomart's martial conduct in
this canto is questionable: her fight with Marinell is
described as "vengeance," above, and he in his fall is
compared to "the sacred Oxe" who is sacrificed and "doth
groueling fall," staining the altar and pillars with "his
streaming gore" (III.iv.17). Thus Spenser depicts Britomart
as an enraged Amazon smiting Marinell in her "fierce furie"
(III.iv.16.2); he in turn is an ox, a castrated bull, sacrificed on the pagan altar of woman's power. Further, Britomart expresses a similar overly aggressive approach later in canto ix when she is denied entrance to Malbecco's castle and must seek shelter elsewhere from a storm. Angry at being denied access to the castle, she then must confront Paridell and Satyrane over who will get the use of a small shed they are sharing during the storm. She and Paridell fight after she threatens him "so despightfully,/ As if [s]he did a dogge to kenell rate" (III.ix.14.6-7). The repetition of Britomart's unjustly ferocious anger serves to emphasize the fact that she is at fault. After Marinell falls, "the martiall Mayd stayd not him to lament" (III.iv.18.1), a detail which clearly contrasts the cold Britomart to the motherly (if excessively doting) Cymoent, whose laments over Marinell's prostrate body go on for several stanzas.

This episode may be Spenser's most ambivalent portrayal of Britomart, and the ambivalence seems to center on her power, which the narrative emphasizes. The long meteorological metaphor quoted above ends with a sight pun

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18 As in her encounter with Marinell, Britomart's ferocity here can be explained allegorically: for instance, Berger maintains that Paridell like Marinell embodies an elemental force (the wind, to which he is compared in his fight with Britomart) to which Britomart is opposed, both here and in their differing versions of history revealed at dinner in Malbecco's House. See Berger, "The Discarding of Malbecco," 159-60.
on "power" in the form of "powre" (both "pour" and "power"). And the last word on Britomart as she leaves the scene, and for all intents and purposes the narrative for the next few cantos, also stresses the word: Britomart rides away over the strand of beach which is strewn with pearls, jewels, and gems, Marinell's treasure. But she "would not stay/ For gold, or perles, or pretious stones an howre,/ But them despised all; for all was in her powre" (III.iv.18.7-9). Of course, this refusal to grasp at wealth defines Britomart as temperate, as Hamilton's note points out. But the fact that she has severely wounded Marinell in a rage, the fact that he is compared to a slaughtered, castrated animal, and especially the fact that, along with the treasure, she also leaves Marinell groveling in his gore without a backward glance, all signal that Britomart's exercise of power has gone awry.

Spenser's emphasis on the word "power" finds an interesting parallel in one of Elizabeth's speeches. In Allison Heisch's analysis of the rhetoric of these speeches, she suggests that, in the earlier days of her rule, Elizabeth tread very carefully around the issue of her power: "Uncertain of herself in the beginning, she became, in turn, defensively assertive, assertive, and finally,

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matter-of-fact about herself." In the draft of a stern speech to Commons in 1566, Elizabeth "wrote a peroration which, in its first formulation, sounded like a threat: 'Let this my displing stand you in stede of sorar strokes never to tempt to far a princes pow. . . .' 'Power' was clearly the word she had in mind, but she struck it out and added 'paciens.'" Elizabeth's careful decision to avoid that word in defining her authority finds an interesting negative reflection in Spenser's insistence on that word to describe Britomart at this point in his narrative. The emphasis on Britomart's power is not flattering; rather, Spenser suggests about his female knight what he openly states about the Amazon Radigund: that her aggression is cruelty and her power tyranny. The phrase "she ... them despised all" refers not only to the gold and jewels but also, I think, to Marinell as well. Spenser provides an ambivalent portrayal of his heroine in canto iv: all is in her power, but whether she has the ability and the right to exercise that power is in doubt.

Britomart's departure from the narrative at this point may indicate that Spenser is at a loss how to deal with the conflicting demands of her role: she must appear powerful, but such power which prevails over men is unsettling, for it

20 Heisch, 33.
21 Ibid., 39.
defies the patriarchal ideology on which Spenser's society is based. Britomart's exercise of power is blunt and overt, in sharp contrast to Elizabeth's cautious and tactful manipulation of her subjects. But Spenser's portrait of Britomart's power unveils the situation which lies behind the queen's careful rhetoric: a woman on top, wielding an authority over men which goes against fundamental beliefs about man's and woman's nature and place in the social order, a situation which also threatens to uncover the illusory nature of the phallus, the fundamental concept of authority, since a woman's appropriation of the phallus suggests that authority is not innately masculine—a concept which lies at the root of patriarchy. Britomart's power reflects the power of her chastity, of course, and as I have commented before, the Queen's signature virtue requires such a resoundingly authoritative depiction in a work designed overtly to flatter her. But in fact the discussions of chastity and its importance for women which were current at the time described no such active and heroic role as the one Britomart performs. Rather, woman's chastity is usually depicted as a purely defensive and negative virtue; it requires a woman constantly to guard against threats and temptations and even to avoid strenuously a situation wherein her chastity might appear to have been compromised—for this is a virtue the appearance of which is as important as the reality. Britomart cannot possibly represent this
brand of defensive chastity: as a knight, as an avatar of the Queen, and as an active proponent of chastity, she cannot fulfill also the very different role of chaste, silent, and obedient woman which was popularly considered exemplary. This problem, of course, presents a challenge to Elizabeth's rule or the rule of any woman and is related to my idea that Britomart's characterization slides between two poles which both contain a threat to Elizabeth's monarchy: to represent Britomart as the embodiment of phallic power challenges the patriarchy and suggests that the biological "reality" of the phallus is a fiction. But to represent Britomart as lacking that phallic power is to suggest that Elizabeth lacks the necessary power and authority to rule. Therefore, Spenser employs one of several "stand-ins" for Britomart to depict traditional female chastity: Florimell.

Florimell steps back into the narrative just as Britomart steps out, for after Cymoent bears her wounded son back to their undersea home the narrative makes one last mention of Britomart: Archimago has singled her out from her earlier company of Arthur and Red Cross Knight, according to stanza 45 of canto iv, and pursues her (although this is the last we hear of him in the poem). The same stanza immediately moves on to discuss what became of Florimell, whom Arthur and Red Cross abandoned Britomart to chase; the mention of Britomart in this stanza is narratively superfluous and serves only to remind us of how
Arthur came to pursue Florimell in the first place as well as to link Britomart and Florimell in our minds. When Spenser praises Florimell for her "stedfast chastitie and vertue rare" (III.v.8.5), he further links the two because this phrase parallels his earlier description of Britomart's "pure chastitie and vertue rare" (III.iv.3.4). Florimell can only maintain her chastity by fleeing her numerous potential deflowerers, however, in contrast to Britomart, who fights to save herself (as in Malecasta's castle) and to rescue others. In Florimell's case, "chaste" is a pun on "chased," as numerous critics have reminded us, but what most do not point out is that Florimell's version of chastity is far more conventional than Britomart's, yet inappropriate for a powerful and androgynous figure.

Cantos v - viii present several Britomart substitutes, including Florimell, Amoret, and even another virgin knight who appears rather than Britomart for the space of one stanza in order to pursue the embodiment of female lust, Argante. We can explain Florimell and Amoret as necessary emblems of the traditionally meek and passive chaste woman, but how can we explain the inclusion of an avatar for Britomart who appears to embody the same characteristics as the knight of chastity? Harry Berger explains such doublings and substitutions in the Faerie Queene by reading some figures as archaiams whose traits or situations are eventually infolded in other characters. He finds the
Faerie Queene infinitely progressive in this regard: Spenser is constantly examining the old ethics and replacing them with new forms. Specifically, Berger understands Florimell, Belphoebe, Amoret, and their consorts as representing three different cultural moments or levels of experience: the classical and natural (Florimell and Marinell), the medieval courtly (Amoret and Scudamour) and the Renaissance courtly (Belphoebe and Timias). All must be embodied in but also superseded by Britomart. I find this reading provocative, helpful in supplying a framework for understanding the function of the phalanx of chaste female figures in Books III and IV, but ultimately too optimistic about the poet's representation of Britomart. For instance, Berger says of Florimell, Belphoebe, and Amoret that "the psychic elements they individually exemplify must be harmoniously concorded--interrelated but not totally interfused--in the ampler and more fully human psyche of a single character whose ultimate destiny lies not in the restricted and essentially traditional or conventional domain of Faerie but in the actual and historical world, the world of Britain looking forward to Elizabeth, to Spenser, and to us."22 Berger understands Britomart to be this "ampler and more fully human psyche," and while I agree that she is something closer to a "full character" than the

22 See Berger, "The Discarding of Malbecco," 168.
others, I do not think it is possible at any time to see her as a "harmonious concord" of Florimell's, Amoret's, and Belphoebe's characteristics. Martial aggression and passive meekness cannot coexist harmoniously in a single figure: that is one of Spenser's many problems with the figure of the virgin knight. Overall, Berger sees Spenser's vision in The Faerie Queene as an essentially optimistic one which strongly valorizes the contemporary political and cultural setting; I would argue just the opposite: that Spenser finds the actual, human, historical world leading to his Britain and his queen extremely problematic and in fact expresses longing for that older world at various times in his narrative (see for example IV, viii, 30-32). A complex relationship exists in The Faerie Queene between the Elizabethan world and the archaic world(s) in which at times they are opposed; whereas at other times Spenser uses the archaic world as a way of safely distancing his criticisms of the court.

That Spenser criticizes the Elizabethan court in parts of The Faerie Queene has long been recognized, but usually we identify these veiled criticisms as part of the "darker vision" of the latter three books. Recently critics have begun to find a similarly dark vision in passages and episodes from the earlier books that may be read parodically
as satires of Elizabeth's court.\textsuperscript{23} Not only do such readings belie the notion of Spenser's optimistic vision, they also lead me back to a consideration of one substitution for Britomart in Book III which has never been explained: Palladine, the female warrior who pursues Argante. Judith Anderson's recent recovery of parodic possibilities in the figure of the giantess Argante may also explain why Britomart cannot appear in this episode. Anderson finds a source for Argante's name in Layamon's \textit{Brut} where Argante is the queen of Avalon, the island to which Arthur's mortally wounded body is carried. This allusion as well as other aspects of the lustful giantess's history and behavior support Anderson's claim that Argante acts as a bitter parody of Queen Elizabeth, particularly her exploitation of her flirtations with her courtiers as well as "the niggardly rewards of courtiership under Elizabeth's thumb."\textsuperscript{24} If


\textsuperscript{24} Anderson, "Arthur, Argante, and the Ideal Vision," 198. She derives this latter aspect of the parody from the etymology of "argante," finding a root in the Greek \textit{argos} meaning "useless" or "yielding nothing," as well as in the French and Latin cognates \textit{argentum} and \textit{argent}, which mean "silver" and "money."
Argante is an angrily conceived avatar for the queen, then the substitution of Palladine for Britomart as the giantess's nemesis makes sense, for here we have another instance where Britomart’s relationship to the queen might be dangerous for Spenser. Argante's version of female power is purely evil, a raucously depicted monstrosity, yet it may refer directly to Elizabeth's own wielding of authority; were Argante juxtaposed to a figure who clearly reflects some aspects of the queen and whose power already has been represented ambivalently, even negatively, by the poet, then Argante's parodic (and satiric) possibilities might be more easily recognized. Further, the episode in which Sir Satyrane attempts to save the Squire of Dames from Argante (and ends up being rescued himself by Palladine) is painted with broadly misogynistic strokes: not only does Argante herself suggest a loathsome and devouring female sexuality, but the story the Squire of Dames tells about his worldwide search for chaste women (in which he discovers only one who is truly chaste) satirizes the whole idea of the chastity Britomart supposedly represents. As Spenser's depiction of power in the hands of a woman becomes more and more conflicted, the image of a valorized and productive feminine authority disintegrates, and Britomart has no place in the narrative.

The final cantos of Book III fit the pattern of the earlier books, a pattern from which Book III diverges in
other respects, such as in the absence of its central figure for cantos at a time. However, Britomart's rescue of Amoret from the House of Busirane constitutes a final test such as Red Cross and Guyon undergo in their encounters with the dragon and Acrasia respectively. But whereas no quest in *The Faerie Queene* finds complete closure, Britomart's experience in Busirane's house and the aftermath of that experience so radically lack closure that the episode might be termed a rupture rather than an ending in any conventional sense of the word. Britomart's quest is to rescue Amoret, whom the enchanter Busirane holds captive: the knight of chastity frees Amoret but is herself wounded, and Amoret's own freakish wound is ambiguously described as both permanent and healed at different points in the narrative. Busirane's charms through which he has tortured Amoret by removing her heart from her body seem to be reversed, but Amoret after her heart is returned to her body is described suggestively as "perfect hole," that is, whole yet not so, wounded still despite the fact that she appears healed. Britomart triumphs in retrieving Amoret but is frustrated in her desire to destroy completely the evil enchanter Busirane, whom she binds and leads out of his ruined house but who disappears from the narrative after that (in contrast to Acrasia, Guyon's final foe, who is also captured but then is sent by Guyon to the Faerie court to meet her fate). And of course, the most famous
discontinuity in this episode is the rewritten ending to Book III in which Amoret and Scudamour, rather than coming together in the ecstatic reunion which originally closed the book, instead remain apart, lost from each other and never to be reunited.

These ruptures signal in part the authorial uneasiness about feminine authority that I have been exploring, and which I treat more fully in regard to these cantos in Chapter Three. But what I want to focus on here is how Britomart's role in Busirane's house reflects and reiterates her experience in Castle Joyeous. Both her first and final trials in Book III reveal important aspects of Britomart's developing self, and while this personal identity cannot be easily separated from her political identity, the dreamlike quality of these final cantos suggests to most readers that Spenser is representing psychic conflicts through the strange tapestries and masques in the House of Busirane. As The Faerie Queene progresses, the problem of personal authority becomes an increasingly urgent issue as the doubt that such a thing as a whole and stable self can exist at all pervades the text. The voyeurism of the Castle Joyeous, in which Britomart was implicated, was ultimately an untenable stance, and the illusory nature of her selfhood was exposed in the mirror episode. In Busirane's castle Britomart is again a voyeur; staring at the tapestry which depicts the gods' amorous exploits, she never "could her
wonder satisfie; But evermore and more upon it gazed" (III.xi.49.7-8). Spenser insists on the insatiable greed of her "busie eye": she "ne could satisfy/ Her greedy eyes with gazing" (III.xi.53.3-4). Also, she again remains carefully protected in her armor as she did in Castle Joyeous, but here she will neither disarm nor will she sleep: "Yet nould she d'off her weary armes, for feare/ Of secret daunger, ne let sleepe oppresse/ Her heavy eyes with natures burdein deare" (III.xi.55.5-7). Her heightened fear in Busirane's dwelling may be attributed to the representation of the victimization of women in the tapestry and statuary. Here, in contrast to Castle Joyeous, the emphasis lies on the victims of mastery: Cupid masters the gods who in turn victimize mortal women. The metaphor of sight is still in play, but the narrative particularly emphasizes those who are objects of voyeurism: the blinded, like the wounded dragon at Cupid's feet, and those whose vision is ineffectual and leaves them helpless, like the women who are raped by Jove as he takes on other forms to "beguile" their "sight" (III.xii.42.4), making "vaine ... the watch, and bootlesse all the ward" (III.xii.31.8).

This focus on the objects of mastery continues in the House of Busirane up until the final moments of the book, when Amoret appears in the Masque of Cupid as the object of Busirane's mastery: she is bound and wounded, and although technically she is released, the horror of her gaping wound,
the implication that the wound will never be completely healed, and her failure to reunite with Scudamour all suggest that Amoret's objectification in Busirane's castle is not a condition from which she truly can be "rescued." Britomart too suffers in this castle, for just as the voyeurism of her first adventure in Book III is repeated here, so too is her wounding. When Britomart is wounded in Castle Joyeous, that wound is the result of a situation where she is "misrecognized": because she clings to her armor so tenaciously, Malecasta mistakes her for a man. This mistaken recognition leads to Malecasta's pursuit of the virgin knight which ends in the fracas with the castle knights during which Britomart is wounded. The wounding which results from misrecognition suggests that this is an instance of what Lacan calls "méconnaissance": the misnaming or misidentification which is part of the way in which identity is constituted.\textsuperscript{25} In the subject-object exchange, the object is always a substitution for an other, an imagined original "other" whom the subject is always trying to find. Just as the subject is constituted through an other in the mirror stage, so that subject continues to be constituted through such misrecognitions when placed in

\textsuperscript{25} That misconstructions constitute the self is basic to Lacan's ideas but like many of his ideas is not systematically explained in any one text. Some of Lacan's ideas about méconnaissance are suggested in The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis, 82-85.
the object position by another subject. Objectified through méconnaissance, the "self" is a construction of that misnaming on the part of another. The wound signifies the violation of that imagined self-sufficiency and wholeness which méconnaissance belies. In Busirane's house, another conjunction of misrecognition and wounding occurs: Busirane stabs Britomart in the chest so that "little drops empurpled her faire brest" (III.xii.33.5). Then Britomart, enraged but not badly hurt, holds her sword over the enchanter and forces him to recant his evil spell which has wounded Amoret. When Amoret's wound appears healed (here is the famous and ambivalent "perfect hole"), she falls to the ground prostrate before Britomart and addresses her thus: "Ah noble knight, what worthy meed/ Can wretched Lady, quit from wofull state,/ Yield you in liew of this your gratious deed?" (III.xii.39.2-4). Like Malecasta, she wrongly identifies Britomart as a male champion who would be interested in that "moste goodly meede" which Arthur and Guyon pursued in the person of Florimell at the start of the book.

The sexual resonance in both these episodes of méconnaissance is appropriate from the Lacanian point of view since desire in Lacan's formulation depends on such misrecognitions--substitutions of one object for another. Both Amoret's and Malecasta's mistakes about Britomart's identity have sexual connotations: Malecasta of course
wants dalliance with this strong, handsome knight; Amoret offers herself as vassal to him and, as we discover at the opening of Book IV, it is with some foreboding that she travels with Britomart because she fears for her virtue at "his" hands. The Busirane episode also includes a pantomime of failed desire when Britomart draws her sword but is restrained by Amoret from killing the enchanter. The martial maid "did extend/ Her sword high over him, if ought he did offend" (III.xii.36.8-9), but she is never allowed to strike. The image is one of priapic frustration, although a certain substitution in imagery allows a release in the tension Britomart's raised sword engenders: the narrative never reports Britomart's lowering her sword but does describe "the cruell steele," the knife in Amoret's heart, falling "softly forth, as of his owne accord,"(III.xii.38.1-2) when Busirane reverses his spell. The suggestion of failed intercourse here is echoed in the rewritten ending to Book III. The original ending depicts sexual bliss when Amoret and Scudamour meet and embrace:

But she faire Lady overcommen quight
Of huge affection, did in pleasure melt,
And in sweete ravishment pourd out her spright:
No word they spake, nor earthly thing they felt,
But like two senceles stocks in long embracement dwelt. III.xii.45.5-9 (1590)

Amoret's "melting" and "pouring out her spright" surely connote orgasm, and the famous hermaphrodite metaphor that follows this stanza emphasizes the complete unity these two
separate beings have achieved. The changed ending, in which Britomart and Amoret emerge from Busirane's house to find Scudamour gone, fits the mood of frustration and ambivalence which has permeated the episode.

Ambivalence is the hallmark of Britomart's portrayal in Book III. Although Spenser initially depicts her a powerful figure, his attitude toward that power becomes increasingly negative during the course of the book. He describes the illusory origins of that power ambivalently in the mirror episode, criticizes her enactment of martial power in the encounter with Marinell, and undercuts our sense of her power several times, most notably in Castle Joyeux and here, in Busirane's castle. Britomart's armor, spear, and sword denote her as male and connote her authority. But Spenser has suggested that the authority, the sense of "self" reflected in that armor, is illusory, that its power is mishandled, perhaps even illegitimate. The power symbolized in canto i by Britomart's enchanted spear has become the frustration symbolized in canto xii by her paralyzed sword.

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Book IV adds little to the story of Britomart or to the development of an idea of feminine authority. Britomart finds Arthegall in this book, which should be an event of some drama and importance, but the strange shifts and substitutions of Book IV rob the narrative of much of its force. She defeats a disguised Arthegall in tourment without ever discovering his true identity, and of course her gender is hidden as well, so their encounter has no romantic results. When they meet again he is determined to avenge himself for the defeat. In their battle, often described in language that puns on a sexual encounter, Britomart at first prevails but after a time begins to decline in strength. Arthegall finally strikes her a blow that shears the ventayle (the moveable front) from her helmet. On seeing her face, he is immobilized by her beauty; against his will his arm goes numb and his hand drops the sword, and eventually he kneels before her. On her part, she tries to raise her sword but like him finds her arm benumbed and unable to maintain its threatening posture.

An interesting point about their encounter is that Britomart, when her ventayle is removed, again becomes the
object of méconnaissance: Arthegall "fell humbly downe upon his knee,/ And of his wonder made religion,/ Weening some heavenly goddesse he did see" (IV.vi.22.2-4); even in a scene of dramatic revelation when Britomart is recognized as a woman, she is misrecognized as well. The fact that Arthegall's courtship of her is not portrayed in any detail reinforces the sense of misrecognition. Spenser announces in one stanza that Arthegall wooed Britomart and in the next reports that he won her; it is distinctly anti-climactic and presented in such a way that the characters Spenser has been building, especially Britomart's, are obscured. The figures are wooden and the plot sketchy:

So well he woo'd her, and so well he wrought her,  
With faire entreatie and sweet blandishment,  
That at the length unto a bay he brought her,  
So as she to his speeches was content  
To lend an eare, and softly to relent.  
(IV.vi.41.1-5)

Probably one problem Spenser is experiencing is the necessity for some rather abrupt changes in Britomart's character. Since the early cantos of Book III he has depicted her as such an aggressive, even angry, figure that for him suddenly to present her in the role of passive, timid maiden is awkward at the least. Yet her passivity here is also part of the demise of her authority, a process which begins in Book III where she moves between a fierce insistence on her own subjecthood, expressed through her voyeurism, and the unavoidable objectification imposed on
her by others. Her objectification is expressed as vulnerability, an attribute emphasized by Spenser's portrayal of her as a young maiden in III.ii as well as by Merlin's ability to inscribe her into the history he recounts, and the misrecognitions which attend her. Even Arthegall's wooing, sketchily as it is presented, partakes of this objectification of Britomart: he wooed her and by so doing "wrought" her, according to the narrative. "Wrought" means "persuaded" only metaphorically; its primary meaning is of course "constructed," "fashioned," "shaped," a meaning which implies that Arthegall's courtship of Britomart forms her, makes an object of her and constitutes her through his desire.¹

Although Britomart has her own quest to pursue, her reluctance to allow Arthegall to leave her and continue his quest is the subject of the rest of this canto, and in fact her own responsibility as a knight (to find Amoret) will never be fulfilled; from this point on, both her passivity and activity center on Arthegall. She has no more significant role to play until we find her awaiting the return of Arthegall in Book V, the Book of Justice of which he is the hero. At this point she appears to be fulfilling a traditional woman's role: she waits for Arthegall and, in

¹ For the definition of "wrought" see the Oxford English Dictionary, volume XII, p. 394.
a manner regarded as typically feminine, vacillates between fear for his safety and a jealous fear that he has abandoned her for another love. At the same time, her own self-doubt is prominent and signifies an uneasiness with this passivity she has adopted. She is quick to leap to the conclusion that Arthegall has abandoned her and quick to blame herself for foolishly "yeelding to a straungers love so light,/
Whose life and manners straunge she never knew" (V.vi.12.6-7). The repetition of the word "straunge" underlines Britomart's sense that her relationship with Arthegall is something foreign, uncomfortable, and untrustworthy; it emphasizes Arthegall's otherness and Britomart's dawning awareness that her course of action revolves around a stranger. She is so disinclined to trust Arthegall at this point that she will not allow Talus, his squire, to tell her the whole story of his master's capture by Radigund: as soon as she hears that her betrothed is the captive of a "Tyranesse" rather than a "Tyrant," she flies into a rage and refuses to hear more.

But with all her worst fears confirmed, Britomart's behavior ceases to be the stereotypically feminine stuff of earlier on; now in her fury with Arthegall "she in her wrathfull will did cast,/ How to revenge that blot of honour blent;/ To fight with him, and goodly die her last" (V.vi.13.1-3). Notably, at this point Britomart "did not lament with loude alew,/ As women wont, but with deepe
sighes, and singults few" (V.vi.13.8-9, italics mine). Her fantasies of fighting Arthegall and her refusal to weep "like a woman" signify her return to her earlier, more powerful role. And when she finds that Arthegall is indeed captive in a literal sense, she immediately dons her armor and sets out in her guise of knighthood to rescue him.

The first adventure she has along the way exemplifies the typical Spenserian ambivalence about Britomart's knighthood: in the house of Dolon, her refusal to divest herself of her symbolic masculinity both endangers and saves her. On the first day of her journey, Britomart meets a knight who seems peaceful, courteous, and hospitable when he importunes her and her companion, Talus, to rest the night at his castle. But as the narrator tells us, this is Dolon, a man of "subtill wit and wicked minde" (V.vi.32.2) whose son Guizor had been slain by Arthegall. Believing that Britomart is in fact Arthegall, Dolon first opens a trap door under the bed in her chamber and then, when that ploy fails, sends a group of armed knights to attack her chamber. The group is easily dispatched by Talus, so Britomart, although burning to avenge herself, waits until morning and then leaves her room to seek out Dolon and his family. However, they are all gone; what she confronts is an empty castle. After she leaves the castle, she encounters Dolon's two remaining sons on the perilous bridge that only has room
for one to cross; naturally she defeats them easily and goes on her way to the Church of Isis.

The Dolon episode takes only half a canto to tell and is relatively self-contained—it has no repercussions in the rest of the book: the characters do not reappear, nothing seems to come of it. What is the purpose of its inclusion? First, there is the traditional reading of the episode which interprets it as historical allegory: Britomart is Elizabeth under attack by devious Catholics. But even if we accept such a close and apparent correspondence between Britomart and Elizabeth at this point, we must still see

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James Phillips suggests that Dolon's mistaking Britomart for Artheball shows that Britomart can enact the same "Justice Absolute" that we have seen Artheball enforce. This reading, along with his overall reading of Book V, which he divides into three parts exemplifying Justice, Equity, and Mercy respectively, is overly simplistic. Phillips does not deal with the troubling questions his interpretation raises. For one thing, what is the connection between justice, equity, and mercy in the terms of Book V? We do not see them all reflected in Artheball by any means. Phillips sees Artheball as an embodiment and enactor of justice but Britomart as an example of equity in that she is a divinely-appointed exception to the justice which proclaims women subject to men. If Britomart does not embody a quality necessary for justice but is rather merely an example of one aspect of justice, then how do we explain her rescue of Artheball? See "Renaissance Concepts of Justice and the Structure of The Faerie Queene, Book V," Huntington Library Quarterly 33 (February 1970): 103-20.
gender as a central element in this episode since Britomart's conflicted sexual role is at least partly a reflection of Elizabeth's anomalous position as female ruler of a patriarchal society. And to take the historical allegory further, it is Elizabeth's refusal to divest herself of a power characterized as masculine which makes her a target of attack and also empowers her to resist attack. Similarly, when Britomart will not remove her armor and lie down in bed, that refusal to give up her masculine role endangers her and protects her as well: Dolon only attacks her because her symbolic masculinity causes him to mistake her identity; yet her refusal to d'sarm and sleep also saves her. Britomart's adherence to her role as knight and her related resistance to bed and sleep are specifically linked to the question of her femininity. Just as in Busirane's House, her refusal to disarm or sleep is a defensive stance: there, her armed watchfulness shows her resistance to the fate of the female figures mastered by men who are in turn mastered by Cupid, although Spenser also suggests that she is incapable of resisting completely such objectification. In Dolon's House, when she is on her way to rescue Arthegall, her refusal to undress, lie down, and sleep reflects again her rejection of the passive feminine role, and in shunning the bed she seems to reject especially the prospect of marriage to Arthegall. Her rejection of sleep also suggests ambivalence about her betrothal to
Arthegall, for in her self-exhortations, Britomart says, "Ye guilty eyes ... the which with guyle/ My heart at first betrayd, will ye betray/ My life now to" (V.vi.25.1-3). Her juxtaposition of the two kinds of betrayal her eyes potentially commit (admitting sleep and admitting the image of Arthegall which she initially fell in love with) also points back to the themes of alienation and méconnaissance so prominent in Book III. As usual, Britomart's refusal to disarm also suggests her refusal to be objectified, but Dolon's misrecognition of her, not despite but because of her armor, shows the futility of her position. And the specific misunderstanding in this episode—Dolon's mistaking her for Arthegall himself—as well as her characterization of that first sight of Arthegall in the mirror as her eyes' betrayal suggest a close link between this episode and the mirror episode in III.ii. Britomart's self is essentially alienated because it is based on the reflection of an other—hence Dolon's mistaking her for Arthegall. She has tried with mixed success to become what she saw in her father's mirror: she is an indisputably powerful knight, arguably the most powerful knight in Faerie. But she is also required, in order to fulfill her destiny, to assume a role essentially inimical to her masculine role as warrior. The conflict between these two "selves" underlies much of Britomart's part in Book V. Her eyes betrayed her at the outset when they focused upon a mirror image essentially
other and culturally forbidden—in that the image embodied a particularly masculine, martial authority—and found there the prototype of a "self," a role, which she must now relinquish.

Britomart's armor thus signifies both her power and her powerlessness; wearing it both endangers and saves her. That dual function of her armor encapsulates Spenser's ambivalence about her masculine role and suggests a further problem: if divesting herself of her armor means in part for Britomart a dangerous laxness, a letting down of her guard that leaves her open to harm, then as Arthegall's betrothed, should she in some symbolic sense retain her armor? His courtship disarms her in the sense that she "relents"; and she is vulnerable to him when she is "wrought," defined, by him. She assumes this passive role with difficulty but assume it she does: her own quest to find Amoret fades from the narrative, and she simply waits. But then she must reclaim her armor and her aggression to save Arthegall, and in Dolon's house, only her refusal to disarm and submit to the passivity of sleep saves her. Yet she must submit her ways unto Arthegall's will in order to fulfill her destiny. Dolon's house exemplifies the conflict centered in Britomart both psychically and politically, a conflict between aggression and submission, activity and passivity, that operates on the level of personal and political exchange.
This conflict reaches a climax at Isis Church, where Britomart rests before her final battle with Radigund. The vision she has there as she sleeps has been variously interpreted and indeed allows for a plurality of readings because of its complexity and attracts much commentary because of its power. The setting of Isis Church and the dream itself seem closely linked to Busirane's house and the nightmarish sequence of events Britomart witnessed there; the entire episode provides a kind of closure to Britomart's story in its echoes of her experience with Busirane at the end of Book III as well as in its placement here before her final appearance in *The Faerie Queene*. The movement from narrative and plot to dream and symbol recalls similar movements in Book IV, where Spenser, unable to reconcile Amoret and Scudamour's story on the level of plot and characterization, retreats to the mythic marriage of rivers to express a union inexpressible in the human terms which have become increasingly problematic in Book IV. Britomart's destiny, expressed in a dream, is similarly inexpressible in conflicted human terms, and even the terms of the dream itself deconstruct under close analysis.

Her dream, as she lies at the foot of the idol, is this: she is dressed as one of Isis's priests in a linen stole with a mitre on her head, and she is making a sacrifice to the goddess. Suddenly her linen stole is transformed to a scarlet robe and her "Moone-like Mitre" to
a crown of gold. Then a hideous storm rages through the temple and blows the holy fire burning on the altar into "outrageous flames." This storm dismays the crocodile who sleeps under Isis's feet; awakening, he devours the flames and the tempest together and, "swolne with pride of his owne peerelesse powre," he threatens to devour Britomart as well. She beats him back with her rod, and all his pride then turns to "humblesse meeke" so that he throws himself at her feet and seeks grace and love from her. She accepts him, and he draws so near to her "that of his game she soone enwombed grew," and she brings forth "a Lion of great might" who subdues all the other beasts (V.vii.13-16).

This dream is usually read as an allegory of justice and equity in which equity, the "feminine" side of justice, must tame justice's potential to become a destructive, oppressive force. As William Nelson succinctly puts it, "Sleeping law [the crocodile] . . . invites chaotic disorder and the destruction of the realm. Stern force is required to suppress the turmoil but unchecked becomes itself destructive. Only when law is restrained by clemency . . . does majesty show itself stable, victorious, and fruitful."³

Also, of course, as Isis's priests tell Britomart when she awakens, this is a dream about her union with Arthegall, represented by the crocodile, and their progeny, the lion who will rule. Thus another strain of critical opinion focuses on the relevance of Britomart's dream to her relationship with Arthegall. The fire and tempest, as well as the crocodile, are usually taken to suggest a sort of masculine rage or sexual violence which Britomart must either accept as a necessary part of love and sexuality, or tame as a way of correcting and balancing the course of love. And the dream has also been read as suggesting responsibility (the scarlet robe), recognize the dangers of treason and rebellion surrounding Mary (the flames and tempest), quell her own pity (the crocodile) which, unchecked, may have cruel consequences for her people, and so on. Graziana even claims that Spenser "intended his readers to see the English legislature behind the Temple of Equity and its priests" (386). His reading is provocative but strained at many points, as when he suggests that "the dream lends itself readily to association with Elizabeth's decision on the night of 24 November" (381), a night which a modern historian has shown was crucial to the decision to execute Mary. Elizabeth appears to have decided by 24 November to prorogue Parliament so that she could avoid its recommendation that Mary be executed. But by the morning of 25 November, she had changed her mind. J. E. Neale, the historian in question, has speculated that this was a sort of dark night of the soul for Elizabeth, but that is only his speculation, and to suggest that Spenser knew of such a night of soul-searching, or even knew that Elizabeth's decision had changed over the course of one night, is also speculation.

For the former view, see, for example, Angus Fletcher, The Prophetic Moment: An Essay on Spenser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 259-276. In contrast, A. Kent Hieatt reads Britomart's experience in Isis Church as further evidence that Spenser's lovers must be understood as playing out a struggle between the desire for maisterie and the necessity for friendship in love, one
Britomart's psychic acceptance of her femininity—symbolized by the scarlet robe and gold crown she dons in place of her virginal white linen—an acceptance of feminine sexuality which makes her union with the crocodile, Arthegall/Osiris, possible.⁵

All these readings have a certain amount of validity and are not necessarily contradictory, although I think we must decide whether Britomart overcomes or accepts the violence of the threatening crocodile (and it seems fairly clear that, using the wand, she overcomes the violence and forces the crocodile to change its tactics, much as she has overcome the lust of various characters by use of her

"mythopoeic continuity" he finds between Chaucer and Spenser. "A relationship of love and mutual freedom is established between Artegall and Britomart when the woman initially quells the male libidinous mastery and competitive violence directed against her" (145). Chaucer Spenser Milton: Mythopoeic Continuities and Transformations, 135-45. Jane Aptekar draws both readings of the crocodile and the virgin together in her study Icons of Justice: Iconography and Thematic Imagery in Book V of The Faerie Queene (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969). Relying on Renaissance iconography of the crocodile or serpent, she finds that the ambivalent nature of both justice and sexuality are suggested in the dream, and the figure of the crocodile particularly. "Isis's crocodile simultaneously manifests the energy that is creative concupiscence and the energy that is destructive lust." Also, "the crocodile is simultaneously Osiris, god of justice, and the epitome of cruelty and guile" (107).

⁵ Elizabeth Bieman, "Britomart in Book V of The Faerie Queene," University of Toronto Quarterly 37 (January 1968). See especially pages 167-69. "She has come fully to terms with her inner femininity in the initiation to the scarlet robe. This has been for the erstwhile warrior an integration of the total self" (169).
spear). However, another possibility never considered is that, as is often true in dreams, the different characters may all represent aspects of the dreamer, Britomart. For example, the crocodile, which is almost always interpreted as masculine (Arthegall or Osiris or the "masculine" force of justice), also has its feminine side as the original description of Isis shows:

Upon her head she wore a Crowne of gold,
To shew that she had powre in things divine;
And at her feete a Crocodile was rold,
That with her wreathed taile her middle did enfold.

(III.vii.6.6-9)

The crocodile is feminine here although it is "he" in the dream when it becomes active. Further, it is an integral part of Isis, enfolding her middle with its tail even as the goddess sets her foot upon it: this iconography reflects the statuary in Busirane's House in which Cupid stands upon the wounded dragon whose "hideous tayle his left foot did enfold"—in both cases, an interdependence exists between the two figures (III.xi.48.7). In Britomart's dream, the crocodile may certainly be read as one aspect of the dreamer herself: the "hideous tempest" and "outrageous flames"

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6 See Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* where he explains that the ego of the dreamer may be represented in one dream several times over, in different forms. *The Standard Edition*, Volume IV, 323.

7 Aptekar apparently assumes that the crocodile enfolds its own middle with its tail, although she offers no explanation for this assumption nor any iconographical evidence to indicate that such a pose on the part of the crocodile might have precedents. Aptekar, 96.
frighten it terribly at first, just as "the furie of her cruell flame," that is her love for Arthegall, initially terrifies Britomart (III.ii.52.2). But the crocodile, like Britomart, is powerful enough to contain the forces of passion, and like the Britomart of Book III whose exercise of power the poet depicts as excessive, the crocodile becomes "swo: e with pride of his owne peerlesse powre" and begins to threaten everything around him, including Britomart herself (V.vii.15.7-9). This uncontrolled force is brought under control only by the stern hand of the Goddess and her wand, which suggests Isis and Britomart both. The two are conflated throughout this canto: Isis the moon goddess wielding her "long white sclender wand" (V.vi.7.5) reflects Britomart the virgin knight wielding her enchanted lance of chastity. If the crocodile suggests the misrule of women in its recollection of Britomart's overbearing exercise of power in Book III, then in a sense the Radigund episode is encapsulated here, because just as Britomart will suppress the rule of women and name it unjust and unnatural when she fights and defeats the Amazon, so here one aspect of femininity attempts to suppress another. And just as the moment when Britomart both repeals the liberty of women and takes on the power of Princess in Radigund's kingdom contains an inescapable contradiction, so too the idea that Isis's white wand can permanently suppress the crocodile deconstructs when we remember the
interdependence of the two: they are neither two autonomous beings nor two separate entities; rather, they are intertwined, interpenetrating, the crocodile's tail around Isis's waist and her foot on its back. Underlying sanctioned feminine power, from the virginal justice of Astraea to the perfect mercy of Mercilla, is the "monstrous regiment" of women's misrule.

When the crocodile changes from an emblem of open force to a submissive and humble creature, Britomart fulfills the traditional feminine role by becoming pregnant. The crocodile "so neare her drew,/ That of his game she soone enwombed grew" (V.vii.16.4-5), suggesting a correspondence between the crocodile and Arthegall; however, an alternate and not necessarily contradictory reading is that Britomart, by submitting as does the crocodile, exchanges an active role for a passive one and political power for generative power. Notably, this pregnancy and the resulting offspring, a lion who "did all other beasts subdew" (V.vii.16.7), results in Britomart's being "doubtfully dismayd through that uncouth sight" upon awaking (V.vii.16.9). As Angus Fletcher notes, "dismayd" is a pun on "dis-maid"; Britomart is no longer a maid.8 The fact that sexual capitulation dismays and ultimately disempowers her is reflected in her passivity after Arthegall "wooed and wrought" her and in her

8 Fletcher, 271.
"languor," as Spenser describes it, when we last see her in *The Faerie Queene*.

Thus Britomart's experience in Isis Church prepares for her encounter with Radigund: the idol itself and the accompanying dream, when considered together, reflect a complex and conflicted feminine entity which is Spenser's Britomart, and we might read Britomart in her relationship with Radigund in much the same way. Spenser seems to suggest through the figures of Isis/Britomart and the crocodile that an unruly force underlies Britomart's power and must be suppressed, ultimately, if she is to fulfill her role in marriage and childbearing: this idea is played out in the dream when Britomart tames the crocodile and then becomes pregnant and gives birth. But the idol shows that this monstrous force cannot be defeated or permanently eradicated: Isis stands with her foot on the crocodile, but it wraps her in its tail at the same time, suggesting a mutual struggle in which no one emerges completely victorious. Radigund may play a similar part in Britomart's history: she is a version of Britomart's self which Spenser suggests must be defeated, murdered even, so that the monstrous regiment of woman's rule which Britomart at least in part embodies may be suppressed and replaced by a passive acceptance of woman's submission. Yet ultimately Britomart, though she kills the Amazon, cannot exert a similar control
over her self because her self is not a product of her own creation.

The idea that Radigund is a version of Britomart herself is not new: Hamilton, for instance, reads her as an embodiment of Britomart's pride and Elizabeth Bieman has pointed out at least one moment in their fight when the two are closely identified, although she asserts that Radigund is only an external threat by the time Britomart encounters her because Britomart "has already overcome her internal Radigund by accepting the crocodile within the temple."  

Arthegall's submission to Radigund once he glimpses her beauty clearly parallels his earlier submission to Britomart under similar circumstances. Just as he shears the ventayle away from Britomart's face during their combat in Book IV and then stands dumbfounded by her beauty, dropping his sword from a benumbed hand, so he removes Radigund's helmet with the intention of beheading her after he has knocked her senseless on the field of battle. When he sees the beauty of her face, his "cruell minded hart" is "empierced," and he drops his sword and is taken captive by the Amazon (V.v.13). Not only do the events of the two battles parallel one another, but the narrator's comment puts Arthegall in the category of "everyman" ensnared by "everywoman," with the

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heavy suggestion that his succumbing to Britomart's beauty falls under the same heading:

Some men, I wote, will deeme in Artegall
Great weaknesse, and report of him much ill,
For yeelding so himselfe a wretched thrall,
To th'insolent command of woman's will;
That all his former praise doth fowly spill.
But he the man, that say or doe so dare,
Be well adviz'd, that he stand stedfast still:
For never yet was wight so well aware,
But he at first or last was trapt in women's snare.

(V.vi.1)

Arthegall is "trapt in women's snare" at the start and at the end, which suggests that this is the common fate of man and implicates Britomart, the "first" (and perhaps the last as well) snare to which Arthegall falls prey. There is also the hint of a frustrated courtier subject to a demanding queen in the lines that describe Arthegall's "yeelding so himselfe a wretched thrall,/ To the insolent command of woman's will."

And while Spenser of course never directly links Queen Elizabeth to Radigund, he does link the Amazon queen to Britomart through the usual Spenserian devices of parallel descriptions and pronoun ambiguity. The first echo of Britomart that we hear comes when the narrator describes Radigund's reaction to the news of Britomart's arrival. When Britomart heard that Arthegall was Radigund's captive, she did not "lament with loude alew,/ As women wont" (V.vi.13); one canto later, when Radigund hears of Britomart's challenge, she is not "with amaze . . . confused
in her troublous thoughts" "as women wonted bee." Rather, she is delighted to have an opportunity to bear arms, much as Britomart seemed relieved to have access to her war gear again when she learned of Arthegall's captivity. Radigund is clearly evil, an Amazon who exemplifies "the crueltie of womenkynd,/ When they have shaken off the shamefast band,/ With which wise Nature did them strongly bynd" (V.v.25.2-4). Spenser invites us to regard Britomart's boldness (and Elizabeth's rule) as an exception when he says, "But vertuous women wisely understand,/ That they were borne to base humilitie,/ Unlesse the heavens them lift to lawful soveraintie" (V.v.25.7-9). However, he undercuts this party-line justification for women's rule through the various parallels he creates between Radigund and Britomart. Both are "unwomanly," refusing to react to a threat with tears, confusion, or fear. When they fight, the battle is, in Bieman's terms, "an heroic cat-fight," bloodier than most combats Spenser describes and fiercely vicious. Spenser makes much of the fact that the women's fury is unnatural, and he implicates both warriors, not just Radigund:

But through great fury both their skill forgot,

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10 Spenser employs this phrase on another occasion later in Book V in a context which makes its association with Britomart even more damning. He uses it to describe Adicia ("Injustice"), who at the sight of her husband's defeat in battle was "not, as women wont, in dolefull fit,/ ... dismayd" (V.viii.45.5-6). A few stanzas later, Adicia degenerates into a raging tiger.

11 Bieman, 170.
And practicke use in armes: ne spared not
Their dainty parts, which nature had created
So faire and tender, without staine or spot,
For other uses, then they them translated;
Which they now hackt and hewd, as if such use they
hated. (V.vii.29.4-9)

Not only do these women "translate" their "dainty parts" by turning the softness of their female bodies to martial uses, but they seem actually to hate the use that nature ordained for their bodies. Although he does not specify what "dainty parts" Radigund and Britomart hack and hew, Spenser surely alludes here to the legend that Amazons cut off their left breasts to accommodate the bowstring; thus, he implies that both warrior women reject their "natural" role as mothers, since they "hate" the "other uses" (nursing and nurturing) of their "dainty parts" (breasts). This passage belies the idea championed by Bieman and others: that Britomart after her dream in Isis Church is a "real woman," ready to accept her role as wife and mother. ¹²

Britomart is never this integrated, unified figure, the "initiated woman" content with her lot of submission and "base humility," although I agree that through her encounter with Radigund Spenser expresses such a desire for Britomart. Just as Isis seemed to suppress the raging crocodile with her white wand and stern look, so Britomart attempts to kill the Radigund within and achieve a stable self. Spenser

¹² Bieman refers to Britomart as "an initiated woman" after the Isis Church episode. Ibid., 170.
clearly shows that Britomart's beheading of Radigund constitutes a search for self-definition of Britomart's part, but at the same time he shows the quest a failure. Britomart lays Radigund low and approaches her victim:

"Where being layd, the wrothfull Britonesse/ Stayd not, till she came to her selfe againe,/ But in revenge. . . . She with one stroke both head and helmet cleft" (V.vii.34.1-6).

The "her selfe" is particularly ambiguous and suggestive, and the fact that the reader will have some momentary difficulty understanding who has been laid down, whose "self" is meant, and whose head and helmet are cleft suggests that the ambiguity is purposeful. Britomart may hope to "come to herself" by killing Radigund, but self-definition is not so simple in *The Faerie Queene*.

Britomart's quest does not end with Radigund's death; in fact, the ironies multiply as the episode draws to a close. Britomart has killed Radigund in an attempt to destroy the Amazon within, but her next act is to rescue Arthegall by heaping reproaches on his head ("I see thy pride is nought"), leading him out of his prison, and taking charge of his change from woman's weeds to warrior's armor as if she were a mother dressing her child. The canto ends on perhaps the most ironic note in *The Faerie Queene*:

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So there a while they afterwards remained,
Him to refresh, and her late wounds to heale:
During which space she there as Princess rained,
And changing all that forme of common weale,
The liberty of women did repeale,
Which they had long usurpt; and them restoring
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I have referred before to the conventional readings of this passage, the most common being that it exemplifies the idea of Elizabeth as divinely-appointed exception to the general rule of women's subjection. I have tried to show that the ambivalence Spenser reveals about Britomart's assumption of power suggests that he had more than a few reservations about his queen's exercise of power; while he may try to reflect the mainstream Anglican justification for Elizabeth's rule in his treatment of Britomart, he is not very successful. The above passage is another instance of ambivalence breaking through: yes, it all makes sense if we understand Britomart as the exception, but the narrator's emphasis on the power she exerts in her reign draws our attention to the contradiction, not its resolution. She not only reigns as a Princess, she is adored as a Goddess; she has absolute sway even as she repeals not only women's rule but their liberty—a harsher sentence, but according to the narrator a just one.

Susanne Woods has argued that Britomart's rescue of Arthegall and assumption of rule, even as she simultaneously repeals the liberty of women and returns power to men, is a "delightfully ironic resolution" which insists that "the
reader must interiorize value by choosing it."\textsuperscript{13} One difficulty in accepting the irony of Britomart's position at this point as intended, even humorously intended, is that such an ambiguous resolution is not in keeping with the ideas about justice expressed in this book. Arthegall insists that "truth is one, and right is ever one" (V.ii.48.6-7); yet as Jonathan Goldberg has demonstrated about Book V, Spenser cannot describe justice without laying bare its internal contradiction and revealing its relativity: the truth is not eternal in Book V but specifically temporal. The truth is whatever the ruler decrees it to be; put crudely, might makes right.\textsuperscript{14} This is the repressed secret of Book V and the realization that The Faerie Queene moves toward: that truth and one of its most vital components, identity, are contextual.

Britomart's quest for a self that began when she looked into the enchanted mirror thus ends with the attempted annihilation of a self, a capitulation in the most exact sense: reduction to a head, the cleaved head and helmet of Radigund which represent her exercise of power. Spenser located Britomart's alienation in her armor which hides her

\textsuperscript{13} Woods, 154-55.

and empowers her, a sign of her false sense of authority. The "one self," like the "one truth," a truth that exists outside of any earthly context, does not exist in The Faerie Queene. Britomart can attempt to destroy a troublesome version of herself but it is still part of her--she cannot control all the versions of her self generated by others: for instance, people call her a goddess when she acts as the princess of Radigund's land. The fact that power does not exist innately somewhere we can see by Britomart's assumption of it and Arthegall's divestment--he when he is forced to dress as a woman, she when she chooses to dress as a knight. Just as Britomart dresses Scudamour in his armor at the end of Book III immediately before she proves her superiority to him by taking on the quest that should, according to Spenser's Letter to Raleigh, be his, so she dresses Arthegall in his armor and hands him the appearance of power which she wields in fact.

Britomart's end is uneasy: although Spenser describes her as experiencing "languor and unrest" when Arthegall once more leaves her behind to continue his quest, we cannot fail to recognize that this final depiction of Britomart recalls our last glimpse of her in Book IV. And of course, she did not languish permanently in her passive role at that point but emerged from her garb of traditional femininity to take on again the guise of knighthood. Book V provides no real conclusion to her search for a self, because her "self" is
her role, the part she plays in relation to culturally inscribed authorities, and the roles ascribed to her in The Faerie Queene are conflicting ones. Spenser criticizes Elizabeth's power through his portrayal of Britomart, but this interrogation of feminine authority apparently results in a growing anxiety about the nature of authority itself—the authorities which comprise political relationships and through which personal identity is constituted. This climactic point of Book V brings together both political and personal concerns: the woman who rules politically is defeated by a woman who rules politically; the powerful force of a dominant woman is defeated in Britomart's dream by a woman who embodies that powerful force. Justice fails to sanction one right and one right only: the very principle of equity which Britomart embodies is the loophole through which exceptions are uneasily acknowledged and the concept of "one truth" is threatened. By the same token that the concept of an innate right to power deconstructs, so does the possibility of any stable selfhood formed in relationship to these supposedly innate authorities. Spenser in the end finds no consistent role for his knight of chastity to play: she enacts an authority defined as masculine and therefore at odds with her destiny and the identity demanded by that destiny as wife and mother; further, the fact that she can assume this authority
threatens the ideological system through which identity is constituted and destiny dictated.
Chapter Three

Identity and Absence: Amoret

Spenser's attempts to represent his queen's authority result in an anxiety-fraught portrait of Britomart, the androgynous knight, whose quest for identity appears finally to be futile. Britomart seems authoritative, but Spenser criticizes her assumption of power and implicates her in the maisterie of Malecasta as well as the cruelty of Radigund. His attempts to depict her as authoritative give way to various other pressures to depict her as in one sense or another "feminine"—and in this period feminine means, by definition, submissive and passive. The history of Britomart has disturbing implications which are not solely the result of Spenser's disapproval of woman's rule: an exploration of woman's authority leads him to examine the development of individual identity and question the nature of authority itself. Britomart's claim to an authority understood to be innately masculine disturbs the system, as does Elizabeth's appropriation of the title "prince." And all identity depends to an extent on that patriarchal hierarchy which is potentially perverted by the queen's
presence: as Maureen Quilligan describes the problem, "A female head to a male body politic poses the problem of monstrosity." But the monstrous female regiment which emasculates Arthegall and robs him of his knighthood is not the only threat to masculine identity. In his portrait of Amoret, Spenser examines a sanctioned definition of femininity and finds that it too threatens the stability of identity.

Amoret is the most traditional of the female figures Spenser describes in The Faerie Queene: she is neither knight nor huntress; she is simply a beautiful woman brought up by Venus in "goodly womanhed." Her role as Scudamour's betrothed reflects Britomart's destiny, which is of course to become Arthegall's wife and the mother of Britain. Amoret is a character worth examining if only for that reason: she is what Britomart, the embodiment of feminine authority, is meant to become, yet the difference between Amoret and Britomart is striking. Amoret cannot even rightly be called a "character" because she speaks directly only once and is usually represented in relationship to someone else. She is the ward of Venus, the prize of Scudamour, the dependent of Britomart. Out of all the female figures in The Faerie Queene Amoret possesses the least authority because as Woman she is silent and passive,

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1 Quilligan, "The Comedy of Female Authority," 170.
and her identity is almost purely relational, derived from the authority of someone else. Her origins reflect this utter passivity, for she is born of the nymph Chrysogonee, who conceives unaware when the sun's rays penetrate her. One way to interpret this virgin birth is to emphasize the male's exclusion from the process, a reading appropriate to the other product of this miraculous conception: Belphoebe, the bold virgin huntress. But we can, alternatively, read Chrysogonee's story as a fable of complete masculine authority: the father is no mere human, but a god--Titan, according to the text, although we might also recognize an allusion to the Olympian Zeus who, in the form of a shower of gold, impregnated Danae. Like Danae, Chrysogonee has no choice in the matter: the golden beams pierce her womb while she sleeps. Amoret, who is taken by Venus immediately after she is born and raised to be a wife, relies on the authority of others for her identity.

Furthermore, Amoret's presence seems to define the male whose authority rules her. When Scudamour relates the story of his capture of Amoret, it is clear that she in some way creates his identity. For Scudamour, the purpose of the quest for Amoret is fame:

What time the fame of this renowned prize
Flew first abroad, and all mens eares possesst,
I having armes then taken, gan avise
To winne me honour by some noble gest,
And purchase me some place amongst the best.

(IV.x.4.1-5)
The knight undertakes his quest as the first exploit in a young career, or so he implies when he says that he had then taken arms. He desires not to win the love of Amoret but instead to purchase a place in the ranks of the great—to make a name for himself. And so he does, from the start of the undertaking. When he wins the shield which grants him entrance to the Island and the Temple of Venus, part of his identity is established: he is "Cupid's man" (IV.x.54.7).

Thus Britomart first sees him:

A little off his shield was rudely throwne,
On which the winged boy in colours cleare
Depeincted was, full easie to be knowne,
And he thereby, where ever it in field was showne.

(III.xi.7.6-9)

Scudamour's shield, which he acquired along with Amoret, makes him "easily known"; he is the knight who won "the glorious spoyle of beauty"; he is Cupid's man. When he loses Amoret on their wedding day, he has lost his authority over her and thus over himself, which explains why Britomart first sees him without his shield: bereft of Amoret, Scudamour is in danger of being bereft of his identity as well.

Why does Scudamour lose Amoret? Surely the marriage of Cupid's man and Venus's maid is fitting. Amoret was raised by Venus as companion to Pleasure in the Garden of Adonis, "trained up in true feminitee," and "th'ensample of true love alone" (III.vi.51-52); she is bred to be a wife, and as a wife she is properly meek and submissive. Appropriate
also is Scudamour's reliance on Amoret for confirmation of his identity. According to treatises about marriage in the period, nothing is more important than a wife's chastity and good name, because her husband's honor, his good name, rests on her purity. But if we scrutinize the expectations placed on women during this time, an inherent contradiction appears: women were supposed to be both submissive and defensive, meekly deferring to the authority of the male and staunchly defending their chastity, simultaneously. We have seen the difficulties involved in portraying such a staunch defender of chastity: Britomart could not play the martial role and the submissive role simultaneously. Furthermore, along with the value placed on female chastity went the popular notion that women were nearly incapable of resisting the temptation to do evil. Referring to Eve as the prototype, writers and philosophers of the age depicted

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2 The ideal qualities of a woman are described in a variety of Elizabethan discussions of "the woman question." One recent study which remarks the emphasis placed on female chastity is Linda Woodbridge, *Women and the English Renaissance: Literature and the Nature of Womankind, 1540-1620* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984). See, for instance, 60. Woodbridge also describes Book III of *The Faerie Queene* as Spenser's "main discussion of womanhood" (119) but comments that its title, the book of Chastity, represents a "common Renaissance reduction: chastity was the one absolute demand made on virtuous womanhood" (136). See also Katherine Usher Henderson and Barbara F. McManus, *Half Humankind: Contexts and Texts of the Controversy about Women in England, 1540-1640* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985). They discuss the female ideal in their chapter on social contexts, 47-98.
woman as dangerously pliant, too frail to withstand seduction. So those qualities desirable in a woman (silence, meekness, malleability) are the same qualities that make her unlikely to maintain that essential virtue, chastity. The tension caused by this contradiction is played out in the story of Amoret and Scudamour. Scudamour can boldly seize the gentle Amoret from the Temple of Venus; although she beseeches him to release her (IV.x.57), she does go with him in the end. After all, she is surrounded by the qualities she embodies: Modestie, Cheerfulness, Shamefastnesse, and especially Silence and Obedience. She is "with terror queld" (IV.x.55.5), appropriately enough, and so she submits. The anxiety produced by this situation can be summed up in the question, if Amoret submits to Scudamour against her will, what can prevent her submission to any other authoritative figure she encounters?

This subversive quality inherent in feminine submission to masculine authority finds one of its most dramatic examples in Desdemona. Stephen Greenblatt discusses Othello in these terms, but he explains the tragedy which results from Desdemona's acquiescence to Othello in this way: the Moor, having adopted the symbolic order of Christianity, is unsettled by the erotic nature of Desdemona's submission and

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3 Henderson and McManus, 17. They note that even a female apologist such as Rachel Speght depicts women as "the weaker vessel" and thus more easily seduced than men.
believes on some level that his relationship to his wife is adulterous. I think a simpler and more convincing explanation for the unsettling nature of Desdemona's submission is implied in the words of Brabantio: "Look to her, Moor, if you have eyes to see,/ She has deceived her father, and may thee" (I.iii.292-93). Whether or not Othello regards his wife's transfer of obedience from her father to him as deception, he cannot help but know that transfer allegiance she did when he wooed her with his story. And yet it is precisely this submissiveness in Desdemona's character that makes her a paragon of feminine virtue: she is the ideal mirror of her husband's identity, as she implies when she says, "My heart's subdued/ Even unto the very quality of my lord" (I.iii.245-46). But like Scudamour, Othello has no confidence in the permanence of his authority over the woman whose submission defines him.

This anxiety underlies Scudamour's description of Amoret's captivity in the House of Busirane. Britomart finds the knight "all wallowed/Apon the grassy ground" (III.xi.7.3-4), groaning and bewailing Amoret's (and his own) plight. Although Scudamour never states explicitly his fear that Amoret is untrue to him, several aspects of this scene point to such an interpretation. For one thing, as

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Harry Berger suggests, the juxtaposition of the Malbecco story and the House of Busirane implies that jealousy plays a role in Amoret's captivity. Clearly we are meant to see Scudamour as a flawed character, since he has lost Amoret and is unable to rescue her. His groveling posture and despairing tone indicate that he is weak, but the nature of that weakness is a subject for debate. That Scudamour is jealous without cause is one possibility which supports the contention that an unavoidable anxiety accompanies the possession of an Amoret, a figure so meek and submissive that she seems incapable of defending herself against any attempt to capture her. Scudamour's description of Amoret's predicament reverberates with that anxiety:

There he [Busirane] tormenteth her most terribly
And day and night afflicteth with mortall paine,
Because to yield him love she doth deny,
Once to me yold, not to be yold againe:
But yet by torture he would her constraine
Love to conceive in her disdainfull brest.

(III.xi.17.1-6)

He asserts that Amoret remains true to him, but his language suggests a worrisome parallel: Amoret yielded to him when

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5 Harry Berger, Jr., "Busirane and the War Between the Sexes: An Interpretation of The Faerie Queene III.xi-xii," English Literary Renaissance 1 (Spring 1971): 114. Berger does not read the House of Busirane as a picture of Scudamour's unconscious mind but rather as a picture of traditional male suppositions about courtship which account for Scudamour's earlier masterful behavior and (implicitly) his jealousy (p. 116). Another recent critic who discusses Scudamour's jealousy is A. Kent Hieatt, Chaucer Spenser Milton: Mythopoeic Continuities, 125.
he demanded her; might she not yield when someone else demands her?

In fact, later in Book IV, after Britomart has rescued Amoret and the two are searching for Scudamour, Scudamour succumbs to the lies of Ate, a hag who embodies discord. She tells Scudamour that she has seen "a stranger knight," that is, Britomart, "have your Amoret at will" (IV.i.49.1). Cupid's man is easily convinced that token, his Amoret, has become the possession of another knight, and he wanders through much of the rest of Book IV with a heart full of "gealous discontent" (IV.v.30.8). Thus, although Scudamour proclaims in Book III that Amoret's love, once yielded to him, is not to be yielded again, he clearly lacks confidence in his own declaration— the "but yet" that follows qualifies his seeming certainty. Amoret should remain true to him, but after all, Busirane is using torture to try to master her. When Britomart undertakes the quest which should rightly be Scudamour's and is able to pass through the flames unharmed, the knight's reaction further reveals the jealous nature of the kind of love he personifies: "He likewise gan assay,/ With greedy will, and envious desire,/ And bad the stubborne flames to yield him way" (III.xi.26.2-4). Of course, Scudamour fails to conquer the flames precisely because he is greedy and envious, qualities which intensify his natural anxiety that the meek Amoret will succumb to her tormentor. Also noteworthy is the connection
between Scudamour's greedy and envious demand that the flame yield to him, and his use of the same word, "yield," to describe Amoret's submission to him. As A. Kent Hieatt suggests, Scudamour's maisterie of Amoret is parallel to Busirane's maisterie; one way to read the House of Busirane is as a representation of Amoret's trauma at the hands of Scudamour himself.⁶

And indeed, despite the fact that Scudamour is the one who first commands our attention in this episode, the Busirane story quickly focuses upon Amoret, the captive woman, and Britomart, the female knight. Busirane's house is about women and directed toward women. The encounter with Busirane is Britomart's ultimate trial in Book III, and as such, in accordance with the poem's structure, it should elucidate the female knight's weaknesses and provide her with an allegorical opportunity to overcome her flaws and move toward perfection of the virtue she embodies. What does Britomart confront in the House of Busirane? Love's power, its ability to master even the strong. Love's many forms, its menacing ubiquitous presence in human life, whether we desire it or not. In Busirane's house, the

⁶ Maisterie is an important concept in Chaucer's "Marriage Group," which clearly forms a backdrop for Spenser's treatment of love in The Faerie Queene. Such echoes from Chaucer to Spenser to Milton are Hieatt's subject in Chaucer Spenser Milton: Mythopoeic Continuities. See especially 95-133, where he offers a detailed discussion of Amoret and Scudamour.
threatening aspects of love appear to be presented from a woman's perspective: the tapestry Britomart examines on the first day depicts the metamorphoses of gods who in various forms can invade and master mortal women; the pageant of the second day presents love's "maladies," according to the narrator, "So many moe, as there be phantasies/ In wavering wemens wit" (III.xii.26). Thus the origin of those frightening aspects of love appears to lie squarely within the mind of woman herself.\(^7\) Indeed, critics of the powerful final cantos of Book III usually read the House of Busirane as some projection of Amoret's psyche, although opinion is divided as to whether the images within the castle represent Amoret's fear of sexuality, her sexual excess, or her inability to reconcile sexual love with chaste love.\(^8\) Furthermore, although not many critics have attended to the episode's psychic significance for Britomart, in fact we see

\(^7\) Sayre N. Greenfield notes that the word "wemen" in "wavering wemen's wit" is a pun on "we men." That reading assigns the responsibility for the depiction of women in the House of Busirane to men rather than to women. His paper, "The Wailing Male and Busirane's Amoret," was presented at Spenser at Kalamazoo, XII, 1987.

\(^8\) Some earlier readers of Book III did accuse Amoret of lust—for example F. N. Padelford, "The Allegory of Chastity in The Faerie Queene," Studies in Philology 21 (April 1924): 376. More recently, critics have focused on her fear. For example, Thomas P. Roche describes Cupid's masque as an objectification of Amoret's fear of sexual love in The Kindly Flame, 77. For yet another interpretation, see Helen Cheney Gilde, "'The Sweet Lodge of Love and Deare Delight': The Problem of Amoret," Philological Quarterly 50 (January 1971): 64. Gilde asserts that Amoret's problem is an inability to integrate chaste love with sexual passion.
her battling her own fear of love's overmastering power which was revealed earlier in her response to her nascent love for Artegaill (a knight "whose shape or person yet I never saw,/Hath me subjected to loves cruell law"
[III.ii.38.4-5]). And we see her struggle with her own tendency to react violently and overpoweringly when she feels threatened—Amoret stops her only just in time from killing Busirane and thus losing forever the power to heal the wound he has inflicted.

Although the House of Busirane seems to show love from a woman's point of view, in fact it has another dimension: it suggests a masculine anxiety about feminine responses to love. For instance, the tapestry which Britomart sees on the first day and which the narrator describes in such vivid detail depicts male assaults on female victims, almost exclusively. As such, this tapestry represents feminine fears. But it has a sub-text of masculine anxiety--the gods themselves who attack mortal women are victims of Cupid's darts, and the females are victims of the same sort of maisterie, or exertion of authority, that Scudamour practiced on Amoret and which Busirane practices on her now; that inability of the female to resist her attacker inspires the anxiety of the proprietary male, in this case, Scudamour. Furthermore, the problem of masculine dependence on feminine honor emerges in this tapestry. Male identity relies on the ideal of female constancy; yet the tapestry
presents Protean males who can take any form or identity, and who use this power to master mortal women. In the tapestry, females fall as a result of male mutability, but the impossibility of feminine resistance to such attacks also creates the anxiety that masculine identity is unstable, fluid, Protean. The popular Renaissance notion of Protean man was a double-edged sword: in the House of Busirane, the masculine ability to change shapes is both a source of power and a cause for anxiety. As we have seen, loss of authority over the female signifies loss of identity. Amoret, like Helle, Europa, Danae, and the other women depicted, confronts a masterful figure in Busirane. And as we have also seen, Scudamour's fear that he has, as a result, lost his authority over Amoret threatens the young knight's identity, represented by his armor. Before Britomart accompanies him to Busirane's door, she must gather up and dress him in "his armes, which he had vowed to disprofesse" (III.xi.20.4); Scudamour's identity as Cupid's man is all but lost when Busirane seizes Amoret, the figure who confirmed the young knight's authority through her submission to him.

This reciprocally anxious, destructive relationship between male and female is best represented in the Altar of Cupid. Here, Cupid is master over the dragon at his feet. But the pose of sturdy masculine authority is qualified by the multi-colored wings which the poet describes in detail:
And wings it had with sundry colors dight,
More sundry colours, then the proud Pavone
Bears in his boasted fan, or Iris bright,
When her discolourd bow she spreds through heaven bright. (III.xi.47.6-9)

Earlier on, such varied colors are associated with shifting, insecure perceptions, as when the narrator describes the tapestry as "faining to be hid from envious eye"; it shows itself unwillingly, "like a discolourd Snake, whose hidden snares/ Through the greene gras his long bright burnisht backe declares" (III.xi.28.8-9). Cupid's "discolourd" wings suggest the shifting male identity. And the dragon under Cupid's feet suggests the mastered female. That she is "shot through either eye" (III.xi.48) recalls the female figures from the tapestry whose vision is no longer a reliable defense because of the transformed figures who confront them:

He [Neptune] loved eke Iphimedia hight,
And Aeolus faire daughter Arne hight,
For whom he turnd himselfe into a Steare
And fed on fodder to beguile her sight. (III.xi.42.1-4)

The mutable man masters the woman by beguiling her sight; he wounds her vision, but in so doing he injures himself. The statuary suggests that such maisterie is self-destructive, for although Cupid stands on the seemingly conquered dragon, at the same time the dragon enfolds Cupid's foot with its tail. Cupid exercises his power by stabbing with a dart and the dragon exercises its power by enclosing with its tail: these two acts suggest, respectively, the male and female
roles in sexual intercourse. The emblem as a whole sums up the anxiety which results from the practice of maisterie as depicted in the tapestry as well as in the relationship between Amoret and Scudamour: as the man subdues the woman, her very submission threatens his identity.

The tapestry and the altar of Cupid which Britomart sees on her first day in Busirane's house reveal the fundamental insecurity underlying the process of masculine maisterie in love. On the second day, Britomart witnesses a pageant which again emphasizes love's destructive power. But whereas the tapestry depicted female submission and the disorder which results, the pageant depicts female resistance. Figures such as Daunger, Dissemblance, Doubt, and Displeasure recall that male creation, the "proud fair" of the sonnet sequence who scorns the love of the poet. Amoret herself follows these frightening figures, and the torment she undergoes because she refuses Busirane reveals the woman's impossible situation. Amoret, despite Scudamour's anxiety, has remained true to him. She has thus far resisted Busirane, but the figures who precede her are a reminder of just how harshly such resistance is often depicted. In a certain sense, Amoret is damned if she does and damned if she doesn't, because Elizabethan culture makes conflicting demands upon women and punishes severely any transgression: if Amoret is submissive, she risks disgrace (see the figures of Reproch, Repentance, and Shame which
follow her in the masque); if she is resistant, she risks the censure suggested in the figures which precede her. Furthermore, her refusal to submit has resulted in a double wounding. The poet's description of Amoret at this point is multi-faceted and resists reductive interpretation; however, several aspects of her appearance should be considered: the fact that her heart has been removed from her body, leaving a gaping wound; the fact that her heart trembles; the fact that it is transfixed by a deadly dart. Trembling is one of Amoret's salient characteristics: it aligns her with the insecure and submissive women in the tapestry (Europa's heart trembles in the encounter with Jove [III.xi.30.8]), and it defines the difference between Amoret and Britomart, who remains sturdy even when the house shakes around her ("Yet the bold Britonesse was nought ydred/ Though much emmov'd, but stedfast still persevered" [III.xii.2.8-9]). Yet although Amoret's heart trembles, it is "quite through transfixed with a deadly dart" (III.xii.21.3), a dart which surely represents her love for Scudamour. It is to him she has yielded and it is his authority which fixes her in place and gives her the impetus to resist the enchanter. But the transfixing dart is deadly, because it identifies Amoret as a captive possession. Furthermore, that "deadly dart" is not the only thing that is killing Amoret. The removal of her heart from her body and the resulting wound cause her vital powers to fade: "And a wide wound therein (O ruefull
sight)/ Entrenched deepe with knife accursed keene,/ Yet freshly bleeding forth her fainting spright" (III.xii.20.6-8). Busirane threatens Amoret's life by revealing her essential lack of identity: the wound (twice described as "wide") represents a gaping absence that is Amoret, that is Woman, that object of desire which, in Lacanian terms, is always imaginary because it is always a substitute for something else which finally is imaginary as well, in an endless chain of substitution. What the House of Busirane reveals is that in this chain of substitution and replacement, "woman" in particular is a male construct: when Busirane removes Amoret from the authority--or authoring--of Scudamour, symbolized by her transfixed heart, what remains is absence. Thus when the dart finally falls from Amoret's "dying heart" and the heart returns to her breast (III.xii.38), the poet describes her as "perfect hole," a curious pun which implies again Amoret's emptiness, her lack of identity. In fact, as soon as Amoret is freed, she falls prostrate before Britomart and declares herself the knight's vassal, regaining a sense of self through submitting to another authority.

So in the end, we have three perspectives on the House of Busirane: the masterful and proprietary male, Scudamour, stands outside, his identity slipping because his female "prize" is so submissive that he fears he cannot control her. Within the House of Busirane, we have a superficially
female perspective in that women, Britomart and Amoret, see representations of other women whose sight is beguiled by the male power over forms, a power that has a dark underside of anxiety for the male himself, since his shifting forms can connote either mastery or instability. Finally, we can see that the masculine authority over forms extends to control the forms, or representations, of women themselves: this is what Busirane's house is—the male enchanter depicting women captured, blinded, dangerous, shamed, and finally, empty. There is, in the end, no solution to this circular condition: in the patriarchal system, men's attempts to establish their own identities through authority over feminine "honor" are doomed to failure, because the same system of representation denies woman any stable selfhood which could encompass a quality like "honor." Britomart maintains her chastity through a defensiveness and aggression that Spenser criticizes; yet the alternative is the unsettling submissiveness of an Amoret, threatening in its own way.

And of course, Scudamour and Amoret ultimately fail to find a "happy ending," even though Britomart does succeed in rescuing Amoret from the House of Busirane. In the 1590 Faerie Queene, which ended with Book III, Amoret and Scudamour are blissfully reunited. But it is part of the poet's often-noted darkening vision and, I think, increasing awareness of the implications of what he has written, that
in the 1596 edition, that ending is changed. Scudamour is gone when Amoret and Britomart emerge from the nightmare of Busirane's castle, and although both Amoret and Scudamour appear in Book IV, they are never reunited; their story finds no closure on the level of plot. However, the last appearance by Scudamour, in IV.x, provides a commentary which serves as an ending of sorts. Here Scudamour tells the story of his first encounter with Amoret when he captures her and takes her from the Temple of Venus. The story is fascinating in what it suggests about the nature of the love Scudamour represents; it is also complex in scope, because although it was surely written years after the episodes in Book III, in the time of the narrative it occurs before them. Scudamour's retrospective is the poet's retrospective as well, looking back at the House of Busirane and the Garden of Adonis, and providing a new perspective on the relationship between Amoret and Scudamour, between art and nature, friendship and love, masculine and feminine: in short, between two versions of authority.

Scudamour tells Britomart and Arthur the amazing story of how he first found Amoret when the "fame of this renownmed prize [Amoret herself]/ Flew first abroad." This version contradicts the earlier story of their meeting offered in Book III, where she and Scudamour are said to have met at the Faery court, where Amoret loved none but Scudamour (III.vi.52). Spenser has apparently rejected this earlier
account by the time he writes Book IV: neither Scudamour's nor Amoret's responses to each other in this book make sense if we assume that they already know and love one another when Scudamour finds Amoret in the Temple of Venus. She does not want to go with him and begs him to let her go, which does not suggest that she has already pledged her love to him. His aggressive response in the Temple is both a result of his view of Amoret as an object to be seized and mastered and a result of his fear of the island and temple themselves. Although the Island and Temple of Venus seem beautiful and harmonious on the surface, Scudamour's description of them indicates that a dark underside exists here, if only in his own mind. On the surface it appears that events fall out favorably (love masters hate, and Scudamour wins the day and the girl with the smiling consent of the deity and the doorwarden), but uneasy undercurrents emerge in his telling of the tale. Specifically, what this narrator reveals is a fear of feminine power which, on the island and in the temple, seems intimately connected with a fear of nature's power. Scudamour's anxiety in confronting this natural, generative feminine power results in his heavy-handed maisterie of Amoret when he encounters her within the temple; through this narrative, Spenser seems to offer his explanation for the existence of maisterie as a component of the sexual love represented by Scudamour, "Cupid's man."
Scudamour's desire to exert his authority over Amoret even to the point of dragging her by force out of the temple is predictable given the deep uneasiness he clearly experiences on the island and in the temple itself. In this lush and beautiful place he feels keenly the power of nature, of generation, and of woman, all of which find expression on the island. It is a place "lavishly enrich with natures threasure" (IV.x.23), a place where lovers "sport/Their spotlesse pleasures" (IV.x,26). Further, the temple at the center of the island is specifically a woman's domain: "All the Priests were damzels" (IV.x.38) says Scudamour, and the iconic Venus is explicitly depicted as the generative power that informs nature. But for each of these powerful forces (nature, generative love, femininity), an opposing authority appears on the island: nature is tempered by art; sexual love is contrasted to friendship; and the mysterious Temple of Venus, locus amoenus, the realm of women, is balanced by the world of male friends whom Scudamour admires and envies.

In fact, these different "authorities" appear in contrast, even in opposition to each other, as a result of Scudamour's depiction of them. In telling his story, the young knight reveals the anxieties he felt when he confronted the natural, generative authority of the woman; he also shows his preference for the other side of the paradigm: the order of art, the placidity of friendship, the
authority of the male. Even though Scudamour faces the world as "Cupid's man," and though he depicts himself as dedicated to his love, his Amoret, in fact he frequently denigrates love and at one point explicitly states a preference for male friendship over sexual love. From the beginning of his narrative, Scudamour maintains that love is not worth the anguish it produces. The first words he speaks are

True he it said, what ever man it sayd,
That love with gall and hony doth abound,
But if the one be with the other wayd,
For every dram of hony therein found,
A pound of gall doth over it redound.

(IV.x.1)

Although Scudamour at times tries to present himself to Arthur and Britomart as the chivalric hero ready to sacrifice all for love, in fact time and again he shows that he resents love's inequity and fears its power. Scudamour brings a mercantile ethic to love that naturally enough results in dissatisfaction: he wants to buy love and get what he pays for. He sees his conquest of Amoret as a "purchase":

Long were to tell the travell and long toile
Through which this shield of love I late have wonne,
And purchased this peerelesse beauties spoile,

(IV.x.3)

and so of course he is resentful when he pays more in suffering than he seems to receive in terms of "reward":

For though sweet love to conquer glorious bee,
Yet is the pain thereof much greater than the fee. (IV.x.3)

Not only does Scudamour resent love; he fears it as well, specifically the power that it lends the female. In his encounter with the figure Daunger in stanzas 16-20, his fantasies of emasculating women overcome him. "Daunger" is, of course, one of the traditional features of the pursued woman, and here Daunger is the name of a particular guardian of the island whom Scudamour must overcome before he can get to the temple. But "daungerous" in its archaic sense means nothing more than resistant to love, unattainable.9 Scudamour describes this character as "an hideous Giant, dreadfull to behold" (IV.x.19) and seems reduced to alternatingly self-deprecating and forceful behavior:

But I though meanest man of many moe,
Yet much disdaining unto him to lout,
Or creepe between his legs, so in to goe,
Resolv'd him to assault with manhood stout.

(IV.x.19)

Daunger's powers produce a sense of humiliation in the knight: he fears he may be degraded into creeping between the giant's legs, so he reacts with an aggressive assertion of "stout manhood." The sexual implications of this are quite clear, as Scudamour, psychologically confronting female power reflected in female resistance, fears to "creep" between her legs in a less-than-ideally masculine

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9 The Oxford English Dictionary offers "reluctant to give, accede, or comply" as one archaic meaning of the word "daungerous."
fashion. So he responds with a manly assault, much as he responds to the surroundings in the Temple of Venus with his assault on Amoret. Scudamour reveals an even more intense gynephobia when he looks back at Daunger after he has passed it and sees that the giant's hindparts are "much more deformed fearfull ugly...than all his former parts did erst appear" (IV.x.20). This vision of horrible hinder regions recalls the description of Duessa, ultimate female temptress, when her "nether parts, the shame of all her kind" are revealed to be deformed and monstrous (I.viii.48). And of course the earliest authority for this depiction of women as hiding a secret physical loathsomeness beneath a surface veneer is the medieval patristic writers, who perceived feminine sexuality as the ultimate danger to men's souls. Scudamour's reaction to Daunger and its hideous hindquarters echos a long tradition of gynephobia which specifically links feminine sexuality with spiritual danger.

The final indication of Scudamour's ambivalence about love comes when he sees the pairs of lovers walking in the arbors on the island, and compares them to the pairs of male friends. His comments about the lovers are sparse:

And therein thousand payres of lovers walkt,
Praysing their god, and yeelding him great
  thanks,
Ne ever ought but of their true loves talkt,
Ne ever for rebuke or blame of any balkt.
  (IV.x.25)
But immediately following the only really positive thing Scudamour has to say about these lovers (that they "sport / Their spotlesse pleasures, and sweet loves content"
[IV.x.26]), he waxes eloquent about the pairs of male friends:

But farre away from these, another sort
Of lovers lincked in true harts consent;
Which loved not as these, for like intent,
But on chast vertue grounded their desire,
Farre from all fraud, or fayned blandishment;
Which in their spirits kindling zealous fire,
Brave thoughts and noble deeds did evermore aspire.  (IV.x.26)

Not only does Scudamour describe the pairs of friends in far more glowing terms than he does the pairs of lovers (an attitude perhaps understandable since in this era male friendship was considered the highest form of love); his depiction of the lovers is also, by implication, quite negative here. In fact, he seems directly to contradict the scant praise he accorded them earlier. At the beginning of the stanza, he mentions the lovers' "spotlesse pleasures," suggesting a chaste, blameless love. But a few lines later he explicitly contrasts the friends to the lovers ("Which loved not as these") by declaring that the friends' love is grounded in chaste virtue, thus implying that the lovers' is not. And an even more dire implication appears in the next line: in an echo of the language he uses to introduce the friends and distinguish them from the lovers, "But farre away from these," Scudamour declares that the friends are
"Farre from all fraud, or fayned blandishment." Thus he portrays the lovers, by implication, as lustful and false.
Furthermore, Scudamour explicitly prefers the friends' state to his own:

> Which when as I, that never tasted blis,  
> Nor happie howre, beheld with gazefull eye,  
> I thought there was none other heaven then this;  
> And gan their endlesse happinesse envye,  
> That being free from feare and gealousye,  
> Might frankely there their loves desire possesse;  
> Whilst I through paines and perlous iepardie,  
> Was forst to seeke my lifes deare patronesse:  
> Much dearer be the things, which come through hard distresse. (IV.x.28)

This passage contains several pertinent revelations, not the least of which is that Scudamour equates sexual love with fear and jealousy, an attitude that becomes obvious at the House of Busirane when Scudamour cannot save Amoret because of his "greedy will and envious desire."

Envy and its partner jealousy are important characteristics of the kind of love this young knight represents; he is not only quick to envy Britomart and feel jealousy over Amoret, but he also confesses envy of the friends he sees on the island. He perceives them as endlessly happy in contrast to his own precarious state as he goes in search of Amoret, and although his last line seems to validate his quest for his love, in fact it sounds like a non sequitur in the context of his earlier remarks about love. That last sententious line suggests that Scudamour is hastily reverting to his public role as the
chivalrous knight, Cupid's man. Whether Spenser means Scudamour to represent an embittered love, or whether these attitudes exist originally as part of the kind of love expressed by "Cupid's man," even before his loss of Amoret and subsequent failure to retrieve her, is impossible to say. Of course his experiences since his visit to Venus's island have embittered him. His telling of the story is surely affected by the fact that Amoret is now gone. But he is supposedly describing the reactions he had to the island and the temple at the time when he first encountered them; also, his maisterie of Amoret when he finds her in the temple, overbearing and unnecessary in the first place, and his subsequent loss of her, indicate that the anxieties he reveals about nature, love, and women are there all along as part of the love inspired by Cupid.

In Scudamour and his story, it might even be possible to see Spenser's exploration of the dynamics of courtly love in particular. Certainly Scudamour's anxieties in the face of the feminine "authorities" in the garden and temple are reminiscent of the anxieties and disapproval that surround Britomart's exercise of authority in Book III, and by analogy, all these anxieties about feminine power point back to the figure of Elizabeth on the throne. And courtly love, particularly in its Petrarchan mode, is one symbolic system through which Elizabeth's courtiers could acknowledge the queen's power and yet achieve some sense of mastery over it
as well, since the Petrarchan model proposes the fiction of the woman in control and yet enacts the power of the man who authors the entire relationship. If Scudamour's story is in part Spenser's exploration of the attitudes underlying courtly love, then what his story reveals is that aggression, the will to master, underlies this kind of love, and it is fear of feminine authority which feeds that aggression.

Certainly the attitude toward nature apparent in Scudamour's story suggests anxiety, even fear of nature's power. The Temple of Venus and surrounding island have been traditionally read as a positive depiction of the union of art and nature in which art uses nature well, and to good ends. However, Scudamour's depiction of the mingling of art and nature portrays nature as vaguely sinister and possibly threatening; the knight reserves his unadulterated praise for the art of men. For instance, he enthusiastically describes the man-made bridge, "ybuilt in goodly wize" to circumvent nature's defense of the island from "invaders wrong" (IV.x.6). The bridge is constructed with

stones of rich assay,
Cast into sundry shapes by wondrous skill,
That like on earth no where I reckon may:
And underneath the river rolling still
With murmure soft, that seem'd to serve the workmans will. (IV.x.15)

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10 See, for example, Hamilton, The Faerie Queene, 499.
This passage indicates Scudamour's essential anxiety about traditional forms of authority: always he fears that they are about to be undermined. Here, he admires the workmanship of the bridge, but all the time that powerful natural presence underneath forces itself into his consciousness. The workman's will seems to have prevailed, but Scudamour's use of that characteristic Spenserian signal, "seems," implies his doubt that the natural force of the river has in fact been mastered by art.

Just as Scudamour's comments about love oscillate between those appropriate to his public image and those that reveal a severe anxiety and resentment, so his remarks about his surroundings on the island are ambiguous rather than entirely negative. He describes the natural bounty of the island in glowing terms: "faire lawnds," "sweet springs," "delightful bowers," and so on (IV.x.24), but his overall appraisal invites comment: "In such luxurious plentie of all pleasure,/ It seem'd a second paradise to ghesse" (IV.x.23). First, he doubly qualifies this apparently positive remark with "seem'd" and "to ghesse." Second, the word "luxurious" is by no means unambiguously positive, suggesting as it does a sensual extravagance that we might associate not so much with Venus's island as we do with the Bower of Bliss, a "Paradise" (II.xii.70) where Verdant spends his days in "wasteful luxuree" (II.xii.80). Scudamour's anxieties surely stem at least in part from a fear of ending up
emasculated and entrapped, as Verdant does in the lap of the Acrasia, his weapons hung up in a tree, his shield erased.\footnote{Parker, 24-30, discusses the symbols of emasculation in this scene.} The luxury of the surrounding island contributes to Acrasia's sexual mastery of Verdant, as the poet emphasizes in his lush description of Acrasia's realm. Even Guyon is temporarily overcome when his gaze is "mastered," riveted by the nymphs at play in the fountain, until the Palmer rebukes his "wandering eyes" (II.xii.69). This island's natural beauty is indeed a product of art, but only in the sense that art vies with nature to create a supranatural setting, a nature more lavish, ripe, and overblown than nature itself. And the beautiful surroundings on the island are to be feared for their power over the human senses: Guyon must suffer "no delight/ To sink into his sense, nor mind affect" (II.xii.53) in order ultimately to exert his violent authority over the Bower of Bliss and its mistress. Just so, Scudamour's veiled anxieties about the power of generative love and the power of nature on Venus's island reflect his fear of being mastered. He ends his description of the island's flowers and trees (whether planted or naturally growing) with another overtly laudatory sentiment that contains an anxious undercurrent: "Nor hart could wish for any queint device,/ But there it present was, and did
Scudamour's fears about sexual love and the power of nature reflect a larger fear of woman which finds its psychic center in his experience within the Temple of Venus. Woman, as symbolically represented by Venus, is the matrix of his anxieties. According to Scudamour, her power consists of an authority over love and an authority over nature, as his epithets point out: "The temple of great Venus, that is hight/ The Queene of beautie, and of love the mother" (IV.x.29). But this seemingly simple phrase points beyond the imagined arenas of feminine power (love and beauty) to actual feminine authorities, perhaps the only real feminine authorities: mother, and in this period, queen. These authorities—the political and what we might call the psychological realms of feminine power—do come together at the Temple of Venus. Outside the temple sits Concord, whose costume ("a crowne/ She wore much like unto a  

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12 Sherry B. Ortner, "Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?" in Woman, Culture, and Society, ed. Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974), 67-87. Ortner suggests that one explanation for the pan-cultural devaluation and subordination of women might be that women are perceived as "natural" beings, linked with a nature that must be conquered if culture is to prevail.
Danisk hood,/ Poudred with pearle and stone" [IV.x.31])
recalls Queen Elizabeth's dress, as Osgood has noted.¹³ This
majestic figure controls such cosmic forces as love and
hate, and produces such virtues as Peace and Friendship.
However, the narrator presents the scope of her power
ambiguously: he claims at first that she controls the
course of the heavens and the world, but then he mentions
that the Almighty has, from the beginning, bound these
natural forces with "inviolable bands." However, Concord
too "holds them with her blessed hands" (IV.x.35), a shift
which may suggest the movement from a heavenly to a temporal
power. Just as the monarch is supposed to be God's earthly
representative, so Concord's blessed hands appear to
reinforce, in human fashion, the Almighty's inviolable
bands. If this figure of Concord whom Scudamour confronts
at the entrance to the Temple does suggest the authority of
a female monarch, then his initial reaction to her bespeaks
his uneasiness about such authority: "By her I entring halfe
dismayed was" (IV.x.35). However, his real enemy is Hatred,
a male figure who threatens to brain Scudamour with his club
(yet another "assault with manhood stout"?) but is
restrained by Concord herself. The configuration of this
scene, in which the authoritative figure of Concord sits
before the Temple of Venus, suggests that the Temple, a

¹³ The Works of Spenser: A Variorum Edition, Volume 4,
226.
womblike enclosure where feminine sexuality reigns over
generation, "lies behind" (literally and figuratively) the
power of the female monarch which is implied in Concord. In
this iconography, the natural and maternal authority of the
feminine (who is "of love the mother") reinforces the
political authority of Queen Elizabeth; the political
authority of a woman and the generative authority of the
feminine are here inextricably bound together.

The anxieties about nature and generation which
Spenser has depicted as an integral part of this figure,
"Cupid's man," explain Scudamour's irrational dismay when he
approaches Concord: although she is not a particularly
menacing figure, she does embody both the personal and
political authority of woman, and anxiety about such
authority may be one basis for the mastering impulse that
informs courtly love. But the specter of feminine authority
threatens Scudamour nowhere as much as in the Temple itself.
Once in the Temple, his attention immediately focuses upon
the "thousand pretious gifts worth many a pound,/ The which
sad lovers for their vowes did pay" (IV.x.37). These lines
echo earlier sentiments wherein Scudamour revealed his
resentment that love cannot be purchased and his anxiety
that the quest for love is more painful than it's worth.
Throughout the Temple episode, Scudamour's attention is
drawn to the sad lovers in thrall to Venus. Of course, they
represent his greatest fears: tormented by love, languishing
at the foot of Venus's altar, they are dominated by the mysterious figure of the goddess. Venus herself appears both menacing and fascinating in Scudamour's depiction. She "in shape and beauty did excell/ All other Idoles" (IV.x.40), according to Scudamour; however, what is unknown about Venus seems to disturb him. "The cause why she was covered with a vele,/ Was hard to know," he says, and later, "They say, she hath both kinds in one,/ Both male and female, both under one name" (IV.x.41). This Venus looks forward to the Isis of Book V who, both through the iconography of her statue in the Church as well as through her role in Britomart's dream, appears to contain and control some masculine force or violence. Scudamour stands in awe of the possibly hermaphroditic Venus of Book IV just as will Britomart when she confronts Isis in Book V, but the similarity of their reactions ends there: Britomart relaxes in the presence of the hermaphroditic Isis to the extent that she disarms and goes to sleep at the foot of the idol; Scudamour remains perpetually uneasy in the Temple. Much of his depiction of Venus focuses nervously on the mysterious and unknown: the substance of her altar ("uneath to understand"), her body which is hidden, her sexual nature. Further, Scudamour mentions her reputed hermaphroditism in terms that emphasize her resulting self-sufficiency, a focus which suggests again the young knight's uneasiness in the face of feminine authority: "She syre and mother is her
selfe alone,/ Begets and eke conceives, ne needeth other none" (IV.x.41). In this realm of women, he suggests, men are not needed. The power of the feminine presence awes him, and it is her power that his story emphasizes.

In perhaps the most telling moment in his narrative, Scudamour reports the hymn to Venus that breaks forth from one of her supplicants. The hymn's focus is, of course, the overwhelming power wielded by the goddess:

So all the world by thee at first was made,
And daily yet thou dost the same repayre:
Ne ought on earth that merry is and glad,
Ne ought on earth that lovely is and fayre,
But thou the same for pleasure didst prepayre.
Thou art the root of all that joyous is,
Great God of men and women, queene of the ayre,
Mother of laughter, and welspring of blisse,
O graunt that of my love at last I may not misse.
(IV.x.47)

Although this part of the long hymn (which Scudamour reports in full, at such length that by the end it is hard to recall that it is not Scudamour speaking) depicts Venus as all-powerful but benevolent as well, the last line which beseeches her reminds us that the praise is sung by one of the lovers described above as "piteously complayning."

Further, the explicit depiction here of Venus as goddess of generation brings to the surface the idea of maternity which has been present sub-textually for some time. Although the mother is not overtly present in this canto, the womblike enclosure of the temple itself, the references to Venus as "mother" (of love, laughter, and so on), as well as the
masculine fear of enclosure by the feminine which Scudamour expresses in his encounter with Daunger and implies in his fear of nature, all serve to suggest that maternity is an important concept in this canto. Indeed, the perceived power of maternity is one explanation for masculine fears of feminine authority; the figure of the mother can represent both the supposed bliss of what Lacan calls the imaginary order, the period when the child perceives himself and his mother as one, or, to take another point of view, the mother might also represent a fearsome original authority which threatens obliteration to the child's perceived "self."

According to Robert J. Stoller in his discussion of the male child's primary identification with the mother, "If he and the mother do not set up a reaction in which both willingly ... decide that they will relieve each other's bodies and psyches from the oneness of the womb ... then the boy will be enfolded in his mother."

Both possible readings of the mother seem to exist here: Scudamour's depiction of the

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figure who encompassses maternal authority is ambiguous; the Venus is attractive but frightening as well.

Faced with this feminine authority, Scudamour reacts aggressively, and his response is surely the result of fear as it is when he confronts Daunger. On seeing Amoret sitting at the feet of Venus, the knight approaches her, and when the figure of Womanhood rebukes him for being "over bold," he claims the privilege of Cupid's man and shows her the shield on which Cupid and his "cruell shafts" are emblazoned, a moment which mirrors the one in which Scudamour assaults Daunger with his stout manhood. Interestingly, Scudamour's assertion of phallic authority is at this point still tempered by his healthy fear of Venus:

And evermore upon the Goddesse face
Mine eye was fixt, for fear of her offence,
Whom when I saw with amiable grace
To laugh at me, and favor my pretence,
I was emboldned with more confidence,
And nought for nicenesse not for envy sparing,
In presence of them all forth led her there.

(IV.x.56)

Although Venus seems to smile on Scudamour, we should not take this to mean that Spenser approves of Scudamour's taking Amoret against her will. For one thing, this entire episode is introduced by the story of Britomart's fight with four knights who resent their earlier defeat at her hands in the tournement for False Florimell. Specifically, they charge her with having "beguyled" them of their loves. In fact, Britomart retorts, she has not stolen the beautiful
False Florimell away from them, but rather "her had to her liking left" (IV.ix.36.9). Arthur, who has entered the action as mediator, reprovès the four knights with these words: ladies, he says, are those

\[ \text{To whom the world this franchise ever yeelded} \\
\text{That of their loves choise they might freedom clame,} \\
\text{And in that right should by all knights be shielded:} \\
\text{Gainst which me seemes this war ye wrongfully have wielded.} \] (IV.ix.37.6-9)

This discussion leads into Scudamour's account of how he won Amoret; it provides an extremely ironic framework, since Scudamour, as he tells his story, reveals that he denied Amoret that very freedom of "loves choise."

Another important clue that Scudamour reacts too strongly to the sign of favor he believes Venus gives him is the use of the word "emboldned." As A. Kent Hieatt has discussed, the word "bold" forms an important link between the House of Busirane and the Temple of Venus. In Busirane's house, Britomart is enjoined to "be bold, be bold," but to "be not too bold," as well. As we have seen, she nearly destroys Amoret because of her overbold impulse to kill Busirane. Scudamour is similarly overpowering as a

\[ \text{\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{Another clue that Scudamour makes a mistake in interpreting Venus's smile as a sign that he may seize Amoret against her will lies in Chaucer's \textit{Parlement of Foules}, in which Venus rules over and smiles on courtship but will not force the female bird to choose a mate, much less allow her to be coerced.}
\footnote{A. Kent Hieatt, "Scudamour's Practice of Maisterie Upon Amoret," \textit{PMLA} 72 (September 1962): 509-510.}
\end{footnotes}} \]
result of his fears, and his overly bold approach to Amoret in which he virtually kidnaps her replays itself psychically in her captivity in Busirane's house.

The two episodes provide a critique of masculine reactions to feminine authority. In the House of Busirane, we saw male figures authoring the cultural representation of women and attempting to control the emptiness they've created. Scudamour's depiction of his "courtship" of Amoret, written later, might be read as Spenser's exploration of the question, why? What inspires Scudamour's proprietary stance and Busirane's use of force? Why does a patriarchal culture "author" women as defeated, captive, violated? The answer offered by a close reading of Scudamour's story is fear: of the female, the mother, the queen, and their perceived powers over forces of nature and generation. So in this sense, Canto X of Book IV is a rewriting of the Scudamour-Amoret story, one that answers previously unanswered questions and furthers our understanding of the events that take place in the earlier book. This development reflects a similar development in Spenser's portrayal of Britomart: in Book III, we saw his uneasiness regarding her assumption of power grow into an almost overtly disapproving depiction; in Books IV and V, the uneasiness remains, but Spenser seems to want to explore the nature of feminine power and masculine responses to it. In Isis Church, the nature of feminine power is a mystery,
just as it is in the Temple of Venus; and in both mystic locations Spenser examines the effect of feminine power on masculine force—a force that seems tamed in Isis Church but which aggressively asserts itself in response to the Temple of Venus.

Spenser's reworking of the story of Scudamour and Amoret is a dark revision, not only because the story ends here with the account of the Temple—Scudamour never finds the Amoret he seeks. When Books IV-VI were first published in 1596, the earlier books were republished along with them, and of course, Spenser changed the ending to the final canto of Book III. That fact is well known, but the way in which he changed the ending is seldom examined. Originally, Britomart and Amoret depart the House of Busirane to find Scudamour awaiting them, and the poet describes the reunion of the two lovers in ecstatic terms. In their embrace, they are compared to "that faire Hermaphrodite," an image that has received much critical attention. Another image that has not been examined, however, is used to describe Scudamour's joy on seeing Amoret:

Straight he upstarted from the loathed layes,
And to her ran with hasty egernesse,
Like as a Deare, that greedily embayes
In the coole soile, after long thirstinesse.

(III.xii.44.5-8: 1590)

The image of a deer in a soile (a pool of water) appears in revised form at the moment when Scudamour captures Amoret in IV.x, but now instead of an image of renewal and joy, we
have an image of entrapment and fear which Scudamour uses to describe his captive:

But I which all that while
The pledge of faith, her hand engaged held,
Like warie Hynd within the weedie soyle,
For no intreatie would forgoe so glorious spoyle.
(IV.x.55.6-9)

Spenser's revision of the image encapsulates his revision of the story. The foundation of this relationship is not a pledge of faith but rather a show of force, and Scudamour, who in Book III might still be judged a sincere, even spiritual lover, drawn to his beloved like a hind to running water in an echo of the psalm, is in Book IV reinterpreted as a hunter capturing his "glorious spoyle" and doomed to lose her because she is for him precisely an object of desire.
At the start of this study I showed how *The Faerie Queene* expresses certain cultural anxieties which Queen Elizabeth's reign brings to the surface. The unmarried queen accepts no masculine authority in her life, either personal or political. Thus she violates an essential assumption about the role of woman in a patriarchal culture. Nevertheless, she is a powerful queen whose ascension to the throne came at a time when the country desperately needed stability in leadership. Elizabeth's impressive intelligence and powerful personality, along with the country's readiness to accept this daughter of Henry VIII and the stability her reign promised, helped her unusual monarchy to succeed. Spenser's overt purpose in writing *The Faerie Queene* is, at least in part, to glorify his queen, and indeed this queen was the object of lavish praise and glorification in many Elizabethan texts. Despite the fact that we are now beginning to recognize the ambivalence or even disapproval that sometimes lies beneath the surface of praise in some of these texts, still, Elizabeth was much
loved; and there are indications that she was in certain ways central to her subjects' emotional lives even as she also represented safety, stability, and the growing power of England on the world scene. The queen's overtly feminine roles of mother and beloved lady seem to take on substance and resonance in Elizabethan culture: it might even be possible that Elizabeth's "body natural" was as important to her people as was their sense of her "body politic." A woman's body is the matrix of her worth: her chastity is her value and her chastity is a component of her body. Although Elizabeth's aim in manipulating her representation seems to have been, toward the end of her reign, to emphasize her body's symbolic possibility (that is, the representation of her body as the immutable "body politic"), it would be wrong to say that she hides her natural body. Rather, her strategies seek to reify the natural body, to create a natural body that is an icon of the body politic rather than an actual human being.

Louis Montrose relates an account written by a French ambassador to Elizabeth's court in 1597 which sheds light on Elizabeth's attitude toward her "body natural." The old queen dressed as all young ladies did until they married, with her bosom displayed—not only that, but, according to the ambassador, she frequently drew the front of her dress open to display the front of her body down to the navel, thus revealing as much of her body as possible and drawing
attention to her breasts and belly, as well.¹ Montrose points to the contrast between the "immutable body politic" of Elizabeth as displayed in court portraits and the ambassador's description of "her sixty-five year old body natural."² But perhaps the most interesting implication of the story is that Elizabeth herself clearly has no regard for her body as it actually is—her breasts are wrinkled, according to the ambassador, and could no longer in their actual appearance easily take on the symbolic significance of the bountiful and selfless breasts of the mother. But the queen displays them in this symbolic sense anyway, as well as in a provocative fashion, which is also inappropriate to the reality of her "body natural." Any realistic sense of her actual body seems subsumed by her body's symbolic significance.

Like Elizabeth's, Belphoebe's is the "body natural" made public icon: her beauty is an object of regard for the male characters and the male poet as well. As one of the few acknowledged figures of Queen Elizabeth in the poem, Belphoebe's presentation must be flattering, and indeed at


² Ibid., 67.
her first appearance in the poem the poet describes her in superhuman terms and in closer detail than he does any other woman in The Faerie Queene:

   Her face so faire as flesh it seemed not,  
   But heavenly pourtraict of bright Angels hew,  
   Cleare as the skie, withouten blame or blot,  
   Through goodly mixture of complexions dew;  
   And in her cheekes the vermeill red did shew  
   Like roses in a bed of lillies shed,  
   The which ambrosiall odours from them threw,  
   And gazers sense with double pleasure fed,  
   Hable to heale the sick, and to revive the ded.  
   (II.iii.22)

The poet is obviously seeking to flatter Elizabeth with this Petrarchan depiction of her face as both flowerbed and holy angel's visage. The topos of inability that has been noted by Thomas Cain is present, too, as it so often is in Spenser's addresses to his queen:3

   So glorious mirrhour of celestiall grace,  
   And soveraine moniment of mortall vowes,  
   How shall fraile pen descrive her heavenly face,  
   For feare through want of skill her beautie to disgrace? (II.iii.25.6-9)

The poet may represent himself as unable to do justice to Belphoebe's heavenly beauty, but he does make a valiant effort—nine stanzas of description of Belphoebe's physical features.

   The elaborate blazon befits this Diana-figure.  
Belphoebe is a virgin-huntress who inhabits the forest, and as we learn later, she and her twin, Amoret, were born of the nymph Chrysogonee but raised by two different goddesses:

3 Cain, 10 and following.
Amoret by Venus, Belphoebe by Diana. Her name reflects her origins: she is Bel-Phoebe, or a beautiful Diana (since Phoebe is another name for the chaste moon goddess). When Belphoebe confronts the surprised Braggadocchio, her relationship to Diana becomes apparent, for the episode contains allusions to the myth of Actaeon, the unfortunate hunter who came upon Diana bathing and was transformed into a stag, then torn apart by his own dogs. Trompart and Braggadocchio are a broadly comic version of Actaeon and his companion hunters: the two "knights," far from boldly hunting in the forest, are in fact creeping along in terror at every rustle of leaf or whistle of the wind. But when they encounter Belphoebe, she is hunting, searching for a wounded hind she has shot. Trompart speaks to her first because Braggadocchio, the coward, hearing her approach, hides in the bushes. When Belphoebe sees the bush in which he is hiding move, she assumes she has found her hind and aims an arrow into its leaves. The case of mistaken identity suggests a relationship between Braggadocchio and a hunted stag, a relationship which recalls Actaeon, particularly since both have chanced upon Belphoebe in the woods. And although Belphoebe is not bathing as was Diana when Actaeon saw her, Braggadocchio's subsequent clumsy, lustful lunge at Belphoebe puts him in the same category as
Actaeon, who is usually understood to have had a licentious motive for spying on Diana.\textsuperscript{4}

Nancy Vickers has suggested a connection between the Actaeon myth and the Petrarchan blazon: she reads the blazon, the numbering and description of the woman's body parts, as a dismemberment of the woman in response to the woman's perceived power to dismember the man who views her (just as Actaeon is torn apart after he watches Diana bathing). The threat inherent in a feminine totality which is different, essentially other to the male, is neutralized through this "descriptive dismemberment."\textsuperscript{5} In the case of Belphoebe, a figure who shadows the actual power of Elizabeth the Queen, the threat is even more overt, since Elizabeth has literal power of dismemberment over her subjects. Maureen Quilligan, building on Vickers' interpretation of the blazon, reads the description of Belphoebe at her initial appearance in Book II not only as a dismemberment that dismantles the threat posed by a powerful woman, but also as a potentially comic moment. "In Spenser's blazon Belphoebe has a conspicuous 'ham,' and the

\textsuperscript{4} According to Leonard Barkan in his essay entitled "Diana and Actaeon: The Myth as Synthesis," the most widespread version of this myth makes Actaeon's motive for watching Diana "intentional voyeurism" (324). \textit{English Literary Renaissance} 10 (Autumn 1980): 317-59.

folk festival that bedecks the pillars that are like her legs has a hint of the carnivalesque."\(^6\) (Her legs are described as "two faire marble pillours" supporting the gods' temple and bedecked by the people "with girlands greene" [II.iii.28]). The comic element in this moment, as well as other moments involving both Belphoebe and Britomart, Quilligan reads as Spenser's attempt to defuse and even at times belittle the power of female authority, with specific reference to Elizabeth's very real power.

Thus Belphoebe is a threat, embodying as she does a feminine power with a threatening analogue in real life. Interestingly, Spenser specifically paints Belphoebe's power as Amazonian. Belphoebe is a warrior-huntress who is clearly (though never overtly) linked to the cruel and emasculating Amazon Radigund. Spenser also compares Belphoebe to Penthesilia in the simile which Harry Berger found so conspicuously irrelevant.\(^7\) The Amazon of legend was sometimes used in popular writing to represent Queen

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\(^6\) Quilligan, "The Comedy of Female Authority," 165.

\(^7\) Harry Berger, Jr., The Allegorical Temper: Vision and Reality in Book II of Spenser's Faerie Queene (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), 123-32. He suggests that the technique of "conspicuous irrelevance" is "the basic strategy of Spenser's allegorical method" (123) and uses the comparison between Belphoebe and Penthesilia as an example of this technique. Berger concludes that the apparently irrelevant reference to Penthesilia brings the death and war of human history into an otherwise completely mythological picture, enriching the texture of Belphoebe's description and refracting "the poem's central issues onto the image of Belphoebe" (128).
Elizabeth, although she herself never drew this comparison; in Chapter Two, I showed how Spenser avoids the comparison as well, setting Britomart and Elizabeth apart from Penthesilia, mentioning them in the same stanza but clearly distancing his knight and his queen from the Amazon who helped to defend Troy in battle. Yet he does not hesitate to describe Belphoebe in these terms; even more interesting, he focuses on Penthesilia's death rather than her triumph in his simile:

Or as that famous Queene
Of Amazons, whom Pyrrhus did destroy,
The day that first of Priame she was seene,
Did shew her selfe in great triumphant joy,
To succour the weake state of sad afflicted Troy.
(II.iii.31.5-9)

The story of Penthesilia's death has several versions, but in one she is killed by Pyrrhus, the cruel son of Achilles, while in most other stories she is reported to have been killed by Achilles himself, who then unlaced her helmet, saw her beauty revealed, and wept with regret that he had killed her. In still other versions Achilles cannot bring himself to kill her after he sees her beauty revealed. The allusion to Penthesilia's death here at Belphoebe's introduction foreshadows the moments in Books IV and V when Arthegall will be defeated by the beauty of an Amazon:

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first by Britomart, whom Spenser hesitates to link directly to the Amazons and who in fact does not defeat Arthegall per se when he is stunned by her beauty. Rather, theirs is a mutual inability to continue the fight, and if anything it is she who is captive to him after he "brings her to bay" at the end of their courtship. Radigund's story most clearly echoes Penthesilia's: Arthegall knocks her down in battle and is prepared to administer the final blow when her face is uncovered and its beauty unmans him, and he becomes her captive. The same story, or some version of it, is suggested in Spenser's initial description of Belphoebe, thus linking her to Radigund. Also, her attire is that of an Amazon, as Nohrnberg points out, and so parallels Radigund's. Each wears a "camus" (a loose dress), although Belphoebe's is white and gold, and Radigund's is crimson and silver—also, Radigund immodestly tucks hers up at times, while Belphoebe's hangs down "below her ham" (II.iii.27 and V.v.2). And both wear buskins, laced boots, in both cases described as embroidered with gold.

Thus Belphoebe is an Amazon as well as a virginal huntress, and so a potentially threatening figure. Further, her obduracy may explain in part Spenser's treatment of her. Amoret's twin, she exemplifies the opposite of Amoret's vulnerability: Belphoebe's impermeable body is a fortress;

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9 Nohrnberg, 457.
the counterpart of Amoret's gaping wound in Belphoebe's history is the ruby cut in the shape of a bleeding heart.\textsuperscript{10} Nancy Vickers discusses the Actaeon myth as a parable of the male's fear of the female's exposed body and its vulnerability. In Belphoebe, such exposed vulnerability never occurs. Vickers reads in the story of Actaeon a reference to incest and transgression: the myth evokes the powerless male child's fear at the sight of the powerful and forbidden woman—the mother—who also, when viewed, appears to lack body parts he has and so suggests the possibility of castration.\textsuperscript{11} The difference between that primal mother-figure and Belphoebe is that the actual body of the mother, and Diana's body in the Actaeon myth, are exposed; the body of Belphoebe remains a secret "enviously" guarded. But the denial of the "body natural," the obduracy of Belphoebe's public mask which withholds access to the yielding woman's body lying behind the mask, may be cause for anxiety just as would the encounter with the forbidden body of the mother.

The denial of Elizabeth's "body natural," her specifically feminine identity, might have unexpected

\textsuperscript{10} Judith Anderson describes the ruby which leads Belphoebe to Timias as "a jeweler's replica of Amoret's heart in the Masque of Cupid" (59). See "'In living colours and right hew': The Queen of Spenser's Central Books" in \textit{Poetic Traditions of the English Renaissance}, ed. Maynard Mack and George deForest Lord. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 47-66.

\textsuperscript{11} Vickers, 103.
repercussions in her subjects, for whom her sexual identity expressed in her femininity seems to have been an important component of their response to her. Louis Montrose has described a dream recorded in the 1597 diary of one Simon Forman, physician and astrologer, that suggests something of the role Queen Elizabeth's sexual identity may have played in the emotional and psychic lives of her subjects. Forman dreamed of walking through the lanes of London in the company of the queen, "a little elderly woman in a coarse white petticoat." In the dream, he pulls the queen away from the embrace of another man, jokes and laughs with her, and awakens just as she is becoming "very familiar" with him and seems to "begin to love" him. Montrose shows how the dream reveals "mother, mistress, and monarch" present in the one figure, the queen.\(^{12}\) And desire for that figure is expressed, both in the terms of political and sexual desire, in the pun "to wait upon." Forman asks the queen if he may "wait on her," but then in the course of the dream explicates the pun inherent in this expression: "Then said I, 'I mean to wait upon you and not under you, that I might make this belly a little bigger.'" In Montrose's words, "the subject's desire for employment (to wait upon) coexists with his desire for mastery (to weight upon)."\(^ {13}\) This

\(^{12}\) Montrose, 65-67.

\(^{13}\) Ibid., 68.
mastery is of course specifically sexual; the dreamer suggests impregnating his sovereign as his way of serving her. Montrose uses the dream to show the doublings of political and sexual forms in Elizabethan culture—to suggest the way in which, under Elizabeth, the sexual and political are inextricably intertwined. But a further aspect of Forman's dream that is worth mentioning is the way in which the sexual character of his relationship with his queen is given primacy. Yes, the figure in the dream is identified by Forman in his diary as the queen, and the fact that she is old might identify her as a maternal figure. But most of the action of the dream depicts a sexual relationship between the two: the dreamer's jealousy when another man embraces her, his attempts to get her away and have her to himself, his sexual punning, and eventually (at the end of the dream) their dalliance as she becomes "familiar" with him. In fact, his jokingly stated desire to "wait upon her" seems to result in the fulfillment of that desire—or at least the dream is heading in that direction when he awakens, as the queen begins to love him and seems about to kiss him.

That Elizabeth's male subjects interacted with her through the terms of desire has been demonstrated before. The language of Petrarchanism which both they and she used placed her in the position of desirable yet unobtainable lady, as did to a lesser extent the various goddess-names
applied to her (Diana, Phoebe, Cynthia, and so on). However, although tradition depicts such figures as Petrarch's Laura and the goddess of the moon as unobtainable, in fact it is clear that Elizabeth's subjects did regard their "desires" as in part obtainable through the manipulation of Petrarchan discourse, just as Forman dreams of obtaining his queen's favors through a kind of sexual mastery. Elizabeth's courtiers used Petrarchan language to describe their very real attempts to gain favor, patronage, and preferment. An extreme example of the actual and pressing hope that might lie behind the Petrarchan mode of address may be found in Essex's letter to Elizabeth on 6 September, 1600, when he was in custody after his attempted rebellion. "Haste, paper, to that happy presence, whence only unhappy I am banished! Kiss that fair correcting hand," he wrote in an echo of Petrarch's "Ite, caldi sospiri, al freddo core!" (Go, burning sighs, to that cold bosom!). He may be consciously or unconsciously echoing Petrarch here, but the hope that his Laura will fulfill his desire presses more urgently than Petrarch's hopes ever did. Here, Petrarchan language is the vehicle through which Essex pleads for his life—and fails. At other times, such a depiction of Elizabeth as the "cruel fair" who forbids her

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lovers' desires might serve a courtier who wants to be reinstated in Elizabeth's favor, receive some sort of preferment, or a host of other common desires that any courtier might express.

An understanding of the actual expectations which lie behind much of the Petrarchanism in the Elizabethan court--coupled with the suggestion present in Simon Forman's dream, that the desire for the queen has a strong sexual component or is expressed, at least unconsciously, in a clearly sexual language--provides us with a shift in focus when reading Spenser's Belphoebe. Perhaps Belphoebe is a threat not, like Diana, because of what she exposes, but rather because of what she keeps hidden.

Belphoebe neither allows nor admits sexual desire: Spenser makes that very clear in her involvement with Timias, Arthur's squire. After she rescues him when he lies dying from wounds received in a fight with three foresters, he falls in love with her. Recovering from his physical wounds, he begins to waste away as a result of emotional wounds, the wounds of love he suffers in the presence of Belphoebe:

O foolish Physick, and unfruitful paine,  
That heales up one and makes another wound:  
She his hurt thigh to him recur'd againe,  
But hurt his hart, the which before was sound.  
(III.v.42.1-4)

The poet implicitly criticizes Belphoebe for her "foolish physick," since she is the physician who both heals and
wounds Timias; Judith Anderson points out another such implied criticism in the line "Madnesse to save a part, and lose the whole" (III.v.43.3). Not only does Belphoebe fail to respond to Timias's love: she does not even recognize the nature of his "malady," worrying rather that the original wound has failed to heal. Further, the poet suggests that even had she understood that he loved her, she would not or could not have provided relief and fulfilled his desire:

Many Restoratives of vertues rare,
And costly Cordialles she did apply,
To mitigate his stubborne mallady:
But that sweet Cordiall, which can restore
A love-sick hart, she did to him envy;
To him, and to all th'unworthy world forlore
She did envy that soveraigne salve, in secret store.
(III.v.50.2-9)

The choice of the word "envy" is telling here, implying as it does greed, a hoarding instinct rather than the virtue Spenser is supposedly praising in Belphoebe. The entire passage, which continues for six stanzas, while it seems a paean of praise for Belphoebe (and by analogy, for Elizabeth's virginity), in fact subverts its own praise through the language used to depict Belphoebe's "fresh, flowering Maidenhead" (III.v.54.6).

Belphoebe's virginity is in this passage suggested by the rose which she tenders "more deare then life"; she hides

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this flower from any threat, "lapped up her silken leaves most chaire/ When so the froward skye began to lowre"

(III.v.51.6-7). This rose, like the "sweet Cordiall" which could restore Timias, is withheld by Belphoebe, guarded "enviously" in the earlier stanza and "charily" here. Further, all women are advised to embellish their beauty with this rose of virginity:

To youre faire selves a faire ensample frame,
Of this faire virgin, this Belphoebe faire,
To whom in perfect love, and spotlesse fame
Of chastitie, none living may compaire:
Ne poysnous Envy justly can empaire
The prayse of her fresh flowring Maidenhead;
For thy she standeth on the highest staire
Of th'honorable stage of womanhead,
That Ladies all may follow her ensample dead.

(III.v.54)

Several phrases and words used in this stanza are striking. The tone of the first two lines, with their emphasis on the adjective "fair," is difficult to identify. Judith Anderson finds it "insistent, even anxiously so," but also finds a logical reason for the repetition: to create a sense of the links between a series of steps, from fair ladies, to a generalized fair example, to the more exclusive form of virginity, and finally to Belphoebe herself.\(^\text{16}\) Certainly she accurately describes the "steps" in this equation, and indeed Belphoebe's position on the highest stair is noteworthy for several reasons, among them the problematic

\(^{16}\) Ibid., 54.
connection thus implied between the kinds of chastity exemplified by the knight of chastity herself and the virgin huntress: if Belphoebe's virginity stands "on the highest staire," are we to understand that Britomart's movement toward holy matrimony is deficient, a somewhat lesser version of chastity? This would have to be our understanding of the matter if it were not for the fact that Spenser so carefully undercuts all the praise he heaps with equal care on Belphoebe, his queen's avatar. Her position on the highest stair begins to totter if we hear an echo from the Amoretti here: "She that standeth on the highest staire/ Falls lowest." And to return to that troublesome "faire": the link between the fair ladies whom Spenser addresses and Belphoebe, his paragon, is clear without a fourfold repetition of the word. I think we can also hear the hint of parody in the repetition of "faire," much as we do in Sidney's "With so sweet voice, and by sweet Nature so/ In sweetest strength, so sweetly skill'd withal/ In all sweet stratagems sweet Art can show" (Astrophil and Stella XXXVI). That the lady is fair and sweet has been stated so often that a restatement easily becomes parodic. Here is another instance, such as those Maureen Quilligan has identified, where the figure of Belphoebe is undercut through the use of humor; Spenser seems to parody the project of praising the sweet, fair, and virtuous lady.
Another interesting thing about this stanza is the ambiguity surrounding the phrases "none living may compaire" and "follow her ensample dead." As Judith Anderson has shown, although Belphoebe's "ensample dead" refers to her example which will live on after her death, it may also suggest that her example, specifically her virginal example, is dead. Perhaps "none living" may compare to her because the example she sets better fits some otherworldly realm than it does human life on earth.\footnote{These ideas are either stated or implied by Anderson, 55-58.} Spenser's use of Penthesilia dead, rather than Penthesilia alive and fighting, for his simile at Belphoebe's introduction in Book II strikes a similar note: Belphoebe is a lifeless rather than a vital figure. To take this analysis a step further, if all living ladies did follow Belphoebe's example, death would indeed be the result since procreation would stop. Such a reading may seem to push the passage too far and veer into the ridiculously literal until we consider the placement of the stanza in question: at the very end of canto v, leading into canto vi which contains the famous Garden of Adonis episode. The Garden of Adonis is the seminary for all life, a \textit{locus amoenus} which is specifically a locus of procreation, having at its exact center the perpetual love-making of Venus and Adonis. The Garden is carefully placed at the mid-point of Book III, a placement which indicates
the importance of the fruits of sexuality to Spenser's understanding of chastity.

According to Anderson, "Spenser saw ... clearly the temporal, human cost--to Belphoebe and Timias both--of the fully realized Petrarchan vision"--that is, the vision of the eternally unobtainable lady pursued eternally by her lover.\(^{18}\) However, his treatment of Belphoebe seems to me far from sympathetic. The "cost" to Belphoebe of fulfilling the role of goddess-Petrarchan lady is not readily apparent; the cost to Timias is. By maintaining her impervious surface, Belphoebe loses humanity, but the loss does not appear to distress her. Timias, on the other hand, loses everything, including his vocation as Arthur's squire, in order to serve the object of his adoration who yet "envies" him the "soveraigne salve" of her love. Interestingly, later in the same passage, Spenser echoes his earlier choice of that word "envy" to describe Belphoebe's attitude toward her virginity: now he asserts, "Ne poysnous Envy justly can empaire/ The prayse of her fresh flowring Maidenhead."

"Envy" is now "poisonous," closer to the "hatefull hellish snake" jealousy of canto xi than to the "envy" which suggests guardianship. In fact, the former version of envy will characterize Belphoebe more accurately as we move into Book IV.

\(^{18}\) Ibid., 58.
Belphoebe and Timias make a final appearance in Book IV when they rescue Amoret from the allegorical character Lust. Belphoebe pursues the villain and slays him with her bow and arrow—an admirable action, but one described in strange terms. Spenser pictures the moment when Belphoebe draws on Lust in these terms:

As when Latonaes daughter cruell kynde,
In vengement of her mothers great disgrace,
With fell despight her cruell arrowes tynde
Gainst wofull Niobes unhappy race.
(IV.vii.30.5-8)

The simile alludes to the quarrel between Latona, mother of Diana and Apollo, and Niobe, a mother of fourteen sons and daughters. Niobe, the story goes, taunted Latona because she had so few children, and was punished with, among other things, the slaughter of her children. Of course, Belphoebe is yet again compared to Diana here, but the context seems odd to say the least. This scene in which Belphoebe slays Lust is followed by her encounter with Timias, whom she finds comforting and kissing the wounded Amoret. Tellingly, Timias himself has inadvertently wounded Amoret while trying to rescue her; then his attempts to comfort her lead to further disaster: the squire's service of his beloved, rather than producing the fruits of heroic deeds, seems only to embroil both himself and others in difficulties. Belphoebe is filled "with deepe disdaine, and great indignity" at the sight of Timias and Amoret together and considers killing them both, but contents herself with
turning her face away from Timias after one oblique accusation ("Is this the faith") and fleeing away "for evermore" (IV.vii.36). Now the "envy" with which Belphoebe guarded her virginity in Book III might occur to us in another context, although Spenser never uses the word again in relation to the virgin huntress. But certainly it is strange that Belphoebe, who could not even recognize a love so powerful that it was killing poor Timias in Book III, is quick to assume that the worst possible kind of "love" is being expressed in Timias's behavior toward Amoret in Book IV. The recognizable historical allegory makes sense of this contradiction, at least in part: from his first appearance in relationship to Belphoebe, Timias clearly represents Sir Walter Raleigh (notice the reference to "divine Tobacco" among Belphoebe's medicinal herbs in III.v.32), and the episode involving Amoret is understood to allude to Elizabeth's banishment of Raleigh after he impregnated a lady of the court, Elizabeth Throckmorton, whom he married soon after.\(^\text{19}\) This allusion to the contemporary court might also help to explain the comparison between Belphoebe and Diana wherein the latter's role as Latona's vengeful daughter is emphasized. Elizabeth's "jealousy" of her court ladies who married her courtiers is

\(^{19}\) This allusion was first noted by J. Upton in his 1758 edition of *The Faerie Queene* and has been since universally accepted.
legendary, and it has often been assumed that her anger at courtiers and ladies who became sexually involved with one another was motivated by her envy. Although the quarrel between Latona and Niobe is not precisely a matter of a married woman mocking a single one, it is similar in that a fruitful woman is mocking one who, while not altogether barren, has failed to fulfill some ideal of female reproductive ability. The earlier linking of Elizabeth to the vengeance of the woman so mocked suggests a similar motive behind her anger at Raleigh and Throckmorton.

Thus Belphoebe, and Elizabeth by implication, forbids desire not only for herself but for others as well. This power to forbid and deny is the focus in both episodes involving Timias, and both narratives detail his suffering, first because of his unrequited love for her, and then because of her rejection resulting from his supposed desire for Amoret. After Belphoebe leaves him in Book IV he becomes a wild hermit, completely solitary and silent, his hair long and matted, his clothes torn to tatters. When Arthur encounters him in the woods, he fails to recognize his erstwhile squire and Timias does not enlighten him.

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20 J. E. Neale explains Elizabeth's interference in her ladies' love affairs as a proper expression of her responsibility to them, she being, as it were, in loco parentis to her maids of honour. Neale, 340. Other historians have pointed out that her interference was political necessity: marriages at this rank created political allegiances which Elizabeth could not afford to ignore or fail to attempt to control.
Apparently, Elizabeth's power to deny, withhold, yet fatally attract leads to a silencing and emasculation of her courtiers: that is at least one way to understand Timias, who as a silent, dispossessed recluse has abandoned his noble calling of chivalry and the service of his lord. After Timias is reconciled to Belphoebe through the agency of the ruby shaped like a bleeding heart, these are the last words with which Spenser describes him:

And eke all mindlesse of his own deare Lord
The noble Prince, who never heard one word
Of tydings, what did unto him betide,
Of what good fortune did to him afford,
But through the endlesse world did wander wide,
Him seeking evermore, yet no where him descride.
(IV.viii.18.4-9)

Timias may have regained Belphoebe's favor, but the poet does not appear to smile on this enterprise; the last word on Timias is close to censure.

Spenser's depiction of Belphoebe suggests that Elizabeth's motto, semper eadem, contains an implicit threat because it does not allow in the end for male desire. Elizabeth is "always the same," an obdurate presence, the denial of the body natural of a woman and the glorification of an immutable public presence. Belphoebe's essence is power, particularly the power to resist, withhold, remain the same. She will not, as Britomart did in Isis Church when she begins to grow great with child, "bear the sign" of male potency: she will not accommodate that desire as expressed in her subject's dream and let a male subject make
his mark upon her body. The most Belphoebe "bears" is a sign of pity; it is Timias who bears the sign, the change, to the point that he is deformed, unrecognizable to the one who should properly be his master. Elizabeth's power is also in part the power to resist: Spenser appears to characterize her virginity as an "envious" withholding and to display an anxiety about her power to resist the desires of her courtiers. Elizabeth, like Belphoebe, exists outside the realm of ordinary human desires, and so she is outside of the realm of male power.

In Britomart, a figure who exists in the human and specifically historical realm, the potential for the investment of phallic power in a woman is threatening enough that Spenser veered away from such a proposition in the end. Britomart eventually does "bear the sign" of male potency in the Church of Isis where her destiny is described, although her final appearance in The Faerie Queene suggests ambivalence and uncertainty about her ability to "submit her ways" unto the will of masculine force. Still, her official destiny has been charted, and in Isis Church that destiny is expressed specifically in terms of relinquishing an authority which has been hers, but is now invested in the masculine principle which inscribes upon her the mark of

Montrose uses this phrase to describe Forman's desire expressed in his pun "to wait upon": he wants the queen, the woman, to "bear the sign of his own potency" when his "weighting upon" her enlarges her belly. Montrose, 68.
phallic potency. In Amoret, the lack of authority was radically unsettling to masculine fantasies of power as well, for the possibility of absence and the revelation of the terms of desire undermines the project of desire and possession itself. In Belphoebe, the obduracy, the radical resistance which was potential in Britomart and completely absent in Amoret, is actual. Spenser's ways of coping with Belphoebe as a version of feminine authority are several: he undermines her power by placing her in comic contexts, as Maureen Quilligan notes. He also places her above and outside of the human sphere in *The Faerie Queene*: her authority does not directly threaten the phallocentric terms of patriarchy because she is a goddess, a stone, a jewel, an "ensample dead"—and thus outside of the political order. But her existence on the outside of the human realm brings its own problems. It enables the poet to accommodate her authority in a way that he could not Britomart's, but it inspires his subtle censure as well. Spenser's treatment of Belphoebe, whose flat, obdurate surface recalls Hilliard's officially-sanctioned "Mask of Youth," suggests some of the difficulties Elizabeth's subjects may have encountered in dealing with their queen. To describe her in terms of mythology is both solution and problem: if she is a goddess—Cynthia, Diana, Phoebe, Astraea—then her assumption of power is explained without threat to patriarchal ideology. But these terms evolved from her
courtiers' need to find an acceptable way to express both her authority and their desires. To place the queen in the position of a Diana is also to risk placing her frustratingly beyond the scope of very real, answerable demands for favor and preferment. Such a depiction of the queen attenuates the immediacy of her human presence and negates the possibility of desire, as well.
Conclusion

In *The Faerie Queene*, Spenser's difficulties in expressing an acceptable version of his queen's authority are manifold. *The Faerie Queene* is a text which points inward, toward the absent Faerie Queene in whose service all the quests (except, notably, Britomart's) are enacted—yet it is a text which looks outward and forward as well, toward the polis and the future of England, but again, this is a place where we find Elizabeth, the culmination, in Spenser's myth, of all the virtues and all the glory whose development he examines in the poem. Yet if Elizabeth is the poem's object of desire, she is also the object of its authority. The Petrarchan poet fictionalizes his abject devotion to the powerful woman while he also creates and so controls her through that same fiction; similarly, Spenser depicts and praises his queen's authority while at the same time he attempts to control it by means of his authorship. This uneasy process is exemplified in the figure of Britomart: Spenser's complex depiction of the virgin knight presents her as the champion of Elizabeth's signature virtue and the embodiment of such perfection and power that some critics have argued that she alone of the poem's protagonists begins...
rather than ends as the perfect exemplar of her virtue. Yet Spenser's depiction of Britomart also implicitly criticizes her assumption of the very authority which exemplifies her virtue and makes her a potent compliment to Elizabeth.

Spenser moves beyond the Petrarchan dynamic of fictionalized subjection and aggression, however, to explore its implications. In the story of Amoret and Scudamour, he examines the nature of courtly love and, in Amoret, the results of the total lack of feminine authority which a patriarchy demands. He also depicts the anxieties which motivate maisterie, one problematic aspect of love with which Chaucer, an important authority for Spenser, was deeply concerned. This exploration of courtly love bears directly on the Elizabethan court since it was an important symbolic system through which Elizabeth and her courtiers could express a relationship of subjection and mastery. The Petrarchan exchange which characterizes Elizabeth as the "cruel fair," the beloved lady whose favors the courtier pursues, is undercut by Spenser's portrait of the obdurate Belphoebe. She enters into a Petrarchan relationship with Timias--she is the beloved but unobtainable object of desire, he her adoring slave who "calls it praise to suffer tyranny" (Astrophil and Stella, 2)---but neither noble deeds nor ennobling spiritual love appears to be forthcoming for Timias. His actions in Belphoebe's service lead to disaster, and Spenser's final word on the squire emphasizes
his abandonment of his lord, Arthur, rather than any potential fruitfulness of his service to the virgin huntress.

Belphoebe denies desire: her decreed virginity, which reflects Elizabeth's own, places her outside the dynamics of sexual desire. Her flat surface recalls the queen's sanctioned "Mask of Youth," which while it seems to depict Elizabeth as more desirable than she really is, in fact removes her bodily presence from the realm of human exchange and the substitution through which desire is constituted. It is Elizabeth's (and Belphoebe's) control over their own representation which makes them threatening to the patriarchal order: the system which demands that what is feminine should faithfully reflect the authorial male cannot easily assimilate such a notion of "feminine authority."

Belphoebe is characterized as not only dead, but as fatal to Timias as well, because of her authority that will not bear the sign of masculine mastery; Spenser, even as he depicts such feminine authority, contains it through this critique. Amoret's radical submissiveness forms the opposite of Belphoebe's assertion of authority, but Spenser cannot advocate such an alternative; it too threatens the stability of masculine identity. Readers of *The Faerie Queene* have wanted to find in Britomart a happy compromise between these two extremes, but no such marriage of Amoret's meekness and Belphoebe's martial vigor takes place. Spenser initially
attempts to place Britomart in an authoritative stance but undercuts her power even as he depicts it. And when she must prepare to cast off her armor of authority and take up her womb's burden, the transition seems untenable: some ideal of femininity and masculinity has been marred by Britomart's very ability to assume that authoritative armor and wield the phallic spear. In Book III, Spenser often expresses his fear that he will "mar" Elizabeth's excellence because of his failure to find adequate words to express her glory. By Book V, our picture of the poet anxious that his words do justice to his queen's greatness has been replaced by the portrait of the silenced poet Bonfont, whose tongue has been nailed to a post by the supposedly all-merciful Mercilla. The authority which the queen embodies now silences the poet, erases his name, "makes all mute," as Spenser describes it in Book V (V.ix.44.2): the "excellence" of femininity within the patriarchal system is marred by the monstrosity of feminine authority and becomes inexpressible for the poet who desires to praise his queen and yet explore the implications of her power.


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