

DRAMATIC UNITY IN SPENSER'S AMORETTI, ANACREONTICS AND  
FOWRE HYMNES

by

Eusebia da Silva

Department of English

McGill University

A thesis submitted to the  
Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Master of Arts

© Eusebia da Silva, March 1989

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	i
ABSTRACT	ii
RÉSUMÉ	iii
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER ONE: THE <u>AMORETTI</u>	9
CHAPTER TWO: THE ANACREONTICS	34
CHAPTER THREE: <u>AN HYMNE IN HONOUR OF LOVE</u>	55
CHAPTER FOUR: <u>AN HYMNE IN HONOUR OF BEAUTIE</u>	71
CHAPTER FIVE: <u>AN HYMNE OF HEAVENLY LOVE</u>	87
CHAPTER SIX: <u>AN HYMNE OF HEAVENLY BEAUTIE</u>	107
CONCLUSION	125
BIBLIOGRAPHY	128

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I wish to thank Professor Maggie Kilgour for her direction and advice. I am grateful to her too for kindly taking the time during her sabbatical year to read early drafts of the thesis.

I thank Professor William Johnson for sending me a copy of his paper "Love's Ascent/Descent in Spenser's Amoretti and Fowre Hymnes." I especially appreciated his letters and helpful suggestions which urged me to enjoy rather than agonize over Spenser.

I am grateful to Professor Paul Piehler for teaching me how to read and reread works of literature, for his guidance and his generosity.

I valued very much the encouragement and constructive criticism of Sister Lorraine Crowe S.N.J.M., Sister Barbara Gooding R.S.M., and Dr. Faith Wallis, who read parts of various drafts of the thesis. Special thanks to Dr. Nini Pal who read the thesis thoroughly and contributed greatly to the progress of my work.

Stewart Cooke and Kendall Wallis gave generously and cheerfully of their time and computer knowledge. Hélène Henault kindly translated the abstract. Elsie Wagner was my patient typist.

I received immeasurable support from Laurie Hanslin, Sherry Krawitz, and Connie Moore.

Above all, I am indebted to Gisela Nolting who has been there line by line, and page by page, clarifying my thoughts and enlivening my spirit.

## ABSTRACT

Much criticism of Spenser's Fowre Hymnes has attempted to establish the relationship between the secular and sacred poems. My thesis is that the poet-lover who is the central actor as well as the narrator in all four hymns unites the earthly and heavenly songs. The Fowre Hymnes show the development of this speaker, who discovers that his attempts to define and represent the nature of love involve him in a continuous conversion of his own heart. I argue that these poems represent a dramatic process of continuous self-discovery, and, especially, of a constant turning from self to other.

As this process draws upon many of the motifs and concerns in the earlier love experience of the Amoretti and its attached Anacreontics I include a discussion of these earlier works. The lover in the sonnets and in the epigrams is also engaged in the act of educating his heart. Within the sequence, the fulfillment in love he desires is not fully attained; instead, here as in the Fowre Hymnes, we have the drama of a man learning and relearning how to become more self-giving in his capacity for love. I show that the dynamics of love Spenser represents in these poetical works is an ultimately inconclusive though self-creating one.

## RÉSUMÉ

Plusieurs critiques de Spenser sur les Fowre Hymnes ont tenté d'établir une relation entre les poèmes profanes et les poèmes sacrés. Ma thèse est basée sur le poète qui est à la fois l'acteur principal et le narrateur dans les quatre hymnes, et c'est ce qui unit les poèmes terrestres et célestes. Les Fowre Hymnes démontrent le développement du narrateur qui découvre qu'en essayant de définir et de représenter la nature de l'amour, il est forcé de retourner continuellement à la conversion de son coeur. J'argumente que ces poèmes représentent un processus dramatique de découverte de soi, et, plus particulièrement, une attention tournée vers l'autre.

Comme ce processus provient de motifs et de préoccupations de l'expérience de l'amour d'Amoretti ainsi que de ses Anacreontics, j'inclue une discussion sur ces premières oeuvres. L'être aimant, dans les sonnets et dans les épigrammes est aussi engagé dans l'action d'éduquer son coeur. A l'intérieur de la séquence, la grandeur de l'amour auquel il aspire n'est pas complètement atteint comme il l'est dans les Fowre Hymnes, à la place, nous avons le drame d'un homme qui apprend et réapprend à devenir un être pouvant donner beaucoup de d'amour autour de lui. Je démontre que la dynamique d'amour représentée par les

œuvres poétiques de Spenser est finalement peu concluante,  
bien qu'elle soit de sa propre action.

## INTRODUCTION

Ever since Spenser's last published work, the Fowre Hymnes, was printed in 1596 critical commentary has frequently been concerned with the hymns' unity. How are the first pair of hymns in honour of earthly love and beauty related to the second pair which exalt heavenly love and beauty? Does Spenser "retract" the earthly hymns or "reform" them? The writer of the dedicatory epistle that introduces the hymns is equivocal about the relationship between the poems he has written. He explains that he has resolved "to amend, and by way of retractation to reforme them, making in stead of those two Hymnes of earthly or natural love and beautie, two others of heavenly and celestiall."<sup>1</sup> The speaker in the hymns on the other hand, is unequivocal in his retraction of the two earlier songs: he calls them "lewd layes" (HHL 8) and he "reprove[s]" (HHL 12) his earlier efforts, turning instead to sing "the heavenly prayeses of true love" (HHL 14).

Most critics stress the thematic wholeness of the hymns.<sup>2</sup> They see a theme of spiritual love common to both

---

<sup>1</sup> All references to the Fowre Hymnes are from Spenser: Fowre Hymnes and Epithalamion, ed., Enid Welsford (Oxford: Blackwell, 1967).

<sup>2</sup> Arguments for and against the unity of the Fowre Hymnes are quoted in The Works of Edmund Spenser: A Variorum Edition, eds. Edwin A. Greenlaw, G. Osgood, M. Padelford, R. Heffner, vol. 7 (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1932-49), pp. 658-62. See also David R. Russell, "The Unity of

pairs, and the earthly hymns as leading to the complementary heavenly hymns. I also propose to give a unitive reading of the hymns but want to postulate that what unifies the four poems is the very drama of the development of the hymns' poet-lover. I agree with Enid Welsford who warns us that "it is a mistake to dismiss Spenser's speaker as an insignificant bit of machinery and to regard the hymns as direct analyses of love which can be interpreted without any reference to the 'poet-lover' who is supposed to be composing them".<sup>3</sup> Welsford, like the more recent critic Mary I. Oates, emphasizes the fiction of the poem. Oates argues that it is from the imperfect lover's frame of reference and not from the perspective of the author's enlightened vision, that thoughts on love and beauty are conveyed in these songs of praise.<sup>4</sup> Like her, I see the Fowre Hymnes as a unified expression of a developing personality.<sup>5</sup>

---

Edmund Spenser's Fowre Hymnes" (Diss. University of Oklahoma, 1981), pp. 3-4 for a succinct summary of the various arguments for unity given by more recent twentieth century critics.

<sup>3</sup> Welsford, p. 60.

<sup>4</sup> Mary I. Oates, "Fowre Hymnes: Spenser's Retractations of Paradise" in Spenser Studies: A Renaissance Poetry Annual IV 1983 ed. Patrick Cullen and Thomas P. Roche Jr. (New York: AMS Press, 1984), pp. 143-69.

<sup>5</sup> Russell also argues for the structural unity of the poem. He sees the Hymnes as representing "the journey of a man from unrequited sexual love to a beatific vision" and the change in the man as what unifies the poem. He contends that "[t]he real subject is the poet lover, his internal



I propose to examine the dramatic elements in the hymns. I believe that by focusing not on what Spenser seems to say about love and beauty in these hymns but instead on how he says it--by means of a dramatic fiction--we will understand the hymns as a poetic experience, as an artistic piece rather than a muddled philosophical treatise. I have also found it illuminating to read the hymns in light of the sonnet sequence which Spenser published a year earlier. The striking similarities and also significant differences between the works elucidate the dramatic element in each. Thus, my thesis includes a close reading of the Amoretti, with the appended Anacreontics, as well as of the Fowre Hymnes.<sup>6</sup>

The drama portrayed in the Amoretti is of an Elizabethan man in love with a lady who initially refuses to reciprocate his love. To win her love, the speaker adopts the approach of the Petrarchan lover: he addresses her with

---

state, his reaction to the deities (or the lady) and to the emotions, frustrations, and contradictions he feels because of them (or her). As in the sonnet sequence, much of the interest in Fowre Hymnes lies in the poet, in his reaction to the object of his desire, in the effect of the deity on his thoughts, fears, hopes--his spirit. For a full response to the poem, understanding the man becomes as important as understanding the deities he praises" (pp. 56-7).

<sup>6</sup> The Amoretti and the Epithalamion were published together in a small volume in 1595. As the aim of my thesis is to examine the love process, specifically, the inconclusive and incoherent nature of the love experience as Spenser represents it, I have not included a study of the triumphal marriage lyric. For an illuminating comparison of the Epithalamion and the Fowre Hymnes, see the introduction to Welsford, pp. 1-91.

pleas, prayers, praise, and with Neoplatonic commonplaces in the hope that these will soften her hard heart. The active pursuit only serves to augment the distance between them, and to increase his suffering. However, when he ceases to seek the lady as an object of desire, and becomes aware of her, indeed loves her for who she is in herself, he discovers her willing to give herself in love to him. He rejoices in this gift of her love, and calls on her to engage, together with him, in a selfless love of the other, as Christ taught them to do. However, towards the end of the sequence the lovers are separated again, and the speaker is once more tormented by his desire for his lady. At the end he discovers that the lesson his earlier experience taught him about letting go, about the need to turn from awareness of self to awareness of the other before he can find fulfillment in love, has to be continuously relearned.

The drama portrayed in the Fowre Hymnes is similarly of a Renaissance man in love. In the earthly hymns the speaker, here too a Petrarchan lover, seeks to gain his lady's favour. He appropriates Neoplatonic theories of love and beauty with which he hopes to "please" (HB 26) his lady and persuade her to love him. In time (outside the time frame of the text--in the space between the writing of the second and third hymns), he becomes disillusioned with romantic love. He lets go of the Petrarchan love experience, and resolves instead to meditate upon Christian

love. In the course of writing his heavenly hymns he discovers himself loved, and this awakens in him the desire to give himself selflessly to the love of God. However he still struggles with his attraction to the things of the world which draw his attention away from God.

The fulfillment in love each of these lovers seeks is different, but the resemblance between the process of conversion each undergoes is remarkable. Thus, I shall show that the drama enacted in both the Amoretti and in the Fowre Hymnes is of a man who grows from a self-centered concept of love towards an understanding of love as an experience of other-centeredness and self-giving. In both these poetical works Spenser portrays the growth in understanding as a process which involves a constant struggle to rise above human neediness and shortsightedness. The irony present in both the sonnet sequence and the hymns is that the speaker sets out to convert the reader's heart but it is instead his own heart that is purified, and educated in the ways of love. It is the lover himself who must learn to turn away from self towards the other. Both lovers are taught that true love is an act of perfect attentiveness to the other, but both find themselves continuously needing to relearn this lesson.

This lesson is also the behest Venus gives her son

Cupid in the epigrams appended to the sonnet sequence.<sup>7</sup> Critics have tended either to ignore the Anacreontics altogether, or to read them as a statement about the cruelty of love.<sup>8</sup> But Spenser's particular inventiveness in these otherwise conventional poems negates the thesis that love is simply cruel. Spenser rewrites the story of Cupid and the Bee story which traditionally represented the theme of the cruelty of love, and by giving Venus a prominent role, subtly changes it into a story about the ultimate power of love to edify, heal, and bring fulfillment. Venus calls on Cupid to show pity to those he hurts, and then in an act of perfect attentiveness to her son's wound she demonstrates what it means to take pity. By her words, and especially by her response to her son's suffering Venus teaches Cupid about compassion, about being wholly aware of and present to the other. Essentially the Anacreontics reenact the drama of the Amoretti lover. However, a close reading of these

---

<sup>7</sup> Greenlaw et al. state that "these interpolated poems bear no title in either the octavo or the folios. Hughes, Todd, and Collier call them Poems. Child calls them Epigrams, and prints them apart from Amoretti and Epithalamion. Morris adopts Child's title. Grosart, Dodge, de Selincourt, and Renwick print them without title" (p. 455). Greenlaw et al. give the poems the title "Anacreontics". In my thesis I refer to them both as epigrams and as Anacreontics.

<sup>8</sup> See Carol V. Kaske, "Spenser's Amoretti and Epithalamion of 1595: Structure, Genre, and Numerology," English Literary Renaissance 8 (1978): 271-95. Also, Charlotte Thompson, "Love in an Orderly Universe: A Unification of Spenser's Amoretti, 'Anacreontics', and Epithalamion," Viator Medieval and Renaissance Studies 16 (1985): 277-335.

poems also throws light on the drama of the Fowre Hymnes, as the movement here is also from an awareness of self, to a growing awareness of others, and ultimately towards an increasing consciousness of the Other.

In the first chapter of this study, I examine the drama of the Amoretti. I focus on the nature of the speaker's love as revealed in his "little loves". In chapter two I show how the Anacreontics relate back to the sonnet sequence, and underline the positive understanding of love that surfaces in Spenser's rendition of the Cupid and the Bee story. The burden of my analysis falls on the Fowre Hymnes, where I focus on the poet's repeated turning away from despair, from self-absorption, towards hope, and towards others. The process of conversion begins in the first hymn with the poet's decision to turn from the destructive act of self-pity towards the constructive act of composing a hymn, and continues throughout the poem in the very act of singing the songs of praise. Each hymn, in other words, becomes the means by which the poet creates, and recreates, his new self. The creation of the new self depends essentially on the speaker's ability to listen to the words of his own songs: as we shall see, the more attentive he is, the more capable of change he is. Thus in each of the poetical works analyzed here my discussion will centre on the emotional and spiritual changes the poet-lover undergoes as he seeks fulfillment in love. It is in

the speaker's own search for unity with the object of love  
that I locate the dramatic unity in Spenser's Amoretti,  
Anacreontics, and Fowre Hymnes.

CHAPTER ONE: THE AMORETTI

The lover of the Amoretti wants to bring about a change of heart in his beloved; specifically, he seeks to "conuert" (14) her "hard hart" (18).<sup>1</sup> The irony running through much of the Amoretti is that the lover believes it is the lady who must change, who must learn to love, when in fact, it is he who must open himself to change and 'unlearn' erroneous conceptions of love. Ultimately, the poet cannot convert the lady, but he himself can and indeed does undergo a conversion of heart. In the course of the eighty-nine poems that form Spenser's sonnet sequence, the lover repeatedly turns away from his own self towards the beloved. However, there is not steady progress towards "enlightenment." The movement towards that love which leads to matrimonial union --which is what the lover and beloved of the Amoretti aspire to, and is itself fulfilled in the Epithalamion--depends on the poet's capacity to let go of his self-serving concepts of love and allow himself to love the "other." The narcissistic and acquisitive nature of his love, represented in his Petrarchan approach and in his egotistical efforts to appropriate his lady's love, is the principle impeding force the poet must learn to renounce. The process of

---

<sup>1</sup> All references to the Amoretti and Anacreontics are from Spenser's Minor Poems, ed. E. de Selincourt (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910).

conversion, of turning from self to other, is a dynamic action, continuously reenacted, as the lover learns and relearns to let go.

The Amoretti opens with the lover referring to the lady as "my soules long lacked foode, my heauens blis" (1). The equation of the lady with food for his soul suggests his desire for spiritual fulfillment. He needs the lady--or thinks he needs her--to sustain his soul, as food sustains his body. The description of the lady as his "heauen's blis" (1) reinforces this idea, and suggests further that what he seeks--what he believes he lacks is a source of spiritual peace and joy. From the start the lady, and specifically the poet's love for her, is linked with a spiritual need.

Throughout the sequence the speaker stresses the lady's spiritual qualities and the power that her divine nature has over him. He bids the world to witness the light of her "souerayne beauty" (3) which has "kindled heauenly fyre,/ in my fraile spirit by her from basenesse raysed" (3) and tells the lady herself that she is "full of the liuing fyre,/ Kindled aboue vnto the maker neere" (8). Her eyes lighten his "dark spright" (9) and are most like the "Maker selfe...,/ whose light doth lighten all that here we see" (9). It becomes clear early in the sequence that, what the lover's soul hungers for is the "heauenly fyre" (3) which strengthens and illumines his frail spirit.



The poet perceives that spark of "liuing fyre" (8) in the lady and is filled with desire for her. The irony is, however, that the poet already possesses within himself some elements of that "heauenly fyre", for his recognition and admiration of the lady's "souerayne beauty" (3) suggests, as we shall see, that it is the divine light within him that responds to the burning light within the lady.<sup>2</sup>

The poet's ignorance of his own "souerayne beauty" (3) prompts him to seek in the person of the lady that which he already possesses. In this way he is like the figure of Narcissus who desired what he already had. The lover himself draws this analogy in a sonnet repeated twice in the sequence:

My hungry eyes, through greedy couetize  
still to behold the object of their paine,  
with no contentment can themselues suffice:  
but hauing pine and hauing not complaine.  
For lacking it, they cannot lyfe sustayne,  
and hauing it, they gaze on it the more:  
in their amazement lyke Narcissus vaine  
whose eyes him staru'd: so plenty makes me  
poore. (35)

The poet is satisfied neither with the lady's absence nor with her physical presence. He compares his gazing on the

---

<sup>2</sup> This idea is stated most clearly in An Hymne in Honour of Love, in which the poet relates that man contains within him some sparks of the divine fire and thus is drawn towards that which is most divine:

having yet in his deducted spright  
Some sparks remaining of that heauenly fyre,  
He is enlumind with that goodly light,  
Unto like goodly semblant to aspyre;  
Therefore in choice of love, he doth desyre  
That seemes on earth most heauenly, to embrace.

lady with Narcissus's staring at himself in the pool of water. The analogy is, initially, puzzling, for as Calvin R. Edwards points out, the speaker "is looking at another person, a real woman, not a reflection of himself."<sup>3</sup> Yet this, as Edwards also states, is precisely the point: the lover is like Narcissus because like him he desires what is only a reflection of his inner self.

What the lover sees in the lady is the idealized projection of his self, the image of what he feels he lacks. Consequently his love for her is expressed not in a selfless giving of himself but as a need he thinks she can fill. Her love, then, is perceived less as a gift to be freely bestowed by her and more as a 'thing' he can acquire. The lady herself is viewed less as a mysterious 'other' than as a desired object, specifically "the object of [his] pain" (35/83). The feeding imagery introduced in the first sonnet and used sporadically throughout the sequence underlines the acquisitive nature of his love and its tendency to reduce the other to an object for his consumption.

Laments, pleas, pledges, and sighs are the 'forces' (14) with which the lover attempts to gain the lady's love. Inexperienced, "vntrainde in louers trade" (51), he tries the approach employed by other lovers whose books he's

---

<sup>3</sup> Calvin R. Edwards, "The Narcissus Myth in Spenser's Poetry," in Studies in Philology, 74 (1977), p. 72.

read (21). His language is that of the courtly lover who sees love as war as he urges himself to bring:

all the forces that ye may,  
and lay incessant battery to her heart,  
playnts, prayers, vowes, ruth, sorrow, and  
dismay,  
those engins can the proudest loue  
conuert. (14)

The paradox is that his intentions are not those of the courtly lover and Elizabeth is not a Petrarchan lady.<sup>4</sup> He does not want a life of courting but "to knit the knot, that euer shall remaine"(6): thus, the courtly approach is inappropriate and futile. The lasting relationship he desires cannot be built on an aggressive, desperate need to be loved; rather, as the speaker himself later instructs the lady, the bond of union "which true loue doth tye" (65) is borne of "simple truth and mutuall good will"(65). The lover's "playnts, prayers, vowes, ruth, sorrow, and dismay" (14) focus his attention not on the beloved but on himself, his needs and concerns.

Echoing the typical Petrarchan lover he calls the lady the "fayrest proud"(2) and complains often of her "hard hart" (18), unaware that his own self-absorption and self-preoccupation are themselves forms of pride. Robert G. Benson claims that "the real obstacle to their love is not the hardness of the lady's heart, but the poet's pride ...

---

<sup>4</sup> The lady's name appears once in the sequence, in sonnet 74, when the lover identifies her as one of three women named Elizabeth.

Pride renders the soul incapable of perfect love."<sup>5</sup> Later, the lover himself becomes aware of the destructive power of pride. He informs the lady that in the "sacred bowre" (65) where true love dwells:

There pride dare not approch, nor discord spill  
the league twixt them, that loyal loue hath  
bound:  
but simple truth and mutuall good will,  
seekes with sweet peace to salue each others  
wound (65)

It is not until this late point in the sequence, however, that the poet comes to this understanding and openness of spirit.

Until then, the poet insists on playing the part of the courtly lover, oblivious of the egocentric nature of the role. The lady, however, recognizes his drama as mere theatre and, it seems, attempts to put an end to the role-playing by frustrating her lover's efforts to draw attention to himself:

when I pleade, she bids me play my part,  
and when I weep, she sayes teares are but water:  
and when I sigh, she sayes I know the art,  
and when I waile she turnes hir selfe to laughter.  
(18)

Unlike the lady, the lover is not amused. He lacks detachment and therefore a sense of perspective. His narcissism prevents him from breaking out of the illusion he's under though he sees the vanity and futility of it:

---

<sup>5</sup> Robert G. Benson, "Elizabeth as Beatrice: A Reading of Spenser's Amoretti," in South Central Bulletin 32 (1972), p. 185.

So doe I weepe, and wayle, and pleade in vaine,  
 whiles she as steele and flint doth still  
 remayne. (18)

The speaker uses traditional images typical of the unattainable Petrarchan object of desire--images of steel, flint, iron, stone and marble--to express what he perceives as the lady's hardness of heart. But the images reveal more about the lover, about the nature of his approach to gain the lady's love, than they do about the beloved. Unable to understand why his "forces" (14) have failed to move the lady, he muses on the process by which certain elements in nature undergo change, and wonders why he is not likewise able to bring about a change in the lady:

The rolling wheele that runneth often round,  
 the hardest steele in tract of time doth teare,  
 and drizzling drops that often doe redound,  
 the firmest flint doth in continuance weare.  
 Yet cannot I, with many a dropping teare,  
 and long intreaty, soften her hard hart:  
 that she will once vouchsafe my plaint to heare,  
 or looke with pittie on my payneful smart. (18)

The poet's multi-level analogy betrays the destructive effects of the courtly approach he's adopted to convert the lady. The rolling wheel eventually "teares" the hardest steel, and the fine rain "weares" out the firmest flint. The speaker draws the analogy between the workings of nature and his own "fruitlesse worke" (23) but does not perceive the significant reality his words point to: ceaseless tears and complaints will not soften the lady's heart but only finally, 'wear and tear' their relationship. His weeping,

wailing and pleading are the stuff of the ego which, like the rolling wheel, grates on the object it comes in contact with.

The lover's egoism hardens the lady's heart, but her "hardnes" (51) protects both him and her from engaging in a love that is consuming rather than strengthening. He compares his attempts to soften her heart to that of a blacksmith attempting to mollify iron:

The paynefull smith with force of feruent heat  
the hardest yron soone doth mollify:  
that with his heauy sledge he can it beat,  
and fashion to what he it list apply.  
Yet cannot all these flames in which I fry,  
her hart more harde then yron soft awhit:  
ne all the playnts and prayers with which I  
doe beat on th'anduytle of her stubberne wit:  
But still the more she feruent sees my fit,  
the more she frieseth in her wilfull pride:  
and harder growes the harder she is smit,  
with all the playnts which to her be applyde. (32)

The lover's fervent desire prevents him from seeing his own "wilfull pride." The analogy he draws suggests that the lady's heart is not like "the hardest yron"; indeed, it is "more harde then yron." He in turn, is like the "paynefull smith" as his will to "mollify" the lady's heart is also the will to fashion her "to what he it list apply."

The irony of the speaker's words in sonnet 32 is that while the "flames" in which he burns cannot change the lady, they can and do alter him. In time, the pain of his experience (even if the pain is simply weariness as sonnet 67 suggests) forces him to let go of his possessive desire. Hence the smith's "hardest yron" (32) comes to represent the

speaker's own heart which must be painfully mollified into an instrument of pure love. For much of the sequence the lover is, to use his own words, "beating on th'anduytle of her stubberne wit" (32)--with closed fists and closed heart; to receive the gift of her love, hands and heart must be open, ready to receive, ready to unlearn the ways of the Petrarchan lover.

The process of unlearning is slow. In sonnet 51, the poet no longer criticizes the lady's obstinacy: he commends it. Still, he has not yet learnt to see it as a reflection of his own egocentric, assaulting behaviour but believes it is only a matter of time before he can allure her to his will:

Doe I not see that fayrest ymages  
 Of hardest Marble are of purpose made?  
 for that they should endure through many ages,  
 ne let theyr famous moniments to fade.  
 Why then doe I, vntraine in louers trade,  
 her hardnes blame which I should more commend?  
 sith neuer ought was excellent assayde,  
 which was not hard t'atchiue and bring to end.  
 Ne ought so hard, but he that would attend,  
 mote soften it and to his will allure:  
 So doe I hope her stubborne hart to bend,  
 And that it then more stedfast will endure. (51)

Here the speaker reappraises and so praises the lady's hardness because it is, like the "hardest Marble," a thing of value. But he misses the point completely when he expresses his hope to eventually "bend" her "stubborne hart": her withholding of herself is valuable precisely because it will not allow their bond of love to be built on anything less than the "mutuall good will" (65) of both

lovers. Though he tries to see the lady's aloofness in a positive light, he cannot let go of his perception of the beloved as a figure that can be 'gotten' and 'had' like the "fayrest ymages/ of hardest Marble ... made" (51). He concludes in sonnet 51 that:

my paines will be the more to get her,  
but hauing her, my ioy will be the greater. (51, my  
emphasis)

He is still under the misconception that the lady's love is something he must acquire. The result is endless frustration.

In an earlier poem (23) the speaker acknowledged that his efforts to earn the lady's love are "fruitlesses worke," (23) yet he is slow to change his ways. His preoccupation with "getting," "having" and "doing" prevent him from simply "being" in a state of readiness to receive the gift of the lady's love. Unlike the lady whom he portrays as observant and detached, the lover engages in ceaseless activity, acting out the myriad emotions by which he is easily swayed:

Of this worlds Theatre in which we stay,  
My loue lyke the Spectator ydly sits  
beholding me that all the pageants play,  
disguysing diuersly my troubled wits.  
Sometimes I ioy when glad occasion fits,  
and mask in myrth lyke to a Comedy:  
soone after when my ioy to sorrow flits,  
I waile and make my woes a Tragedy. (54)

The use of the adverb "ydly" in line two is telling: it seems to reflect more on the speaker than on the lady.

Himself unable to be still, he interprets her detachment as



idleness. Yet while the lady remains distanced "lyke the Spectator," she is not passive:<sup>6</sup>

she beholding me with constant eye,  
delights not in my merth nor rues my smart:  
but when I laugh she mocks, and when I cry  
she laughes, and hardens euermore her hart. (54)

In The Four Loves C. S. Lewis, writing on the playfulness of love, states that "nothing is falser than the idea that mockery is necessarily hostile ... lovers are always laughing at each other."<sup>7</sup> The lady, as the lover represents her, mocks and laughs perhaps because she recognizes the lover's exaggerated mirth and pain for what they are: play acting, not a real drama. Though the poet is himself, as Louis Martz suggests, aware that he is acting, he appears to be so absorbed in the role-playing that he loses a sense of perspective and thus interprets the lady's sensible, liberating response as insensitivity: "What then can moue her? if nor merth nor mone,/ she is no woman, but a

---

<sup>6</sup> Louis I. Martz notes in fact that the lady of the Amoretti "talks and acts more than most [Petrarchan] heroines do. Most Petrarchan ladies, as Pope might say, 'have no character at all'; and even Sidney's Stella ... remains for most of the sequence a black - eyed effigy around which Astrophel performs his brilliant Portrait of the Lover as a very young dog. But Spenser's lady has a very decided and a very attractive character ... throughout the sequence she is certainly one of the most smiling and 'chearefull' ladies to appear in the English sequence, and I doubt that her smiles are outdone anywhere on the Continent" ("The Amoretti: 'Most Goodly Temperature'," in Form and Convention in the Poetry of Edmund Spenser, ed. William Nelson [New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1969]), pp.152-3.

<sup>7</sup> C. S. Lewis, The Four Loves, (London: Fontana Books, 1960), p. 99.

sencelesse stone" (54). Martz argues that in this sonnet the lover is consciously and deliberately "adopting all the masks that may catch his lady's eye and prove his devotion."<sup>8</sup> However, the self-absorbing nature of the courtly lover role encourages not selfless regard for the beloved but more particularly self-preoccupation with playing a part.

It is only when the lover ceases trying to "catch his lady's eye" that he can see the lady, can begin to relate to her as an "other" rather than merely as an object of desire and, finally, can know himself loved. In sonnet 54 the speaker refers explicitly to his beloved as a material "thing" ("she is no woman but a senseless stone"), yet here, he also represents the lady as a perceiving subject ("my loue lyke the Spectator"). Elizabeth observes him, sees through his theatrics, and refuses to play the game his way. Hence, at the same time that the poet is caught up in his own act, he suggests a way of seeing his beloved not merely as an object but as a real "other". Yet, in order for him to recognize the lady as such, he will have to be both more attentive to his own words, and to Elizabeth herself.

The image of the lady as a person in her own right surfaces again in sonnet 59--but now in a more favorable light. The satisfied tone of the first two lines of this

---

<sup>8</sup> Martz, p. 162.

sonnet is markedly different from the frustrated outbursts of earlier poems:

Thrice happie she, that is so well assured  
vnto her selfe and settled so in hart ... .  
(59)

Here again the poet reappraises his lady. He has now learnt to see her stillness as perfect poise of spirit. In contrast to the negative image of the "sencelesse stone" in sonnet 54 the poet here uses the more positive comparison of the lady to a "steddy ship" that:

doth strongly part  
the raging waues and keepes her course aright:  
ne ought for tempest doth from it depart,  
ne ought for fayrer weathers false delight. (59)

The simile is especially revealing in light of a similar analogy the speaker drew upon to describe himself earlier in the sequence. In sonnet 34 he too compared himself to a ship but one that:

through Ocean wyde,  
by conduct of some star doth make her way,  
whenas a storme hath dimd her trusty guyde,  
out of her course doth wander far astray.  
So I whose star, that wont with her bright ray,  
me to direct, with cloudes is ouercast,  
doe wander now in darknesse and dismay,  
through hidden perils round about me plast. (34)

The analogous images reveal pointedly the individual characters of the two figures: she is steadfast and self-reliant; he is easily shaken and entirely dependent upon her. He needs her--or thinks he needs her--because unlike her he has not yet found the stillpoint of his own being; he

has not yet discovered how to sustain himself by tapping into his own inner resources.

The poet's appreciation of the lady's "self-assuredness" marks however a turning point--in him and consequently in the sequence. For the first time he understands that her hardness is not simply pride, not "the cold pride of the Petrarchan mistress,"<sup>9</sup> but, as he understands it now, a certain 'possession of self' borne of her knowledge of what she is about. It is her self-assurance that enabled her to remain steadfast before the lover's numberless stormy protests:

Such selfe assurance need not feare the spight  
of grudging foes, ne fauour seek of friends:  
but in the stay of her owne stedfast might,  
nether to one her selfe nor other bends. (59)

The poet now realizes that he cannot "bend" (51) the lady's heart or even "soften it and to his will allure"(51). Instead he must rejoice in who she is: "Most happy she that most assured doth rest,/ but he most happy who such one loues best" (59). Again, the tone of these lines is significantly different from the wheedling praises which pervade the early sonnets. Here he is not trying to get the lady to love him but he himself is resting in the joy of loving her. For this reason the sonnet is pivotal; the poet has turned from self devotion to the love of the "other."

---

<sup>9</sup> Don H. Ricks, "Convention and Structure in Edmund Spenser's Amoretti," in Proceedings of the Utah Academy of Arts and Letters 44 (1967), p. 446.

Appropriately, the following sonnet, sonnet 60, marks a new beginning, a new year.

Benson notes that the climax of the sequence begins with sonnet 60 and ends with 68, the Easter sonnet. He defines the climactic action as "the poet's surrender of self, his victory over the pride that for so long has rendered him incapable of love."<sup>10</sup> But it seems fair to state that the turn away from self to the beloved in sonnet 59 is already a significant step in the poet's slow conversion of heart. It moves him to an act of repentance actually voiced in sonnet 62.

Critics have referred to sonnet 62 as the precise turning point of the sequence.<sup>11</sup> Indeed here the speaker indicates a conscious desire to change his past ways. He urges the beloved to, together with him:

chaunge eeke our myndes and former liues amend,  
the old yeares sinnes forepast let us eschew,  
and fly the faults with which we did offend.  
Then shall the new yeares ioy forth freshly send,  
into the glooming world his gladsome ray:  
and all these stormes which now his beauty blend,  
shall turne to caulmes and tymely cleare away. (62)

Alexander Dunlop observes that "here the lover begins to show awareness of his shortcomings. He has felt himself more sinned against than sinning ... here he includes himself among the offenders as he resolves to 'fly the faults with which we did offend'." Dunlop adds that the

---

<sup>10</sup> Benson, p. 186.

<sup>11</sup> Dunlop, p. 114.

third quatrain (quoted above) "suggests that the new year's joy promised in the sonnet is contingent upon the act of penitence."<sup>12</sup> But in fact the joy is already obvious in the lines "then shall the new yeares ioy forth freshly send,/ into the glooming world his gladsome ray." The very will to change liberates the speaker and brings a joyful note of hope to his words.

Once the lover has wrenched himself away from himself as the central object of his concern and attention, the lady gives herself unreservedly. In sonnet 64 the lover celebrates the lady's gift of herself, and describes her through the traditional form of the blazon:

Comming to kisse her lyps, (such grace I found)  
 Me seemd I smelt a gardin of sweet flowres:  
 that dainty odours from them threw around  
 for damzels fit to decke their louers bowers.  
 Her lips did smell lyke vnto Gillyflowers,  
 her ruddy cheekes lyke vnto Roses red;  
 her snowy browes lyke budded Bellamoures,  
 her louely eyes lyke Pincks but newly spred.  
 Her goodly bosome lyke to a bounch of Cullambynes;  
 her brest lyke lillyes, ere theyr leaues be shed,  
 her nipples lyke yong blossomd Iessemynes.  
 Such fragrant flowres doe giue most odorous smell,  
 but her sweet odour did them all excell. (64)

The generous, giving lady becomes a fertile, boundless garden of earthly delights, which his catalogue, or blazon, is barely able to contain. The exhaustive list ends in line twelve: one senses that the only thing that keeps the speaker from relating more of his sense experience is the constraints of the sonnet form! Once the poet's desire to

---

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 114.

possess gives way to the contrition of a heart open to receive, love flows freely "without constraynt or dread of any ill" (65).

Benson remarks that the poet expresses "a remarkable change of heart in 62-68".<sup>13</sup> Certainly there is significant change in the poet: he becomes less self-centered and his love less needy. But there is no drastic transformation. Sonnets 67 and 68 both indicate that love ultimately cannot be acquired and appropriated, only received and reciprocated. Yet while this is the lesson of the poet's own experience, it is questionable whether he fully comprehends it.

In sonnet 67 the poet characterizes himself as a hunter who finally succeeds when he ceases to chase the desired object:

Lyke as a huntsman after weary chace,  
 Seeing the game from him escapt away,  
 sits downe to rest him in some shady place,  
 with panting hounds beguiled of their pray:  
 So after long pursuit and vaine assay,  
 when I all weary had the chace forsooke,  
 the gentle deare returned the selfe-same way,  
 thinking to quench her thirst at the next brooke.  
 There she beholding me with mylder looke,  
 sought not to fly, but fearelesse still did bide:  
 till I in hand her yet halfe trembling tooke,  
 and with her owne goodwill hir fymely tyde.  
 Strange thing me seemd to see a beast so wyld,  
 so goodly wonne with her owne will beguyld. (67)

Reed W. Dasenbrock notes that "Spenser consciously challenges Petrarchan notions of love when he writes a poem

---

<sup>13</sup> Benson, p. 187.

like sonnet 67 which relies on the classic Petrarchan topos of love as hunt only to conclude that love cannot be a hunt if it be love."<sup>14</sup> On a similar note, Dunlop observes that "the notion of conquest is foreign to Spenser's concept of love. Rather the lover must by his constancy prove himself worthy to accept the gift of her love."<sup>15</sup>

A rereading of sonnets 67 and 68 reveals that the notion of worthiness is not necessary to the concept of love which unfolds in the Amoretti. The lover's comparison of himself to a tired hunter betrays the fact that he lets go of the will to possess the desired object, not because he fully desires to let go of it but because he is weary of the "long pursuit and vaine assay." But though the poet does not give up the pursuit in a selfless act, the fact that he does let go is enough. The act of letting go renders him not necessarily worthy or deserving of the gift of the other's self-giving but leaves him in a state of readiness to receive the other. Ultimately, this is all that's asked. The very notion that love is a gift implies that it is not motivated by the worthiness of the recipient. This is more clearly stated in sonnet 68, the Easter sonnet.

The sonnet opens with the poet addressing Christ, the "glorious Lord of lyfe" (68). He asks that the Lord:

---

<sup>14</sup> Reed W. Dasenbrock, "The Petrarchan Context of Spenser's Amoretti," in PMLA 100, no. 1 (1985), p. 45.

<sup>15</sup> Dunlop, p. 111.



grant that we for whom thou diddest dye,  
 being with thy deare blood clene washt from sin,  
 may liue for ever in felicity.  
 And that thy loue we weighing worthily,  
 may likewise loue thee for the same againe:  
 and for thy sake that all lyke deare didst buy,  
 with loue may one another entertayne. (68)

The poet cites Christ's love as the paradigm by which he and the lady should live: "So let vs loue, deare loue, lyke as we ought:/ loue is the lesson which the Lord vs taught" (68). The poet's address to his "deare Lord" (68) reveals that Christ teaches love's indifference to worthiness. Christ's love, manifested especially in his self-sacrifice, creates value ("being with thy deare blood clene washt from sin"). Man's personal worth is irrelevant, for with His love, Christ "all lyke deare didst buy" (68). Christ's love is pure gift; and, as portrayed in sonnet 67, so is the lady's love for the poet. The effect of the courtly approach on the lady is, as William C. Johnson notes, "exactly the opposite of that which the lover expects."<sup>16</sup> He cannot conquer her love, for as Dunlop concludes "true love is not a matter of wooing and winning, of courtship and conquest; it is ultimately a gift of grace."<sup>17</sup> This would seem to explain yet further why the lover's efforts to "conuert" (14) the lady are felt by him to be "fruitlesse

---

<sup>16</sup> William C. Johnson, "Amor and Spenser's Amoretti", in English Studies 54 (1973), p. 220.

<sup>17</sup> Dunlop, p. 113.

worke" (23): love is pure gift, not reward for work well done.<sup>18</sup>

While the speaker experiences love as a gift, he betrays that he does not fully comprehend it as such. At the end of sonnet 67 he is puzzled ("strange thing me seemd") by the self-giving of the "gentle deare" (67); in sonnet 69 he suggests an analogy that contradicts the experience of love depicted in 67 and 68. The poet cites the practice of the "famous warriors of the anticke world" who erected trophies "in which they would the records haue enrold/ of theyr great deeds and valarous emprize" (69). He wonders "What trophee then shall I most fit deuize,/ in which I may record the memory/ of my loues conquest" (69), and decides that his verse shall be the "immortal moniment" in "which he will record "The happy purchase of my glorious spoile,/ gotten at last with labour and long toyle" (69). Though the poet wishes to immortalize the beloved that all "may admire such worlds rare wonderment," (69) his identification with the famous warriors strongly suggests that it is his own "great [deed]" (69) (the supposed "conquest" of the lady) that he hopes to record for all posterity. There is an unmistakable note of pride in the concluding couplet that recalls the tone of earlier sonnets.

---

<sup>18</sup> I wish to acknowledge my indebtedness to Anders Nygren's Agape & Eros (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1953, 1982), which helped me in thinking through my own interpretation of Spenser's Amoretti. See esp. pp. 61-159.

What sonnet 69 discloses about the lover is that he undergoes no drastic change. The conversion of the heart begun in sonnet 59 depends on a continuous turning away from self towards the other. It is a process, not a magic effect, and at times the poet fails "to fly the faults" (62) which bind him. As Dunlop notes his "weakness is the weakness of common humanity".<sup>19</sup>

Nevertheless, the lover makes a conscious effort to rise above his shortsightedness, to move towards a higher view of his love experience. He confesses in sonnet 72 how often "my spirit doth spred her bolder winges,/ In mind to mount vp to the purest sky," but then, "it down is weighed with thoght of earthly things/ and clogd with burden of mortality." The lover, much like the figure of Redcross in Book One of The Faerie Queene, often fails to rise above his limitations, but his efforts to transcend his human weakness keeps him moving forward.

The best example of this continual striving is found in the lover's growing capacity to accept the lady's absence. Throughout the year long courtship the lover is distraught when separated from the lady. But towards the end of the sequence, he attempts to rise above his childish dependency. In sonnet 78 he tells how:

Lackynge my loue I go from place to place,  
lyke a young fawne that late hath lost the hynde:  
and seeke each where, where last I sawe her face,

---

<sup>19</sup> Dunlop, p. 109.

whose ymage yet I carry fresh in mynd.

The analogy stresses the relationship of dependence. But while the sonnet begins in the languishing tone of earlier sonnets with the poet searching for the sight of the beloved, it ends not with him wallowing in self-pity but his urging himself to "Ceasse then myne eyes, to seeke her selfe to see,/ and let my thoughts behold her selfe in mee" (78). These lines mark a breakthrough for the poet. He lets go of his restless need for the lady's presence and instead channels his energy into apprehending her essence within him. In the next sonnet he describes what he perceives as that essence. Unlike other men who see only his lady's outward beauty, he recognizes her "to be diuine and borne of heauenly seed" (79); this divine nature, "deriu'd from that fayre Spirit, from whom al true/ and perfect beauty did at first proceed" (79) is the lady's "true beautie" (79), and what in her he most values. The small but significant act of apprehending the lady's essential spirit within him (78) has brought, it seems, a peace of mind that now enables the poet to focus on the beloved as an "other" of infinite worth in herself. Furthermore, while he still does not recognize his own inner beauty (indeed in sonnet 83 he speaks of his "little worth"), his ability to behold the lady's self in him suggests he no longer perceives her spiritual nature as separate from him, but as an element he can incorporate and nurture his own self with. This subtle change in the poet-

lover's spiritual development is still more perceptible at the end of the sequence.

The tone of the final sonnets appears to return to the despairing note of earlier sonnets. In sonnet 86 we learn of a "Veneomous tounge" which has caused a breach between the lovers. Old fears and anxieties have full reign once again as the poet struggles with the physical and emotional absence of the lady:

Since I haue lackt the comfort of that light,  
The which was wont to lead my thoughts astray:  
I wander as in darkenesse of the night,  
affrayd of euery dangers least dismay. (88)

But there is a difference between this state of forlornness and that expressed in earlier sonnets. Whereas earlier his "hungry eyes" (35/83) could not "lyfe sustayne" (35/83) without the physical presence of the lady and he even demanded that:

no thought of ioy or pleasure vaine,  
dare to approch, that may my solace breed:  
but sudden dumps and drery sad disdayne,  
of all worlds gladnesse more my torment feed.(52)

Now, with only the "image of that heavenly ray" (88) before his eyes, he is able to:

[behold] th'Idaea playne,  
through contemplation of my purest part:  
with light thereof I doe my selfe sustayne,  
and thereon feed my loue-affamisht hart. (88)

The return to food imagery is significant. The poet has not yet found the stillpoint of his own being. Indeed, in sonnet 83 we have sonnet 35 repeated, which strongly suggests he remains a Narcissus-like lover looking outside

himself for a reflection of what is within him. However, the repetition of the sonnet also points to the change, subtle but significant, which has taken place in the speaker. For, sonnets 35 and 83 are not identical. The verb "having" in the sixth line of sonnet 35 is replaced by the verb "seeing" in the same line of the later poem. The change suggests the lover has let go of a certain degree of possessiveness: he now channels his energy into perceiving rather than appropriating the lady. Accordingly, in Sonnet 84 he cautions that "not one spark of filthy lustfull fyre" must break out of him, but rather he must "Onely behold her rare perfection,/ And blesse [his] fortunes fayre election."

Thus, while at the end of the Amoretti the lover still experiences his centre to be the lady, and not his own inner beauty, he is able now to sustain himself by looking to the source of the lady's essential nature, apprehending that within him, and nourishing his mind and soul therewith. However, because he is of flesh as well, it is not enough that he sustain the mind and soul, and so he confesses how "with such brightnesse whylest I fill my mind,/ I starve my body and mine eyes doe blynd" (88). He must nurture both his body and his soul in a relationship of true human love. Thus, he will rejoice in the Epithalamion when he receives the gift of the lady's body, mind and spirit in marriage. Now caught in the midst of the love process, learning the

painful lesson of letting go, he finds little joy and comfort.

As the drama of the Amoretti draws to a close the speaker's struggle with the lesson of detachment continues. He has not yet learnt to love "as [he] ought" (68). However, in the course of the romance depicted in the eighty-nine sonnets, the poet-lover has progressed in his understanding of love: he has moved from what Johnson, drawing on the writings of Martin Buber, calls "an 'I' centric to a 'thou' centric view."<sup>20</sup> Repeatedly, he has renounced self-serving thoughts on love which enabled him to turn, albeit slowly and erratically, from self to other. It is this continuous conversion that will bring about the favorable change he seeks in his relationship with the lady. For, as Spenser will further illustrate in the epigrams he appends to the sonnet sequence, it is through the education and conversion of the lover's own heart that the capacity to give selflessly in love is learnt, and the desired unity with the beloved eventually attained.

---

<sup>20</sup> William C. Johnson, "Love's Ascent/Descent in Spenser's Amoretti and Fowre Hymnes" (unpublished paper, presented at the Sixteenth-Century Studies Conference, 1987, Arizona State Univ., Tempe, Arizona).

## CHAPTER TWO: THE ANACREONTICS

The inconclusive nature of the love experience depicted in the Amoretti is reenacted both in the drama of the attached Anacreontics, and in these poems' very structural form. The most striking characteristic about the four epigrams is their enigmatic quality, created by their apparent lack of organization. To read these as the finale of the Amoretti, rather than the Epithalamion (which is treated more frequently as the fulfillment of the courtship process described in the sonnet sequence), enables us to see further the ambivalent and inconclusive nature of love. Instead of the resounding closure of marriage we have ambiguous, seemingly disconnected episodes. Spenser chose for the closing lines to his "little loves" a poetic form which (like the sonnet sequence) defies smooth narrative progression: epigrams are not meant to "tell a story". Yet, because Spenser placed individual poems together, the reader assumes there is a unifying element which connects them.

The first three epigrams consist of one stanza each, in which the principal figures of lover, beloved, Cupid, and Venus are introduced. The fourth epigram is made up of six stanzas which relate an encounter between the god and the goddess of love. A cursory reading reveals that the theme of love underlies each of the four poetic pieces. The challenge is to uncover the statement which the epigrams as a whole make on the subject of love.



Carol V. Kaske and Robert S. Miola are two critics who have more recently examined the epigrams in some detail, and both argue that the Anacreontics recapitulate the conflicts in the sonnet sequence and anticipate the epithalamial resolution.<sup>1</sup> Kaske states:

all Anacreontics look back by virtue of their theme of cruel love to the prebetrothal sonnets; ... in addition, the fourth Anacreontic with its anticipation of physical union expresses sentiments peculiar to the betrothal period and looks forward to the marriage.<sup>2</sup>

I agree that the epigrams allude both back to the sonnet sequence and forward to the marriage lyric; however, I would like to challenge Kaske's statement that the theme of the epigrams is the cruelty of love. I want to show that without negating the cruel or painful experience of love, Spenser's treatment of the Cupid and Venus relationship reveals love as a benevolent, healing experience. My contention is that the concept of love as a gift of grace which emerges in Spenser's Amoretti is here presented in the

---

<sup>1</sup> Robert S. Miola draws on and elaborates Peter Cummings' suggestion that the epigrams recapitulate and integrate the themes of the Amoretti as a coda after a fugue ("Spenser's Anacreontics: A Mythological Metaphor," Studies in Philology 77 [1980]). Cummings discusses the Anacreontics briefly in "Spenser's Amoretti as an Allegory of Love," Texas Studies in Language and Literature 12 (1971): 178-9.

<sup>2</sup> Kaske, p. 280. Kaske sees the volume Amoretti and Epithalamion divided into an emotional progression of three stages: courtship (sonnet 1 to 57), betrothal (sonnet 68 through the Anacreontics), and marriage (pp. 272-3).

seemingly "trifling" story of Cupid and the Bee.<sup>3</sup>

The first two lines of the first epigram introduce the "I" of the poem and the figure of Cupid. The speaker is a youth, signifying, as Miola points out, not necessarily chronological age but rather inexperience, which the speaker had already drawn attention to in the Amoretti.<sup>4</sup> The Cupid of the Anacreontics is the traditional little winged boy, a "cruell carelesse elfe" (79) who shoots his darts and inflicts pain pitilessly. In the first epigram particular emphasis is laid on Cupid's lack of compassion:

In youth before I waxed old,  
The blynd boy Venus baby,  
For want of cunning made me bold,  
In bitter hyue to grope for honny.  
But when he saw me stung and cry,  
He tooke his wings and away did fly. (1-6)

Here Spenser also establishes a covert parallel between Cupid and the lover. The epigram introduces the Cupid and Bee story as it was originally employed in a Theocritean

---

<sup>3</sup> The tone of the epigrams is naive and playful throughout. This has no doubt contributed to the pervasive critical attitude towards the Anacreontics, which has been to characterize them as "trifling" poems quite "out of keeping with the serious feeling of Amoretti and Epithalamion" (see Greenlaw et al., p. 455). However, lately critics have come to see that the epigrams do in fact make a statement about the nature of love that is as thoughtful as those disclosed in the sonnets, in the Epithalamion and in the Fowre Hymnes. For a brief summary of commentaries by "bewildered" critics, see Miola, pp. 50-1.

<sup>4</sup> Miola, p. 52.

poem.<sup>5</sup> In Theocritus 19 the god of love is stung while stealing honey from a honeycomb; in Spenser's epigram it is the lover who, prompted by the blind god, "grotes" (suggesting the lover's own blindness) for honey in a "bitter hyue" (4) and is stung. The analogous experience which Theocritus's Cupid and Spenser's speaker undergo, indicates Spenser's intention to make the god of love an analogue for the lover.<sup>6</sup> As Miola observes, this:

brief vignette that features first Cupid emboldening a young poet to seek honey in a hive and then the young poet stung, disappointed in hope and frustrated in desire, recapitulates with brevity and precision the plight of the lover in the preceding sonnets.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> James Hutton, "Cupid and the Bee," PMLA 56 (1941): 1036-1058, states that the Theocritean poem is attributed to Theocritus in the manuscripts but is "now handed somewhat abruptly to Bion or Moschus" (1038). It was first printed in the Aldine Theocritus of 1495. "Theocritus" 19 is written in eight hexameters, but Hutton gives the following literal translation:

Love the thief was once stung by a wicked bee, as he filched a honeycomb from the hive, and all his fingertips were pricked. It hurt, and he blew on his hand, stamped the earth, and skipped about; and he showed his hurt to Aphrodite, complaining that the bee is but a tiny creature, but it causes such wounds. And his mother laughed: "What! are you not like the bees, you who are also little, but cause such great wounds?"

<sup>6</sup> It is important to note however, that the parallel between Cupid and the lover is not given by straightforward allegory but by allusion, and like other allusions set up in the poem (the identification of Diana and Venus with the lady), they reverberate throughout the poem but are not permanently fixed or static. Indeed the Anacreontics seem to suggest that human identity itself is not clearly defined but blurred--especially in a relationship of love which demands a certain loss of self and a merging of identities.

<sup>7</sup> Miola, p. 53.

Having acquainted the reader with the lover, Spenser in the following epigram introduces the beloved:

As Diana hunted on a day,  
 She chaunst to come where Cupid lay,  
 his quiuer by his head:  
 One of his shafts she stole away,  
 And one of hers did close conuay,  
 into the others stead:  
 With that loue wounded my loues hart,  
 but Diane beasts with Cupids dart. (1-8)

According to Francis J. Child, this second epigram is a translation of Marot's epigram "De Diane"; but a rereading of the two poems reveals that Spenser has adopted rather than translated the French work.<sup>8</sup> In Marot, Cupid and Diane exchange not only arrows but roles as well:

L'Enfant Amour n'a plus fon arc eftrange Dont il  
 bleffoit d'hommes & cueurs & teftes: Auec celuy de  
 Diane a faict change Dont elle alloit aux champs  
 faire les queftes. Ilz ont change, n'en faictes  
 plus d'enqueftes; Et fi on dict: a quoy le  
 congnois tu? Ie voy qu'Amour chaffe fouuent aux  
 beftes, Et qu'elle attainct les hommes de vertu.<sup>9</sup>

Once Amour and Diane have traded weapons, he chases beasts with her darts and she proceeds to hunt virtuous men with his. In Spenser, however, Diana secretly exchanges one of her darts for one of Cupid's, and there is no exchange of roles: Cupid wounds the lady with Diana's dart and the goddess hunts beasts with Cupid's arrow. Significantly, Spenser chooses to have both Diana and Cupid play a part in

---

<sup>8</sup> Greenlaw et al., p. 456.

<sup>9</sup> Clement Marot, Oeuvres, édition Georges Guiffrey (Geneve: Slatkine Reprints, 1969) IV 169.

wounding the lady. Consequently, the lady is not, as Miola suggests, "chilled" into "disdainful chastity".<sup>10</sup> Her chastity is associated with sexual human love.

The heart wound described in the second epigram supports the portrait we have of the lady of the sonnets. In his sequence Spenser is careful to point out that just as the speaker is not a typical courtly lover (he wants "to knit the knot, that euer shall remaine" [Amoretti 6]) so the beloved is not the cruel, sterile lady depicted in many courtly love lyrics. Like the typical lady of a sonnet sequence, she is chaste and goddess-like, but her chastity does not keep her from falling in love with the imperfect lover: it merely allows her to withhold the gift of herself until that time when the love between them is built on "mutuall good will" (Amoretti 65). Only if the reader disregards the role Cupid plays in setting Diana's arrow in motion, can she/he read Anacreontic II as a statement about the lady as a "distant, proud, cruel avatar of chastity".<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> Miola states "Whereas Cupid's arrow inflamed the lover with sexual passion, Diana's dart chills the lady into disdainful chastity" (p. 53).

<sup>11</sup> Miola, p. 56. Miola remarks that the lady's "appearance in the last epigrams anticipates the imminent transformation of the lady from the distant, proud, cruel avatar of chastity to the sensual, loving bride." My reservations regarding this interpretation are based on the observation that Spenser repeatedly avoids simplistic definitions of human identity. Human change as he depicts it involves a complex dynamic process not a dramatic metamorphosis. For this reason I also take issue with the statement Miola makes at the beginning of his article in which he remarks that "the four epigrams make structurally

The lady is so far from being a perfect embodiment of the goddess of "disdainful chastity" that she is mistaken by Venus' son to be the goddess of love:

I saw in secret to my Dame,  
How little Cupid humbly came:  
and said to her All hayle my mother.  
But when he saw me laugh, for shame  
His face with bashfull blood did flame,  
not knowing Venus from the other.  
Then neuer blush Cupid (quoth I)  
for many haue err'd in this beauty. (1-8)

This third epigram is a rather close translation of Marot's "De Cupido et fa femme."<sup>12</sup> However, Spenser's originality lies in placing it directly after the Diana and Cupid epigram. Miola sees the movement from the second to the third epigram as reflecting "the change in the conception of the lady from a figure of Diana to a figure of Venus".<sup>13</sup> But there is nothing in Anacreontic II and III to imply a radical change. Indeed the space between the epigrams acts

and thematically possible the various and difficult transitions the sequences encompass--from sorrow to joy, loneliness to love, aridity to fruition, discord to concord, sickness to health, sin to salvation, Lent to Easter, and death to new life" (p. 52). While I agree with Miola's perceptive observation of the transitional role the Anacreontics play, I see the movement in the Amoretti as being much less clearly defined than Miola suggests it is.

12 Marot, p. 193:  
Amour trouua celle qui m'eft amere,  
Et ie eftyoy, i'en fcaay bien mieulx le compte:  
<Bon iour (dict-il), bon iour Venus ma mere.>  
Puis tout a coup il veoit qu'il fe mefcompte,  
Dont la couleur au vifage lui monte  
D'auoir failly: honteux, Dieu fcait combien:  
<Non, non, Amour (ce dis ie) n'ayez honte;  
Plus cler voyantz que vous f'y trompent bien.>

13 Miola, p. 56.

as a kind of hyphen joining and dividing the concepts of the lady as Diana, and of her as Venus. In other words, the lady combines in herself the qualities of the goddess of chastity and the goddess of love.

In support of this representation is the portrait we have of the lady in the sonnets; there she emerges as a Diana-Venus figure somewhat like the figure of Britomart in the Faerie Queene. John S. Bean observes that Britomart's magic (channeled into the magical spear she carries) "is related not only to her virgin intactness but to her own capacity of falling in love."<sup>14</sup> The power of the lady of the sonnets also lies in a certain intactness of self, which keeps her steadfast in the face of "raging waues", "tempest", and "fayrer weathers" (Amoretti 59). What sets the lady of the Amoretti apart from the ladies of conventional sonnet sequences is precisely that she combines in herself the "virgin intactness" of a Diana and also the willingness to give herself in love as a "daughter of the Queene of loue" (Amoretti 39).

The encounter between Cupid and Venus in epigram three has set the scene for the story of Cupid and the Bee related at length in epigram four. The first two stanzas of this last Anacreontic are, as James Hutton observes, a close

---

<sup>14</sup> John S. Bean, "Making the Daimonic Personal: Britomart and Love's Assault in the Faerie Queene," Modern Language Quarterly 40 (1979): 249.

rendering of a madrigal by Torquato Tasso.<sup>15</sup> However, it is noteworthy that at the close of stanza two, Spenser adds two lines that are not in Tasso. In both poems Cupid is "sweetly plumbring" in his mother's lap, is disturbed by an insect (a gnat in Tasso, a bee in Spenser), awakens, and muses how a tiny creature can cause so much havoc; in response Venus draws an analogy between the tiny insect and the baby Cupid:

E tu picciolo sei,  
Ma pur gli uomini in terra col tuo pianto  
E'n ciel desti dei. (Tasso)

See thou thy selfe likewise art lyttle made,  
if thou regard the same.  
And yet thou suffrest neyther gods in sky,  
nor men in earth to rest:  
But when thou art disposed cruelly,  
theyr sleepe thou doost molest.  
Then eyther change thy cruelty,  
or giue lyke leaue vnto the fly. (13-20)

Both Tasso's Venus and Spenser's Venus attempt to enlighten

---

<sup>15</sup> Hutton, p. 1049. Hutton concludes that the fourth epigram is "made up of two stanzas from Tasso, two from the original theme of Cupid and the Bee, and two of new development, each part ending with its appropriate 'moral'." He cites Tasso's madrigal on p. 1043:

Mentre in grembo a la madre Amore un giorno  
Dolcemente dormiva,  
Una zanzara zuffolava intorno  
Per quella dolce riva,  
Disse allor, desto a quel susurro, Amore:  
Da sì picciola forma  
Com'esce sì gran voce e tal rumore  
Che sveglia ognun che dorma?  
Con maniere vezzose  
Lusingandogli il sonno col suo canto  
Venere gli rispose:  
E tu picciolo sei,  
Ma pur gli uomini in terra col tuo pianto  
E'n ciel desti gli dèi.



Cupid, to make him see in the tiny figures of the gnat and the bee his own uncanny capacity for creating unrest; but Spenser has his goddess also instruct her son to either change his cruel ways or to excuse the fly's troublesome nature. In other words, she asks not only that Cupid acquire self-knowledge but that he take action. Venus' instructions are Spenser's invention. Her words take on added meaning in the next stanzas.

Stanzas three and four draw upon the two earliest sources for the Cupid and the Bee theme: "Theocritus" 19 and "Anacreon" 35.<sup>16</sup> It is doubtful that Spenser went directly to either of these poems; he most probably used as a source Ronsard's Ode 16 of Book 4 which was a close paraphrase of both Greek poems.<sup>17</sup> Whatever his source, Spenser's version

---

<sup>16</sup> Hutton, p. 1039 cites "Anacreon" 35 in translation:

Love once failed to see among the roses a sleeping bee, and was stung. His finger wounded, he bawled, and ran flying to lovely Cytherea: 'I'm done for, mother,' said he, 'done for, I'm dying! A little winged serpent stuck me that the rustics call a bee.' But she said: 'If a bee's sting hurts, what hurt think you they feel, Eros, whom you strike?

The Greek poem is in 16 short "hemiambs" the familiar measure of Anacreon. It was discovered by Henri Estienne in 1549 and published in his Anacreon of 1554.

<sup>17</sup> Although Ronsard is the most likely source, it is noteworthy as Sidney Lee points out in Greenlaw et al. p. 456 that "there were in existence when Spenser wrote at least eight different renderings of [the poem] into French by as many French poets. Ronsard, de Baif, de Magny, and five others handled the fancy. There can be little doubt that Spenser's French reading impelled him to work upon it." Ronsard's Ode 16 is cited in Meritt Y. Hughes, "Spenser and the Greek Pastoral Triad," Studies in Philology 20 (1923):

of Cupid and the Bee deviates subtly from tradition so as to encompass the themes evoked in his earlier works. The "little Cupid" of Spenser's *Anacreontics* is not stung accidentally as he steals honey (as in Theocritus 19), or moves among the flowers (as in Anacreon 35, Ronsard's Ode 16), or sleeps unawares (as in Thomas Watson's Sonnet 53), but as he deliberately chases the bee:<sup>18</sup>

the cruell boy not so content,  
would needs the fly pursue:  
And in his hand with heedlesse hardiment,  
him caught for to subdue. (21-4)

To the reader of the preceding sonnet sequence, the picture of Cupid pursuing the bee "for to subdue" immediately calls to mind the image of the poet-lover seeking to "soften" and "bend" the lady's heart to his will. Cupid's "heedlesse hardiment" like the lover's bold efforts to assault the lady with his "forces" (sonnet 14) brings pain:

But when on it he hasty hand did lay,  
the Bee him stung therefore:  
Now out alas (he cryde) and welaway,  
I wounded am full sore. (25-8)

---

196.

<sup>18</sup> Thomas Watson's Sonnet 52 in *Hectompathia* (1581) is also considered a source for Spenser's poem. Hutton notes that while Spenser's development of Cupid's cure in stanza five could have been suggested by Ronsard who has two lines on the subject, Watson alone before Spenser elaborates this motif. Hutton also observes that Watson's conclusion is similar to Spenser's (p.1050). Kaske however, dismisses Watson's version of the cure as a possible source because he has "Aesculapius curing the sting with herbs, which is not very similiar" (p.279). She suggests Ronsard's erotic preface to a cure as the source for Spenser's own sexual remedy.

Like the lover of the sonnets Cupid promptly receives a gentle rebuke:

Vnto his mother straight he weeping came,  
 and of his griefe complayned:  
 Who could not chose but laugh at his fond game,  
 though sad to see him pained.  
 Think now (quod she) my sonne how great the smart  
 of those whom thou dost wound:  
 Full many thou hast pricked to the hart,  
 that pitty neuer found:  
 Therefore henceforth some pitty take,  
 when thou doest spoyle of louers make. (31-40)<sup>19</sup>

The few critics who have examined Spenser's Anacreontics tend to gloss over this stanza and focus rather on the next two stanzas. The reason is most probably that this stanza appears to be too close a rendition of the original theme to attract the same degree of interest as the last stanzas of new development. However, Spenser's particular inventiveness already begins in the above stanza. Lines 31-8 do draw rather closely on the traditional motif. The numerous versions all relate that Cupid is stung, complains to his mother, who responds by identifying Cupid's wound with the pain he inflicts on others. Furthermore the goddess' reply in lines 35-8 is similar to the response given by Aphrodite in Theocritus 19, by "lovely Cytherea" in

---

<sup>19</sup> As Miola notes: "[t]he identification of the goddess with the lady is further strengthened in [this] epigram by Venus' reaction to Cupid's tears and complaints. The goddess laughs at Cupid's sorrows just as the lady of the sonnets turned 'hir selfe to laughter' (XVIII) at the plight of the weeping lover and made his pain "her sport" (X)" (p. 56). The identification also throws light on the nature of the Lady's laughter: it is not maliciously directed at the lover (as he sees it), but is a benign response to his "fond game".

Anacreon 35, and by Venus in Ronsard's Ode and Thomas Watson's sonnet:

What! are you not like the bees, you who are  
little but cause such great wounds?  
(Theocritus 19)

If a bee's sting hurts, what hurt think you  
they feel, Eros, whom you strike?  
(Anacreon 35)

Si doncques un animal  
Si petit fait tant de mal,  
Quand son haleine espoinconne  
La main de quelque personne,  
Combien fais-tu de dlueur  
Au prix de luy, dans le coeur  
De celuy dans qui tu iettes  
Tes amoureux sagettes?

(Ronsard 16)

Why so, sweet Boye, quoth Venus sitting by?  
Thy selfe is yong, thy arrowes are but small  
and yet thy shotte makes hardest hartes to cry?  
(Watson 53)

The seemingly insignificant difference between these four versions of Venus' rejoinder and that found in Anacreontic IV is that in the latter, the goddess does not answer Cupid's complaint with a rhetorical question.

Spenser's goddess of love also bids her son to reflect on the pain he delivers, but she concludes with a further statement:

Therefore henceforth some pitty take,  
when thou doest spoyle of louers make. (39-40)

These two lines (and line 38 directly preceding) are totally original to Spenser, yet no critic has commented on their significance. In stanza two Venus suggested Cupid "change his cruelty" (or cease to complain about the fly); in stanza four the goddess of love makes clear how it is Cupid can

change: by taking pity on those whose hearts he injures. Venus not only calls attention to the word "pity" by using it twice (lines 38-9); she proceeds directly to demonstrate what it means to take pity:

She tooke him streight full pitiously lamenting,  
and wrapt him in her smock:  
She wrapt him softly, all the while repenting,  
that he the fly did mock.  
She drest his wound and it embaulmed wel  
with salve of soueraige might:  
And then she bath'd him in a dainty well  
the well of deare delight. (41-8)

While the sexual innuendos in the description of Venus' cure are unmistakable, the incident is above all an example of that love which holds nothing back, which gives its all. Venus turns to her son, enfolds him, heals his wound, and bathes him in her "dainty well": in so doing she reveals the feeling of deep compassion and tenderness which defines the word "pity" as it was understood in Spenser's time (and now).<sup>20</sup> To pity, as the goddess of love demonstrates, is to turn the attention wholly towards the other and to give of oneself in a selfless outpouring of love. Pity, as Venus uses the word and exemplifies it, is a creative not a destructive sentiment; it is an inner feeling that gives

---

<sup>20</sup> The ambiguous sentence structure of lines 41-4 make it possible to interpret either Cupid or Venus as 'piteously lamenting' and 'repenting'. However the focus in this stanza is not on Cupid but on Venus and specifically, on the healing power of her love, thus, the words apply more appropriately to the goddess than to her son.

rise to an outward act. It brings healing and wholeness.<sup>21</sup>

In her analysis of Anacreontic IV, Kaske observes that "the concordance yields a striking statistic about this poem which gives it some kind of structural importance: its reiterated and obvious theme is that love is 'cruell'."<sup>22</sup> Charlotte Thompson affirms "Cupid appropriately is the poem's dominant actor and suffering, too, is its theme".<sup>23</sup> The use of the conventional figure of the cruel Cupid does indeed suggest that, for Spenser, to love necessarily involves pain. However, without negating this reality, Spenser rewrites the Cupid and the Bee story which traditionally expressed the theme of the cruelty of love, and subtly changes it into a story about the ultimate power of love to edify, heal and bring fulfillment. Spenser does this by giving Venus a prominent role in the epigrams.

While "cruell" and "cruelty" are indeed used a total of

---

<sup>21</sup> It is this kind of pity which prompts Britomart in the Faerie Queene to aid the despairing Scudamour and give up her life, if need be, to save Amoret from her misery (III xi 7-18). But perhaps more to the point of the Cupid/Venus discussion above, it is noteworthy that when Britomart herself initially falls in love she indulges in a destructive form of pity: self-pity. Until she goes to see Merlin who reads the Cupid's wound as a benevolent occurrence, Britomart (like Scudamour later) sees death as the only option to her love wound (III ii 35). When she takes the focus off her pain and instead gives herself wholeheartedly to the search for Artegal, for her beloved, then healing begins to take place in herself and those she comes in contact with.

<sup>22</sup> Kaske, p. 277.

<sup>23</sup> Thompson, p. 330.

five times in reference to Cupid, and he is, as Thompson observes, the dominant figure in the Anacreontics, appearing as he does in each of the epigrams, Cupid is nevertheless an agent of a higher, benevolent power. He maintains a subordinate role in relation to Venus. He is introduced as "Venus baby" and in epigram three he comes humbly, reverently, to the lady he believes to be his mother. Significantly, the five instances of the words "cruell" and "cruelty" to depict Cupid are balanced by five references to Venus as "mother".<sup>24</sup> The epigrams call attention not only to the subject of love's cruelty but also to the greater power of love's capacity for tenderness and mercifulness. The Venus of the Anacreontics is like the Venus of Faerie Queene III vi who descends from the state of goddess in the sky to that of mother on earth, to bring her defiant son home. She is a mother who feels pity when her son is wounded and not anger that he has defied her.<sup>25</sup> Her response teaches the lesson that her love is greater than Cupid's capacity to inflict pain. Cupid, as Venus remarks,

---

24 Anacreontic I line 3 ". . . All hayle my mother."  
 Anacreontic IV lines 1-2 ". . . as loue lay sweetly  
 slumbring,/ all in his mother's lap."  
 line 11 "To whom his mother closely smiling sayd,"  
 line 31 "Vnto his mother straight he weeping came,"  
 line 57-8 "And now forgets the cruell carelesse elfe,/ his mother's heast to proue."

25 I am indebted for this reading of Venus to William V. Nestruck, "Spenser and the Renaissance Mythology of Love," Literary Monographs VI (1975): 37-70. See esp. pp. 37-42.

is capable of hurting both "gods in sky" and "men in earth", but still he remains subsumed under the power of Venus' greater divinity.

In Spenser's representation of her, Venus' pagan divinity has Christian connotations. Cupid's words "all hayle my mother" call to mind the words of the angel Gabriel at the Annunciation; and in stanza one of epigram four Cupid is described as "sweetly slumbring,/ all in his mother's lap" (23) recalling the iconography of the Madonna and Child. Finally, in stanza five there is the Pieta-like figure of Venus pitifully and lovingly holding her wounded son to her. Venus' divine pity links her not only to the virgin but also to the figure of Christ. In Faerie Queene II viii 5-6, Spenser compares the meeting between a guardian angel who heals the physically and spiritually sick Guyon to the reunion between Cupid (without bow and arrow) and his mother Venus. Remarking on this simile Miola observes that:

it is Venus' divinity, her compatibility with the notion of a loving Christian God, that sparks the comparison between her meeting with Cupid and the sinner's reconciliation with God. The striking similarity between this simile and the epigram's reunion of Cupid and Venus points to the latter's allegorical significance. In both passages Venus acts as a symbol of divine power whose primary function is the healing of spiritual wounds and the reinstatement of sinners to a life of grace.<sup>26</sup>

Miola's perceptive reading throws light on the power of

---

<sup>26</sup> Miola, p. 63.



divine love to heal the spiritual being, but it leaves out the strong sexual connotations. The image in stanza five communicates an understanding of love as that which brings both spiritual and physical fulfillment.<sup>27</sup> Spenser's goddess of love is a divine power whose pity heals body and spirit, and in the process teaches the individual to embrace human suffering:

Who would not oft be stung as this,  
to be so bath'd in Venus blis? (49-50)

Venus's response to Cupid's grief also teaches the lesson the Amoretti lover learns from experience but does not fully understand. The generous love she showers on "the cruell boy" (43) is not a reward for an act well done but is itself an act of grace. The goddess' love for Cupid is, like the love granted the lover by his lady and his "deare Lord" (Amoretti 68) pure gift.

Kaske refers to the parenthetical ending to stanzas five (49-50) as the climax of the poem.<sup>28</sup> Indeed it is, and it negates the thesis that love is simply cruel. The poet's rhetorical question confirms rather that the power of love

---

<sup>27</sup> This latter image evokes elements of the Pieta theme, a motif which traditionally is also laden with sexual connotations. See Leo Steinberg, The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983). Steinberg notes that in Northern Pieta groups of the 15th Century, there are instances in which the Madonna's hand rests on Christ's loincloth "in reminiscence perhaps of Mary's role as protectress of Jesus' infancy" (p. 104).

<sup>28</sup> Kaske, p. 279.

to restore is ultimately greater than the power of love to inflict pain--so much so that, suffering which gives rise to joy is welcomed. But the Anacreontics do not end on that climactic point. As with the preceding sonnet sequence, the epigrams appear to return to a condition similar to that described at the beginning. Like the speaker with whom he is identified, Cupid is slow to learn the lesson his experience teaches him, and in the final stanza the narrator relates that:

The wanton boy was shortly wel recured,  
of that his malady:  
But he soone after fresh againe enured,  
his former cruelty.  
And since that time he wounded hath my selfe  
with his sharpe dart of loue (51-6)

Cupid's own painful experience does not stop him from continuing to do what he, as the god of love, is called to do; once healed, he is off again shooting his darts of love. This is appropriate and right: Venus' behest was not that Cupid cease to shoot his heart-wrenching weapons, but that he change his cruel ways. What renders Cupid "cruell" is that he neglects to take pity on afflicted lovers:

And now forgets the cruell carelesse elfe,  
his mothers heast to proue.  
So now I languish, till he please  
my pining anguish to appease. (57-60)<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> Spenser's particular emphasis on the importance of "pity" in a relationship of love is original and profound but necessarily flawed within the mythological context he puts it. Spenser wanted to convey that an element of compassion is called for between lovers; that pity for another (as opposed to self-pity), brings forth selfless acts of love. Accordingly Spenser changes the myth of Cupid

It is curious that it is Cupid rather than the beloved who will (in time and when he pleases) appease the lover's "pining anguish". One expects the lover at this point to complain that unlike Cupid he has received no fulfillment from his goddess of love, from his lady. Instead the lover's complaint is directed at Cupid and specifically, at the god's lack of compassion. But, to the extent that Cupid is an analogue for the speaker, the implication of these lines appears to be that fulfillment in love will come when the lover himself will take pity; when, that is, he pacifies his own anguish by turning the focus away from the self toward the beloved.

Though the Anacreontics appear to end without a resolution, with Cupid remaining the same "wanton boy", and the speaker focused egotistically upon the "I", yet there has been some progression from the first to the last epigram. Cupid has in fact not refused to take heed of Venus' behest, but only "forgotten" it; consequently, the

---

and the Bee to accommodate this human reality. But Cupid's pity for the wounded cannot manifest itself in action; if Cupid feels pity, it will only stay at the level of the heart as it cannot flow outward towards the victim; it is an emotion wasted on Cupid. The "little winged god" cannot even show pity by wounding a desired beloved as he is blind and only shoots his darts haphazardly. In brief, Cupid's only function is to shoot his "dart[s] of love", it is an indulgence to ask that he take pity; thus the analogy between Cupid and the lover falls short. In order for Spenser's myth to make sense one has to transfer the human level of meaning to the mythological level. This is what I have attempted to do in my reading.

poet will languish only "till he please": till he recollects what the story of the Cupid and the Bee teaches and then responds to the experience of love with the same spirit of selflessness that the goddess of love demonstrated.

The enigmatic quality which characterizes the Anacreontics still lingers even after one has attempted to explain the more perplexing passages. The poems' organizing thread remains essentially beneath the surface, obscuring the "perfect" unity the reader reaches for. I suggest Spenser meant it to be so. Very likely, he chose a poetic form which resists narrative coherence because it was an appropriate vehicle by which to represent the incoherent experience that love is. In both the Amoretti and the Anacreontics Spenser suggests that to be in a relationship of love means to be caught, as the poet-lover is, in the midst of experience learning and unlearning the lesson of love; moving more often than not one step forward and two steps backwards in one's knowledge and understanding. It is in this state of emotional flux that the speaker of the Fowre Hymnes also finds himself entangled.

### CHAPTER THREE: AN HYMNE IN HONOUR OF LOVE

The speaker of the Hymne in Honour of Love is in a state of inner turmoil: love rages "with restless stowre" (3) in his heart and tyrannizes his entire being. Like the lover of the Amoretti, he decides to ease his "bitter smart" (5) by engaging in the act of writing. The speaker of the sonnet sequence addressed his rhymes directly to his lady; the Hymne poet frames his song in praise of the god of love. While the two works are aimed at different audiences, the poets' intention for writing is the same: to convert the heart of the beloved. Ironically, however, in both poems it is the speaker's own heart that is converted: at the beginning of the Hymne the poet complains about the cruel ways of the god of love; at the end he sings of the ultimately benevolent will of the divine power at work in him. This change in perspective does not come about suddenly but is born of a struggle to rise above a condition of despair and shortsightedness.

Three particular moments in the hymn clearly manifest this struggle. On three occasions the poet makes a conscious effort to turn from self-pity and despair to embrace a more hopeful attitude toward his love experience. His willingness to attend to the insights he gains into his predicament brings on the slight but significant change in his outlook. In charting these three moments in the hymn I

hope to show how the process of conversion that the poet undergoes involves a constant effort to learn and relearn the lesson of self-transcendence, to learn and relearn how to continuously turn the attention from self to other, from despair to hope.<sup>1</sup>

The first effort the poet makes to move outside of himself occurs at the very beginning of the hymn. The tone of the first stanza of the Hymne in Honour of Love is one of complaint and oppression, as he claims that "long since hast [Love] .../ subdude my poore captived hart" (1), and of longing for relief--as he wishes "Faine would I seeke to ease my bitter smart" (5); but the speaker refuses to wallow in his pain, so that in the next stanza he appears suddenly as decisive and resolute:

And now t'asswage the force of this new flame  
And make thee more propitious in my need,  
I meane to sing the praises of thy name,  
And thy victorious conquests to areed ... .(8-11)

The poet is unequivocal about his motivations for singing the hymn: he sings because he is in need. He desires consolation from the god of love. His reasons for composing a song of praise are wholly self-interested. Nevertheless, in turning from his own grief to tell how love "madest many harts to bleed" (12), he places his personal suffering in

---

<sup>1</sup> According to David Russell, "Throughout the poem there is a kind of dialogue between song and silence, between hope and despair. With each hymn the poet feels he can no longer sing, but he forges on, in hope, and renews his praise" (p. 146).

the context of the Petrarchan love experience in general. This allows him to gain some detachment from his own pain and consequently to stop wallowing in it and to attempt to understand it instead.

To come to terms with his inner tumult the poet writes a song, which begins with a description of Love's origins. He questions how anyone can "perfectly declare,/ The wondrous cradle of [Cupid's] infancie" (50-1), but then he himself ventures to tell how the god has Venus for his mother and both "Plentie" and "Penurie" (53) for his fathers--a rather complicated genealogy to say the least, which locates the source of love in contradiction. According to him also, Cupid is simultaneously the youngest and the eldest of all the gods. The poet's version conflates the traditional myth of Cupid as the son of Venus with three different accounts of Love's birth given in Plato's Symposium. In giving this syncretic version of Love's origins, the poet underlines the essentially "wondrous" (51) and paradoxical nature of the energy which has taken hold of him.

But while love's very essence is mysterious, and, indeed, confusing, the work of love is to bring light and order to all things. The drama of the god of love begins with the deity awakening to a world in "great Chaos" (58) and bringing order to it. In relating this particular myth of Cupid, the poet creates for himself a role model, a lover

whom he can copy, from whom he can learn how to order his own inner chaos. As in the Anacreontics, the myth of Cupid which Spenser's speaker relates is an analogue for the speaker's own drama. The Hymne poet tells how Cupid, "that had now long time securely slept/ In Venus lap" (61-62) is wakened and inspired to "make his hardie flight" (69) through the "great wide wast" (70) of a world in "deepe darkness" (60). He does so "Weakely at first" (67). He needs light "to guide his wandring way" (71) and receives it from his "owne faire mother" (72). With the power of Venus' light he illumines the world and by severing its "sundrie parts" (76) brings order to what "before had lyen confused ever" (77).

In his decision to write a "simple song" (307), the Hymne poet initiates a similiar movement upward away from his owne "deepe darkness" (60) and towards a fuller understanding of his predicament, towards greater illumination. Before he begins to sing, the lover, like Cupid before his journey, feels weak, his wits "enfeebled" (15) and "faint" (17) by the "sharpe sorrowes" (16) love has inflicted upon him. Like the god, too, he is strengthened, however, by a power greater than himself, by Love's own kindling fire, and with desire, he calls on the muses, the nymphs and the "faire blossomes of youths" (36) to lift their voices in song with him. The song is the vehicle by which the poet analyzes the "sundrie parts" (76), the



various stages, of his love experience and in doing so brings some peace to the "restless stowre" (3) within him.

The first act of separation which the poet performs is to distinguish between the energy which draws things together merely "[T]o quench the flame, which they in burning fynd" (102) and that divine spark which moves human beings to come together "not for lusts sake, but for eternitie" (104). In his effort to clarify the chaos within him, the young poet-lover is concerned with differentiating between lust and love, and with giving his feeling a name and locating its origin. He explains that because man possesses a divine spirit he is drawn to the divine, and to that which on earth most resembles the divine: the beautiful. Hence, according to the poet it is nothing to wonder at that "Fraile men, whose eyes seek heavenly things to see,/ At sight [of beauty] so much enravisht bee" (117-19).

In giving this traditional, Platonic reading of love as a desire for the heavenly, the poet stresses the noble nature of his own love. However, both his rhetorical question (117-19) and his ensuing description of the human love experience (120-140), reveal that the desire which separates men from other creatures is, ironically, also what gives birth to a violent love, "rage extreme" (117) that makes individuals less than human. The experience which man's higher nature makes him especially vulnerable to is

one which "suckles the blood, and drinketh up the lyfe" (125); it drains and consumes the lover. It reduces the heavenly born man to a thrall who wastes his days and nights, loathes his life and disdains the light of heaven (127-133).

Initially the poet is able to describe this love experience from the perspective of an apparently objective observer. However, in line 134 he stops merely relating the ills of "poore lovers" (258) and addresses "the author of their banefull bane" (128) directly. He chastises Cupid: falling back on the old topos of love as a sadistic force that "triumph[s]" (137) in the "decay" (137) of languishing lovers and purposely "emmarble[s]" (139) the female heart, the poet like the other "wretches" (126), of which he speaks, makes "ful piteous mone" (127) to the tyrant Love.

The shift in narrative voice marks a change in the poet's own capacity to speak as a detached narrator. His description of lovers' "consuming grieve" (126) appears to trigger his own feelings of pain and resentment and he interrupts the narration of their experience to turn the spotlight once more on his own woundedness:

So hast thou often done (ay me the more)  
To me thy vassall, whose yet bleeding hart,  
With thousand wounds thou mangled hast so sore  
That whole remaines scarce any little part,  
Yet to augument the anguish of my smart,  
Thou hast enfrosen her disdainefull brest,  
That no one drop of pitie there doth rest. (141-7)

As he has done in the opening stanzas, the poet here calls attention to his pain and his need. While his decision to create a "simple song" (307) initiated a movement upward, away from despair and toward hope, his personal identification with the lovers he depicts prevents him from sustaining that upward movement. Indeed the "piteous mone" (127) sets the poet's emotional energy moving once again downward toward self-pity, so that he questions the purpose of his own creative act which had set in motion the movement upward toward hope and self-transcendence:

Why then do I this honor unto thee,  
 Thus to ennoble thy victorious name,  
 Since thou doest shew no favour unto mee,  
 Ne once move ruth in that rebellious Dame,  
 Somewhat to slacke the rigour of my flame?  
 Certes small glory doest thou winne hereby,  
 To let her live thus free, and me to dy. (148-54)

The poet's question, though meant as a rhetorical criticism of the pitiless god, reveals his own self-interested attitude toward his art. He ennobles the name of love in a song because he desires to acquire his lady's pity in return. Failing to obtain her compassion, he questions the sense in continuing to praise the god of love when one cannot "get" what one "wants" from him. The poet's egocentric motives lead him towards despair--as is rhetorically represented by the conclusion of the stanza with the final, monosyllabic, heavy stresses on "me to dy" (154).

According to Oates, the lover's "constant effort in this first poem is directed toward finding some haven from his grief in order to allow his spirit to revive and reverse its downward emotional spiral toward despair or lust".<sup>2</sup> This undertaking is precisely what occurs at this point in the drama: just when the poet's negative train of thought impels a movement toward despair, he directs his mind to remember and consider his knowledge of the nature of love:

But if thou be indeede, as men thee call,  
The worlds great Parent, the most kind preserver  
Of living wights, the soveraine Lord of all,  
How falles it then, that with thy furious fervour,

Thou does afflict as well the not deserver,  
As him that doeth thy lovely heasts despize,  
And on thy subjects most doest tyrannize?  
(155-161)

The use of the conditional conjunction "But if" seems to arrest the downward emotional spiral and makes an attempt to introduce a way of thinking about love contrary to the one he has been gradually falling into. The benevolence of Cupid is not something the speaker knows perfectly for himself: he has experienced mainly the afflictions of love.<sup>3</sup> But he remembers that others know him as a "great Parent" ("as men thee call" [155]) and a "most kind preserver"

---

<sup>2</sup> Oates, p. 149.

<sup>3</sup> However, as Welsford notes (p. 41), the fact that at the beginning of the hymn the speaker calls on the "mightie God of love" (22) to help him, to "overspred/ [Him] with the shadow of [his] gentle wing" (19-20) and enable him to sing, reveals that the poet believes in the god's benevolence though he had not yet experienced it.

(156). Thus, he holds up this positive belief and juxtaposes it against what he knows from experience: that those who surrender to love suffer his trials most. In the poet's view, Love's apparent error is his failure to differentiate between the worthy and the unworthy, the good and the bad, the friend and the foe. This lack of discrimination puzzles him. Both his recollection of what others have said and his questioning of love's ways are part of his struggle with his own negative view of love. This marks the second moment in the hymn in which the poet makes a conscious, deliberate effort to turn from self-pity and despair to embrace a more hopeful attitude toward his love experience.

This tentative striking out for a fuller understanding of his predicament results in the conclusion that love's trials are tests which refine and make one more "deserv[ing]" (166) of love (162-8). Because of the difficulty in acquiring it, love is found to be that more valuable--so "having got it, [men] may it more esteeme/ For things hard gotten, men more dearely deeme" (167-8). David Russell describes this couplet as an idealistic attempt to justify Cupid's tyranny and the lady's hardness, but one which does not relieve the pain of the experience.<sup>4</sup> Indeed the sententious quality of the poet's words suggest that he

---

<sup>4</sup> Russell, p. 67.

voices not personally tested truths, but utterances of other men.

However while this idealistic interpretation cannot, as Russell argues, eliminate his pain, it clearly illustrates his efforts at what Oates describes as the poet's "self-therapeutic enterprise".<sup>5</sup> That is, at this point in his song the poet has again become self-absorbed, self-preoccupied, and momentarily he discovers that the way out of this enclosing frame of mind is to turn to the words of authorities and to listen to others. The insight he gains and embraces does not eradicate the pain of unrequited love, but it gives meaning to his suffering and allows his spirit to revive and reverse its emotional spiral toward despair. As a result he is able to continue his song and the work of analyzing the Petrarchan experience with a new degree of detachment.

Upon resuming his discussion of the human love experience the poet once again attempts to differentiate between lust and love. Again he stresses the dissimilarity between the two, between the man who feels "loose desyre" (175) for a lady, and him who truly loves his beloved. According to the speaker, lust is a "moldwarpe" (182) which does not dare to aspire towards heaven, but instead lies on earth and remains there in "cowardly distrust/ Of his weake wings" (180-1). Love, on the other hand, is a "Lord of

---

<sup>5</sup> Oates, p. 149.

truth and loialtie" (176), a force which rises "On golden plumes up to the purest skie" (178). For the young lover the difference between the two emotions is a crucial one: lust debases, love raises, the one is "false", the other is "true". The tentative conditionals of lines 155-166 ("But if.../ How falles it then .../ Yet ...") has given way to direct assertions "For love is ... (176)/ Such is ..." (190), which creates the impression that the poet now feels sure of himself, and of his ability to discriminate between love and lust. However, as he proceeds with his analysis of the experience of the true lover, his language betrays an awareness on his part that the love he defines as "true" can indeed become just as self-serving and destructive as "loathly sinfull lust" (179)--that simple oppositions are inadequate as a means of ordering the chaos of the experience of love.

As the poet describes it, the Neoplatonic idealization of the beloved (190-6) does not direct the lover's attention to heavenly things but rather, as Welsford observes, intensifies the desire for the lady such that the true lover's mind quickly makes of its heaven a hell.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, in an image which recalls the recurrent theme of love as

---

<sup>6</sup> Welsford explains how, according to the hymn poet's version of the Neoplatonic refining process, "[t]he lady's inward beauty refines and elevates her lover's mind and he then is able to mirror her inward beauty in a mental image which is even lovelier than her actual bodily form. But this does not lead to any repudiation of sexual love; if anything it intensifies it" (p. 152).

appetite in the Amoretti and in particular the "hunger" imagery of sonnets 35 and 83, the poet compares the "true" lover to the figure of Tantalus who lives in the nether world forever consumed by the sight of what he cannot have (200). In Amoretti 35 and 83 the Narcissus-like lover is starved by the "plenty" (the lady) he sees before him; similarly, the Tantalus-like lover "feeds" (198) on the image of the beloved imprinted in his "deepest wit" (197), but instead of being nourished by this food he is himself consumed by his "infinite desyre" (202). This desire for the other is, as depicted by the poet, literally self-consuming. A lover's mind once fixed on the "fairer forme" (193) of the beloved

Ne thinks on ought, but how it to attaine;  
His care, his joy, his hope is all on this,  
That seemes in it all blisses to containe,  
In sight whereof, all other blisse seemes vaine.  
Thrise happie man, might he the same possesse;  
He faines himselfe, and doth his fortune blesse.  
(205-10)

The Hymne poet appears to be making a general statement about the absorbing nature of the Petrarchan experience he knows only too well. However, the use of words such as "seemes" (207), and "faines himselfe" (210) places a distance between himself and the universal Petrarchan lover he describes, as they suggest that the speaker himself doesn't necessarily believe that possessing the lady is the ultimate bliss, but rather that the lover who thinks so is deluded, and what we would call obsessed.



Indeed, the poet mocks the extreme to which the Petrarchan lover's fixation of mind drives him to. The lover's obsessive desire for his lady causes him to:

[cast] in his unquiet thought,  
 What he may do, her favour to obtaine;  
 What brave exploit, what perill hardly wrought,  
 What puissant conquest, what adventurous paine,  
 May please her, and grace unto him gaine . . . .  
 (218-22)

Both in this stanza and in the next two the poet uses an emphatic syntactic structure created by the repetition of exclamatory statements to overstate, indeed ridicule, the behavior of the lover, thus displaying his own awareness of the absurdity of the Petrarchan lover's frame of mind. Furthermore, in the stanza above and in lines 231-35, which give examples of feats impelled by love, there is a certain compactness, as action is heaped upon action. The resulting impression of speed, and even breathlessness seems to imply the impatience, frenzy and compulsion, of the individuals caught in the throes of "true" love. There is no peace, no rest for the lover, for even when he has gained the lady's love he does not possess a joyful spirit but a "troubled mynd" (253) plagued by dread of imaginary rivals. The lover's obsession with "getting" takes away, it seems, from the joy of having. The fear of a rival torments him:

with more then hellish paine!  
 And to his fayning fansie represent  
 Sights never seene, and thousand shadowes vaine,  
 To breake his sleepe, and waste his ydle braine.  
 (253-6)

Earlier in the hymn, the poet drew a clear distinction between the voluptuary, whom he compared to a "moldwarpe" (182) lying slothfully in the earth, and the true and loyal lover, rising "on golden plumes up to the purest skie" (176-182). The image we are presented with now of that same "true" lover, dragged down and wasting away, seems to suggest that the "infinite desyre" (202) that is love can leave the human being as unsound in body, mind, and spirit as the "loose desyre" (175) that is lust. Indeed, in the text, the "infinite desyre,/ ... kindled through that first conceived fyre" (202-3) turns into "gnawing envie" (259) "hart-fretting feare" (259), and most "cursed" (266) of all, according to the speaker, into "That cancker worme, that monster Gelosie" (267).

From the perspective of an observer, the hymn poet can mock the foolishness of the lover who "dreads no danger, nor misfortune feares" (223) as he pursues the object of his desire "Through seas, through flames, through thousand swords and speares" (228). While he describes the extreme obsessive behavior of the love-stricken man, the poet can speak as one who looks on the melodramatic theatrics before him. However, as earlier in the hymn, at a given point his identification with "th'evils which poore lovers greeve" (258), leads him once again to speak not about them, but in sympathy with them "Thou that hast never lov'd canst not beleeve,/ Least part of th'evils which poore lovers

greeve" (257-8). As he describes the suffering which lovers undergo, he appears to speak once again from personal anguish. His discussion of the various stages of the Petrarchan love experience ends with the lament: "Ah Gods, that ever ye that monster [Gelosie] placed/ In gentle love, that all his joyes defaced" (271-2). The illusion of objectivity crumbles, and with this heartfelt sigh his voice seems to gravitate towards the plaintive tone of the beginning and middle of the hymn.

However, the poet refrains from self-pity and instead reasons

By these, ô Love, thou doest thy entrance make,  
Unto thy heaven, and doest the more endeere,  
Thy pleasures unto those which them partake,  
As after stormes when clouds begin to cleare,  
The Sunne more bright and glorious doth appeare;  
So thou thy folke, through paines of Purgatorie,  
Dost beare unto thy blisse, and heavens glorie.  
(273-9)

There is no transitional stanza to show how the poet moves from a feeling of deep distress "Ah Gods ..." (271) to an optimistic view of the pain he suffers. The shift appears sudden and illogical. And yet, at this third low point in the hymn the speaker recalls the insight he has gained earlier; he reiterates the conclusion he has voiced in stanza 24: "th'evils which poore lovers greeve" (258) are trials which purify the heart and prepare it to receive the bliss of fully reciprocated love. His ability to turn again from his experience of pain towards some potentially greater good, reverses the descending movement, and brings forth a

healing vision of love which revives his spirit.

Consequently, his narration of the plight of "poore lovers" (258) ends not with a pitiful picture of many bleeding hearts, but with a triumphant vision of lovers savoring "joyous happie rest" (281). The poet anticipates a time when Cupid's "folke" (278) are no longer consumed by their hunger for each other but nourished "on Nectar heavenly wize" (282); a time when all frenzied pursuit has ceased and lovers "lie like Gods in yvorie beds arayd" (285).

At the end of the Hymne in Honour of Love the longing with which the poem began seems still intense, as the poet hopes, "Ay me, deare Lord, that ever I might hope, .../ That happie port for ever to recure" (294-8). Although he has not achieved "rest" (281, 283), the speaker is not dragged down by the "hellish paine" (253) he endures at the moment; he is encouraged by the thought of what awaits him should his heart be purified "through paines of Purgatorie" (278). The hopeful note upon which he concludes is hard-earned. It is not brought on magically, suddenly, but is the result of a conscious and repeated effort on the poet's part to rise above a condition of despair and shortsightedness. It is the struggle he faces throughout the Fowre Hymnes.

CHAPTER FOUR: AN HYMNE IN HONOUR OF BEAUTIE

The song to love has so carried the poet-lover above his condition of despair that he is lifted "up aloft above [his] strength" (6) to sing yet another song--now in honour of Venus, the "queene of Beauty" (15). And whereas in the first hymn the lover sang solely to have his need for love fulfilled, to obtain relief from his pain, he now hopes his song will move the violated hearts of "gazefull men" (12) whose eyes are fixed on earthly things, to admire heavenly beauty. The poet admits that his own eyes are "dim and dulled" (20), and his own understanding is limited. However, illumined by Venus, he hopes to enlighten others. Thus in this second hymn the young man's purpose for writing appears less self-centered, more outward looking. But his endeavour here is not, in fact, any less disinterested than in the first hymn. He hopes "this sacred hymne" (21) will "so please" (26) his lady that she, "at length will streame/ Some deaw of grace, into [his] withered hart" (26-7). He wishes in effect, that his words will defrost her emmarbled heart, so his own heart may be revived by her compassion. His motivation for writing this second hymn, then, is twofold: to inspire his fellowmen to the love of heavenly beauty, while simultaneously to move his lady to take pity on him--to love him.

Accordingly, the young poet presents himself as a

spiritual guide to "gazefull men" (12) and "faire Dames" (162) and creates an image of himself as a discriminating lover, one who knows the difference between "real" and superficial beauty, between lust and love. His main concern is to persuade his audience that true love is spiritual in nature and that beauty is an inner radiance, not an outward show. The Neoplatonic stance of "enlightened authority on love" is taken in an attempt to educate his fellowmen, and in the hope of melting his lady's "disdainefull brest" (HL 146). But it is also another effort on the lover's part to rise above his imperfect vision of love; for, in adopting the role of a Diotima he moves (in theory, if not in practice) towards a heightened understanding of his love experience. However, because of his desire to "get the lady" the Neoplatonic philosophy he voices proves indeed to be "up aloft above [his] strength" (6), and in the end he abandons the stance altogether.

The irony running through the hymn is that while the poet-lover communicates his idealistic vision of beauty and love with sureness, his arguments do not always hold up to logic. Furthermore, his methods of persuasion betray inattentiveness on his part. Most revealing of all, at the end of the hymn the speaker does not attempt to persuade his lady of his love by pointing to the spiritual views he has so confidently set forth, but by invoking her pity for his miserable state of mind and heart. Elaborating on these

points I hope to show how at this stage in the dramatic fiction, the young poet-lover is indeed not in a position to speak as a Diotima on love.<sup>1</sup>

As in the first hymn, the poet begins his song with an account of the birth of the deity he honours. Significantly, as with the description of Cupid's ancestry, the poet's narrative does not clarify but underlines the mysterious nature of Beauty's origins. Beauty is the "goodly Paterne" (32) according to which God "fashioned" (33) all things "as comely as he could" (33). But whether that "wondrous Paterne" (36) was "in earth layd up in secret store,/ Or else in heaven" (37-8) is not known; and even Beauty's "face and feature" (41) which surpasses "All mortal sence" (42) cannot be described. Beauty's very nature is mysterious.

However, as the lover perceives it, there is no mystery about the powerful impact which the presence of this "great Goddesse" (15) has on "every earthly thing" (43). Her essence "flows from the beame/ Of [her] bright starre" (55-6) and transforms from within the outward appearance of all things, and:

That is the thing which giveth pleasant grace  
To all things faire, that kindleth lively  
fyre ... . (57-8)

---

<sup>1</sup> Welsford asks us to keep in mind "that within the fiction of the poem Spenser is inviting us to listen not to the revelation of a Diotima but to the studied, purposeful rhetoric of a man in love" (p. 43).

The poet-lover's strong assertion "That is the thing" sets the authoritative and unequivocal tone with which he will expound his vision of inner beauty as the source of love. His premise is that the soul's beauty radiates through the body and "robs the harts of those which it admyre" (61). When he discusses the spiritual aspect of physical beauty, he berates those who hold to the view that beauty is an external property:

How vainely then doe ydle wits invent,  
That beautie is nought else, but, mixture made  
Of colours faire, and goodly temperament  
Of pure complexions . . . . (64-7)

By beginning his statement with the words "How vainely" and describing the position contrary to his as that held by "ydle wits" the poet presents his own assertions as authoritative.

To reinforce his premise that the body in itself has no power to move one to a passionate rage, the poet asks, in the next stanza, whether outward beauty can so affect the heart and mind as to "rob both sense and reason blynd" (77). The answer the rhetorical question begs for is an indisputable "no". However the poet imagines an adverse rejoinder and asks--again rhetorically--why "the blossomes of the field" (78) or "faire pictures" (82) both of which can outrival visible human beauty, yet do not "Worke like impression in the lookers vew" (81) and do not "like powre shew" (82). His audience is meant to conclude that indeed outward beauty is a detachable quality which in itself



cannot stir strong passion. The formation of the rhetorical question--a form of response that doesn't allow for any real exchange because it points to the "evident truth" contained within it--makes this argument sound irrefutable, when in fact the analogy is illogical: for while it is true that a beautiful flower does not arouse a man to a passionate rage, the reason for this is, surely, not that visible beauty has no power to move, but that a flower's beauty cannot impassion man who is not a flower. The poet-lover's comparison is unfair because it ignores the basic human reality that people are moved by other people's appearance. The speaker's concern in these stanzas is to persuade his audience of the essentially spiritual origin of love's "raging fyre" (4). His method of persuasion is to expose the falsity of an opposing viewpoint. Ironically the illogicality in his own argument suggests that the premise he sets forth is itself tenuous.

To give strength to his argument that physical beauty plays no role in arousing amorous desire, the speaker elaborates in some detail the Neoplatonic understanding of the incarnation of the soul. He tells how upon descending "from the top of purest heavens hight" (109) the soul takes light and energy from the sun and frames for itself a body. The more "heavenly light" (121) the soul retains the more beautiful is its "fleshly bowre" (123). Hence, the poet teaches:

where ever that thou doest behold  
 A comely corpse, with beautie faire endewed,  
 Know this for certaine, that the same doth hold  
 A beauteous soule, with faire conditions thewed,  
 Fit to receive the seede of vertue strewed.  
 For all that faire is, is by nature good;  
 That is a signe to know the gentle blood. (134-40)

The poet has dropped the argumentative tone of the earlier stanzas, and in a more gentle voice teaches his audience to read the material world as a sign of spiritual realities. But if we do read the poet's words attentively, we note that his earlier stress on the difference between inner and outer beauty is complicated by the vision he sets before us. For in fact, his Platonic theory of the incarnation of the soul reveals how inextricably linked the spiritual and physical realities are. In lines 64-84 the young poet-lover argued that external beauty--bodily colour, complexion, composition, and proportion--is a detachable quality that has little power to arouse the amorous desire of true love. Yet his portrayal of the body as the externalised form of spiritual beauty, indicates that the two cannot be separated: both the body and soul--as a single entity--work "wonders" (86) in the hearts of men.

However, there are contradictions even within this vision of reality itself, for, too often, outward appearance and inner reality do not, in fact, correspond. Though the poet speaks with conviction of the direct relationship between a "beauteous soule" (137) and a "comely corpse" (135) ("Know this for certaine" (136) he tells his

listeners), he is forced to qualify his assertion: he notes that often virtuous persons are physically unattractive, and wicked individuals exceedingly beautiful. Briefly, in stanzas 21-23 the poet explains that these observable realities are accidents of nature, or the fault of an evil will, and do not affect the soul's innate goodness. Yet in our imperfect world, discongruity between inner and outer beauty is the norm not the exception, and the poet-lover's brief consideration of this too common reality suggests that he is not entirely equipped to deal with this disconcerting truth.

In this first half of the poem then, the poet attempts to turn men's gaze to heavenly beauty by arguing that it alone is the origin of "lovers fire" (100). However when he tries to explain this by means of the Platonic theory of the incarnation of the soul, contradictions arise. On the one hand, heavenly and earthly beauty cannot be divided--the soul's beauty is manifest in the body--yet on the other hand, spiritual and physical beauty do not often correspond. The speaker's strategy is to explain and clarify the nature of each form of beauty, maintaining always that a lover's passion is born of the attraction to spiritual beauty. But in fact what his numerous explanations and qualifications point to is the essentially mysterious nature of the power which "kindleth lovers fire" (100).

Understandably, the lover's desire to make sense of his

own amorous predicament and to convince his lady of the worthiness of his love, does not allow him to rest in mystery. Instead he adopts the tone of a Diotima, as of one who has learnt the lesson of detachment from earthly things. But the knowledge that the young lover hopes with his words to please his lady undermines his otherworldly stance. The poet is very properly sincere in his desire to bring others to admire spiritual beauty, but his attachment to his own earthly beauty, to his lady, does not allow him to communicate his Neoplatonic vision persuasively.

This inability is more clearly evident in the second half of the poem. Having extolled the heavenly origin of beauty the poet, now midway through his song, turns to urging his audience to love. Interestingly, his words are no longer addressed to the "ravisht harts of gazefull men" (12) or even to a general audience, but specifically to "faire Dames" (162). The poet laments that beautiful women are often "Made but the bait of sinne" (152), and thereupon he makes an impassioned appeal to the "faire Dames" (162) in his audience to "Loath that foule blot, that hellish fierbrand/ Disloiall lust" (169-70). He urges them to give themselves to love "that loiall is and trew" (176); and he warns the ladies against men of base affections who cajole "faire beauties" (170) only to satisfy their own lust. The young lover's words are lofty. Yet, ironically, though he distinguishes himself from those of ignoble intentions by

urging the ladies to love not lust, his method of persuasion is actually similar to those that commend lust "by loves abused name" (172).<sup>2</sup>

For example, he warns his fair ladies against men "which your ears would bland" (171), yet he addresses his female audience with an excess of exalted praise (162-8). Furthermore, he urges the ladies to love because it will "more illumine your resplendent ray,/ And adde more brightnesse to your goodly hew" (177-8). Thus rather like the poets who employed the carpe diem motif to win over their reluctant ladies, the poet-lover here encourages his fair dames to love, by flattering and assuring them that it is in their interest to do as he advises:

to make your beautie more appeare,  
It you behoves to love, and forth to lay  
That heavenly riches, which in you ye beare.  
(183-5)

These words undercut the speaker's earlier efforts to downplay the importance of physical beauty; but he veils his appeal to the ladies' vanity by adding that they must manifest their "heavenly riches" (185) so:

That men the more admyre their fountaine may,  
For else what booteth that celestiall ray,

---

<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, while in both the earthly hymns the lover claims to know the difference between love and lust and implies that what he feels for his lady is the former, not the latter, in the Hymne of Heavenly Love he confesses that, in fact, in "the heat of youth" (10) he ignorantly praised not love but "that mad fit, which fooles call love" (9). This knowledge which the reader of the Fowre Hymnes brings to the study of the earthly songs encourages particular attentiveness to the lover's words.

If it in darknesse be enshrined ever,  
That it of loving eyes be vewed never? (186-9)

So, the poet urges the ladies to engage in love firstly because it will highlight their inner and outer beauty, and secondly, because it is, in effect, their Christian duty. I say "Christian" because undoubtedly the poet's rhetorical question quoted above is meant to recall Jesus's own words to his disciples:

A lamp is not lighted to be put away under a bushel measure; it is put on the lampstand, to give light to all the people of the house; and your light must shine so brightly before men that they can see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven. (Matt. 5:15)

The scriptural echoes in the poet-lover's words lend a strong note of authority to his argument. Like Jesus, the poet urges his listeners to give themselves to love for altruistic reasons; and while we need not doubt the sincerity of the poet-lover's message, the carpe diem overtones do alert us to the self-interested nature of his advice.

However, while the poet obviously hopes to move his lady to love him, he never forsakes his function of spiritual advisor, indeed he calls attention to it by counselling ladies:

But in your choice of Loves, this well advize,  
That likest to your selves ye them select,  
The which your forms first sourse may sympathize,  
And with like beauties parts be inly deckt.  
(190-3)

Speaking much like a concerned father (when he is really a

worried lover!) the poet reiterates the Neoplatonic commonplace that lovers cannot be opposites, that partners must carefully choose one another according to their original spiritual affinity. In the lines that follow he warns that discord arises if individuals with "unlike parts" (196) unite. He teaches that love is a "celestiall harmonie" (197), that lovers are not united but reunited here on earth: "likely harts" (198) are destined to join "by starres concent" (198), for in their "heavenly bowres" (202) they "did see/ And know ech other here belov'd to bee" (202-3). Thus, in fact, their joining involves not an act of choice but a process of recognition.

Confident, the young lover elucidates for his "faire Dames" (162) the process by which they may come to know "whom heaven did at first ordaine,/ And made out of one mould the more t'agree" (206-7). The process demands difficult mental acrobatics which, if willingly engaged in, distinguish the true lover from those who do not love but only "burne at first beholders sight" (210). The process is complex: the true lover abstracts an image--"a more refyned forme" (214)--of the beloved, contemplates it, and, as Robert Ellrodt explains, "conforms it to the 'idea' that originally informed his own soul",<sup>3</sup> fashioning thereof "An heavenly beautie to his fancies will" (222).

---

<sup>3</sup> Robert Ellrodt, Neo-Platonism in the Poetry of Spenser (Geneva: Librairie E. Droz, 1960), p. 131.

The idealization of the image of the beloved which the poet describes here is the first of two steps in the traditional Neoplatonic ladder of love.<sup>4</sup> However, the speaker does not introduce the ladder to give an account of the soul's ascent from the lower to the higher love and beauty. Rather he explains how through this process of abstraction and idealization the lover comes to recognize a soul fit "with his spirits proportion to agree" (227). Having found his other half, he does not move on to a higher love and beauty, but "He thereon fixeth all his fantasie,/ And fully setteth his felicitie" (228-9). Instead of ascending from sensible to intellectual beauty the poet slips back into the "sensuous language of Petrarchism"<sup>5</sup> and exalts the experience of romantic love. Unlike other men, lovers possess a sharp eyesight that allows them to:

see through amorous eye-glaunces,  
Armies of loves still flying too and fro

---

<sup>4</sup> The question of how high up the poet-lover goes on the Neoplatonic ladder of love has been of major concern to most, if not all critics of the Fowre Hymnes. Tetsuji Hiramatsu gives this brief summary: "Renwick (Daphnaida, p. 210) thinks that the poet does not go beyond the second step. Bennett ('The Theme' p. 22) believes that Spenser goes as far as the third. To Fletcher ('Benivieni's Ode of Love' p. 557) 'Spenser rises even to the fifth step'" ("Spenser's Myths of Venus and Cupid in the Faerie Queene and Fowre Hymnes: The Emergence of Marriage as a Romantic Ideal," Diss., Michigan State Univ., 1983, p. 154). I find Ellrodt's discussion of the problem the most elucidating. He does not attempt to discern which Neoplatonist--Benivieni, Pico, or Castiglione--Spenser was following, but asserts that "[o]ne thing is clear: [Spenser] did not go beyond the second step." See especially pp. 130-40.

<sup>5</sup> Hiramatsu, p. 158.



Which dart at them their little fierie launces,  
 Whom having wounded, backe againe they go,  
 Carrying compassion to their lovely foe;  
 Who seeing her faire eyes so sharpe effect,  
 Cures all their sorrowes with one sweete aspect.  
 (239-45)

Padelford argues that "Spenser was probably at a complete loss to know how to give poetical expression to the vision of pure abstract beauty and so was forced to fall back upon the traditional stock-in-trade of the poetry of romantic love."<sup>6</sup> I think the return to the concerns of the lover at this point, is not due to Spenser's limitations as a poet, but to his speaker's inability, or perhaps more precisely, his unwillingness to climb the Neoplatonic ladder of love. Within the dramatic fiction of this hymn we have a young poet-lover who has been called to praise spiritual beauty while still very much caught in the bonds of an earthly beauty; and while he tries very hard to serve his calling, his own needs and desires ultimately force him to step off the Neoplatonic ladder, and to indulge himself in a banquet of earthly delights.

What follows, then, is a delightful poetic rhapsody by the young lover on the joys of romance. Returning to the recurrent theme of love as hunger, the speaker compares lovers that feed their souls on their beloved's smiles to Gods that feed on "Nectar in their bankets free" (249). Unlike other men, the sharp eyesight of the lover enables

---

<sup>6</sup> F. M. Padelford, "Spenser's Fowre Hymnes: A Resurvey" (Studies in Philology, 29 [1932]), p. 212.

him to discern in the beloved's features a glimpse into the plenitude and fullness of the world of love, in which:

Sometimes upon her forehead they behold  
 A thousand Graces masking in delight,  
 Sometimes within her eye-lids they unfold  
 Ten thousand sweet belgards, which to their sight  
 Doe seeme like twinckling starres in frostie  
 night:  
 But on her lips like rosy buds in May,  
 So many millions of chaste pleasures play. (253-9)

In the Hymne in Honour of Love the speaker had turned from his exposition of the idealizing process to describe the anxiety-provoking pain of unrequited love (190-272). Here the poet turns from the same, to celebrate the titillating joys of reciprocated love. In both hymns the idealizing process does not lead the lover to a greater understanding or a desire for an ideal, abstract, spiritual beauty, but to a longing for an imperfect, real, corporeal woman.

In the last two stanzas of the Hymne in Honour of Beautie the narrator abandons the stance of enlightened authority on love. He no longer speaks as an inspired counsellor but as one desperately seeking consolation. In return for singing the hymn celebrating Venus' name he asks that his lady be persuaded to give him "one drop of dew reliefe" (284) to restore him to life. The lofty vision of love as a "celestiall harmonie,/ Of likely harts" (197-8) which "worke ech others joy and true content" (200) is not the experience the poet knows; in his condition of deep need it is not even the experience of ordinary human love he aspires to. He asks for his lady's pity that he "her

bounden thrall by her may live" (278).

Given the poet-lover's Neoplatonic understanding of love, it is, on a first reading, somewhat surprising that he does not call upon his lady to recognize their spiritual affinity and thereby soften her "disdaineiful brest" (HL 146) in this manner. However, on more careful reading, the poet's method becomes less surprising: we realize that, unlike in the first hymn, he expresses spiritual insights not so much in a spirit of proper attentiveness but with a desire to persuade. Thus the effort to enlighten others is the more sincere as it also represents the poet's hope to strike a sympathetic chord in the lady. As Welsford observes, "the meditations on universal love and beauty are persuasive compliments intended to win [the lady's] favor."<sup>7</sup>

In the last stanza of this hymn the poet-lover tells his lady "When your faire eyes these fearefull lines shal read,/ Deigne to let fall one drop of dew reliefe" (283-4). Like the poet-lover of Amoretti I, the Hymne poet envisions his lady reading his words, and he writes with fear in his heart--indeed with a "trembling hart" (276)--as he entrusts his life to the power of his words to arouse pity in a "disdaineifull brest" (HL 146).<sup>8</sup> The desire and fear with

---

<sup>7</sup> Welsford, p. 47.

<sup>8</sup> Commenting on Hymne in Honour of Beautie 281-87, Russell writes "Though this peroration is a typical bit of Petrarchan hyperbole, the poet is nevertheless entrusting his future, even, he says, his life, to the power of his song to produce relief" (p. 147).

which he writes the song of praise make him less capable of being himself changed by his lofty words.

On a superficial level the change we witness in the speaker of the Hymre in Honour of Beautie is a disconcerting shift from inspired Neoplatonic poet to destitute Petrarchan lover. But on a deeper level the young poet-lover moves towards a state of greater vulnerability which in time, prepares him to be created anew by a power greater than his own self-fashioning. At the end of the hymn the speaker throws his Neoplatonic theory of love to the wind, and himself at his lady's feet. The act is disconcerting. He appears to abandon the ongoing struggle to rise to a more perfect vision of love. But, paradoxically, in letting go of a vision he cannot hold because he does not have the emotional and psychological strength to do so, the young lover drops his defenses and opens himself to change. At this point in the drama he hopes he will be revived, created anew by his lady. This renewal does not happen. But in the course of writing yet another hymn he calls to mind a Christian vision of love and beauty which he can and does draw upon in his moments of need.

CHAPTER FIVE: AN HYMNE OF HEAVENLY LOVE

Like the huntsman of sonnet 67 in Spenser's Amoretti, the lover of the Fowre Hymnes has, at the beginning of the Hymne of Heavenly Love, forsaken his "weary chace" (Amoretti 67) after the object of his desire. However, unlike the huntsman the hymn poet has not merely "[sat] downe to rest" (Amoretti 67), but as Welsford observes, has instead "turned round and tak[en] a different path."<sup>1</sup> His painful experience of unrequited love has forced him to let go of his earthly hopes and fears, and to turn to meditate on divine love.

At the end of the Hymne in Honour of Love he had promised the god of Love that if he should be reassured success with his lady: "Then would I sing of thine immortall praise/ An heavenly Hymne, such as the Angels sing" (HL 301-2). Although the poet has not in fact now come "unto the wished scope/ Of [his] desire" (HL 296-7), nonetheless he sings. Like the angels who "caroll Hymnes of love both day and night" (HHL 70) in worship, the poet now renders his service of song freely, unconditionally. His painful love experience has purified him, has simplified his needs.<sup>2</sup> He

---

<sup>1</sup> Welsford, p. 49.

<sup>2</sup> As I noted in the chapter on An Hymne in Honour of Love, at the end of that hymn the speaker had come to understand "th'evils which poore lovers greeve" (HL 258) as trials which purify the heart and prepare it to receive the bliss of fully reciprocated love. And indeed this proves to

only longs now to "tell the marveiles" (49) wrought by heavenly love. He no longer seeks personal rewards. He does not even express the wish to convert his audience to a heightened level of awareness.<sup>3</sup> The poet turns to sing his heavenly hymn willing only one thing: to perfectly communicate the ineffable.

However, he is aware that the hymn he has promised to compose is one that only angels can sing perfectly because no earthly thought can comprehend the transcendental nature of that which he writes about, "much lesse [his] trembling verse/ With equall words can hope it to rehearse" (41-2). Yet in singing, even if imperfectly, he is himself perfected in his understanding of love. The hymn opens with a prayer to be lifted up that he "may see" (3) the workings of divine

---

be the poet-lover's experience, only ironically both the purity of heart he arrives at, and the gift of perfect love he receives, are not the experiences he had imagined or even hoped for.

<sup>3</sup> The speaker's introductory stanzas (lines 8-21) reveals that he is conscious of his role as a public poet and of the inherent potential in poetry to lead readers to good or ill. However, while in An Hymne in Honour of Beautie (and in the An Hymne of Heavenly Beautie to follow) he explicitly declares his hope to convert his readers' hearts through his poetry, in this hymn he is merely concerned to free himself from any further responsibility for leading his audience astray with the warning: "who my passed follies now pursewes, / Beginnes his owne, and my old fault renews" (HHL 20-1). His objective now is to offer his song up as an act of prayer, to the glory of his God. Towards the end of the hymn (225-286), he will adopt a hortatory tone directed at his fellow Christians, but also, and perhaps primarily, at himself. However, this preacherly voice surfaces only after he has himself undergone a conversion of heart.

love "Farre above feeble reach of earthly sight" (5). The decision to sing the "heavenly prayeses of true love" (14) is yet another effort on the lover's part to find some haven from his grief. Indeed the creative act does raise him up above his condition of despair. However, the haven he finds is not a place of rest, but is a path, the path of spiritual meditation. He turns to exploring the nature of divine love by way of imaginative meditation, a spiritual discipline popular among Elizabethans.<sup>4</sup>

The structure of the Hymne of Heavenly Love develops in accord with the central Ignatian meditation practice involving the three powers of the soul. This spiritual exercise taught the individual to focus his memory, understanding and will on a particular Christian mystery, with the purpose of exciting devotion to the heavenly Trinity, of which the soul's trinity of powers was an

---

<sup>4</sup> The most influential treatise in the latter half of the sixteenth century was the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola, which set before the devout a detailed and quite methodical meditative scheme consisting of three preliminary preparatory steps (a prayer, an exercise of imaginary composition and yet another prayer), then the meditation proper involving the memory, understanding and will, and finally the whole exercise ending with colloquies addressed to God or the meditator's own soul.

Spenser's debt to the meditative practise has been studied by Russell (see pp. 75-89), and A. Leigh DeNeef, who in "Spenserian Meditation: The Hymne of Heavenly Beautie" (The American Benedictine Review 25 [1974]) states that in Spenser's time "[t]he sheer numbers of spiritual exercises and the constant proliferation of different meditative forms virtually ensured a widespread knowledge of the convention. In fact, we are learning that the popularity of the spiritual exercise was probably as strong among the Puritans as any other sect" (p. 321).

analogue. Thus, throughout the third hymn the lover exercises first his memory, then his understanding, and finally his will on the "marveiles" (49) he tells. In the final part of the meditation, specifically in the application of the will, the lover sets down for himself and for his fellow Christians, a Christocentric meditation (225-59), a less intellectual, more affective meditation than the one he is himself engaged in this hymn.<sup>5</sup>

If we see the overall structure of the hymn as reflecting the pattern of a spiritual exercise, then the poem comes alive as a dramatic piece of work. In other words, we see in the Hymne of Heavenly Love not a theological document but the drama of a man who in turning to meditative practice gradually awakens to the knowledge that he is perfectly loved, and ultimately, is moved to

---

<sup>5</sup> Like Russell I perceive lines 218-87 as encompassing the final movement of the meditation according to the three powers of the soul. However, I think that within this exercise of the "application of the will", and as a natural consequence of this exercise, the poet-lover creates a second meditation, one that he and his fellow Christians might engage in daily as was the practice of the devout Christian at the time. My hypothesis that this second meditation is different from the spiritual exercise which governs the structure of the Hymne of Heavenly Love is supported by the editorial note to lines 225-87 given by R. Kellog and O. Steele, eds. Book I and II of The Faerie Queene (New York: Odyssey Press, 1965). The editors remark that "the spiritual exercises which Spenser describes here were made extremely popular in the late Middle Ages by the writings of St. Bernard (1091-1153) and St. Bonaventure (1221-1274). They were still very widely practiced in the Renaissance in both Roman Catholic and Protestant communities" (pp. 512-13).



reciprocate this love, thereby reversing his spirit's descending movement. Thus here, as in the Hymne in Honour of Love, the act of recalling spiritual truths, the attempt to understand them, and in the end to embrace them, is what awakens, educates, and indeed enlivens the poet-lover's "barren spright" (45).

In the Hymne in Honour of Beautie the poet had begun by describing himself as "too full" (3) of the power of earthly love. Now he calls upon the Holy Spirit to:

shed into my barren spright,  
Some little drop of thy celestiall dew,  
That may my rymes with sweet infuse embrew  
And give me words equall unto my thought,  
To tell the marveiles by thy mercie wrought.  
(45-9)

He begins not in fullness, but in a poverty of spirit ("my barren spight") that leaves him open to the "marveiles" (49) he tells. The spiritual poverty renders the poet capable of a greater degree of attentiveness to his own narrative discourse not only because he has let go ("Sith now that heat is quenched" [18])--momentarily at least--of desires and fears which assailed his mind and heart, but also because, in this hymn, he engages in "a discipline directed toward creating the act of pure attention."<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Louis L. Martz, The Poetry of Meditation, rev. ed. (New Haven: Yale U.P., 1962), p. 67. My understanding of Christian Meditation as practiced in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is derived from Martz's study of the subject.

According to Louis Martz, the practice of methodical meditation in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was popular because "it satisfied and developed a natural, fundamental tendency of the human mind--a tendency to work from a particular situation, through analysis of that situation, and finally to some sort of resolution of the problems which the situation has presented".<sup>7</sup> It is not surprising then that the hymn poet too should now resort to this exercise. While from the very beginning of the Fowre Hymnes he has attempted through intellectual analysis to make sense of the predicament in which he finds himself, he has followed no particular method of inquiry, and thus the effort though constructive, has not proved entirely successful. Meditation, however, helps the poet to focus his mind, and thus, as Russell notes, "gives a relevant sequence to thought, from the first step to the last, lending clarity and simplicity to the search for love and beauty which, for the young [poet-lover of the secular hymns], had been a chaos of conflicting attitudes, ideas, and emotions."<sup>8</sup>

The poet states in the introductory stanzas that the person we read about in the earthly hymns is a young self from whom he now disassociates himself. Russell notes that the poet here "establishes his role as a public penitent,

---

<sup>7</sup> Martz, p. 39.

<sup>8</sup> Russell, p. 78.

even asking the readers of his earlier poems to forgive him, 'quench my blame' [18]".<sup>9</sup> This seems to mark the point of the lover's religious conversion. Here he consciously and deliberately lets go of his young self and turns to create a new self by employing the first power of his soul, his memory, to recollect the basic tenets of his Christian faith.

However, while the words of contrition at this particular moment in the Fowre Hymnes mark the inner change that has taken place in the poet, the conversion he undergoes is not a decisive, instantaneous transformation. As in the Amoretti, the conversion of the heart involves a process: a gradual turning from self to other. In the Fowre Hymnes this occurs at the very beginning of the poem in the poet's decision to turn from the destructive act of self-pity towards the constructive act of composing a song of praise, and continues throughout, in the very act of singing each of the four songs. Just as in the Amoretti, the significant act of repentance voiced in sonnet 62 was initiated by the turn away from the self to beloved in sonnet 59, so here in the Fowre Hymnes the radical turning away from self to Other has been prepared for by the lover's repeated attempts to rise above his narrow view of love. Also, in both sonnet sequence and hymns the struggle with despair is--even after both poets voice their resolution to

---

<sup>9</sup> Russell, p. 83.

lead a new life--never completely overcome. The process of conversion as Spenser depicts it in these works involves a slow education of the heart: a process of learning and relearning the lesson of love.

The poet begins his third hymn with a new story of origins. The mystery and contradiction involved in the births of both earthly love and beauty is now sublimated into the Christian paradox of the Trinity. As the poet now understands it, before anything was created, God, that eternal creative power, "mov'd in it selfe by love" (28). Out of God's spontaneous love the Son was begotten, and from their mutual love was derived the Holy Spirit. The poet's new genealogy of love reveals that the power of divine love is its self-giving, gratuitous nature. God is described as "being pregnant" (50) and "full of fruitfull love, that loves to get/ Things like himselfe, and to enlarge his race" (51-2). The creation of mankind was itself an act that streamed from "that eternall fount of love and grace,/ Still flowing forth his goodnesse unto all" (99-100). God fashioned man "by love out of his owne like mould,/ In whom he might his mightie selfe behould" (116-7). And when man, like the angels before him, fell into a spiritual abyss, "that great Lord of Love" (127) took pity and in an act of self-giving love restored humanity to its original "happie state" (139).

As Russell observes, "from lines 22 to 154 the devout calls to mind, successively, the 'begetting' of Christ in heaven, the creation of the cosmos through love, the creation and fall of the angels, the creation of man, man's fall, and, finally, the birth of Christ and his death on the cross."<sup>10</sup> But what seems more important than outlining what the poet recalls, is to note where the emphasis falls as he reflects on these doctrines. With each event the poet stresses the self-giving, gratuitous nature of the power of love which brings all these "marveiles" (49) into being. He recalls that God moves and has his being in love, and then describes the nature of this love as creative, lavish, and merciful. In the process of remembering and rehearsing this, the speaker reawakens to the Christian faith which, as an Elizabethan gentleman, he would have held to, but perhaps, had lost sight of, or forgotten.

The exercise the poet-lover is now engaged in, the act of recollecting the spiritual truths of his faith, is the means by which he reverses the downward emotional spiral, and slowly recreates his new self. This process of recreation is possible because the poet is wholly attentive to the "marveiles" (49) he recollects. He sustains the exercise of recollection for approximately 130 lines; and within this space (lines 22-154) his attention is wholly centered on the workings of divine love. This perfect

---

<sup>10</sup> Russell, p. 79.

attentiveness to the story he narrates creates in him a profound sense of the love of God. The recollection of Christ's crucifixion (148-154) especially awakens his compassion and he breaks out of his recollection exercise with "an emotional outburst of pity for Christ's pain":<sup>11</sup>

O huge and most unspeakable impression  
Of loves deepe wound, that pierst the piteous hart  
Of that deare Lord with so entyre affection,  
And sharply launching every inner part,  
Dolours of death into his soule did dart. (155-9)

The poet can understand the pain of the crucifixion because his heedfulness allows him, as it were, to carry imaginatively the same cross. In the Hymne in Honour of Love he described the predicament of other "poore lovers" (258), and was led back to feeling pity for himself. He could not sustain for long his attention on the other. However, now the discipline of the meditation on divine love has taken him out of himself, so that his identification with the wounded Christ calls forth his own capacity for pity, for other-centeredness. And with this response of compassion to Christ's pain, the poet-lover engages the second power of his soul, the understanding.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> Russell, p. 81.

<sup>12</sup> The function of the faculty of the understanding was, according to the Jesuit Puente, "to make several discourses and considerations about that mystery [being meditated], inquiring, and searching out the verities comprehended therein, with all the causes, proprieties, effectes, and circumstances that it hath, pondering them very particularly. In such sort that the Understanding may forme a true, proper, and entire conceipt of the thing that it meditateth, and may remaine convinced, and persuaded to

His own pity for Christ leads him to consider the degree to which a human heart and mind could indeed fully enter into the experience of Christ crucified: "What hart can feele least touch of so sore launch,/ Or thought can think the depth of so deare wound?" (162-3). The poet doesn't answer these questions but proceeds instead to "draw out the theological import latent in the wound".<sup>13</sup> His understanding is that Christ's "bleeding sourse" still flows "To heale the sores of sinfull soules unsound" (166). In other words, "Christ's death is not simply an event in history, discreet, contained; it has eternal effects which the Christian is experiencing now".<sup>14</sup> The "different path" the lover took at the beginning of this hymn has led him into the knowledge of God's perfect love for him; he has discovered himself as beloved, as one called to reciprocate love rather than command it for himself.

In stanzas 26-31 the poet considers the consequences of the crucifixion, in order to grasp for himself the meaning of this event. The rhythm of these lines is slow and contemplative, reflecting the thought of one who, as Martz describes the meditator, "takes the measure of things [and]

---

receive, and to embrace, those truthes that it hath meditated, to propound them to the Will, and to move it thereby to exercise its Actions" (quoted in Martz, p. 34).

<sup>13</sup> Russell, p. 81.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 82.

brings word of them"<sup>15</sup> to others certainly, but primarily to himself. In colloquy with his own soul, he examines the tenets of his faith in order to accept them on the basis of his own understanding. When the poet comprehends the nature of the love which Christ "taught" (212) and "Ensampled" (213) he is moved to exercise the same selfless love. Thereupon, the reflective, meditative tone of lines 176-217 is broken by a dramatic apostrophe exhorting humankind to awaken and exercise its' will:

Then rouze thy selfe, ô earth, out of thy soyle,  
In which thow wallowest like to filthy swyne,  
And doest thy mynd in durty pleasures moyle,  
Unmindfull of that dearest Lord of thyne;  
Lift up to him thy heavie clouded eyne,  
That thou his souveraine bountie mayst behold,  
And read through love his mercies manifold.  
(218-24, my emphasis)

This call to free the mind and body from mental stupor and "durty pleasures," and to attend to that "dearest Lord," harks back to the opening stanzas of the hymn in which the poet-lover forsook "all those follies" (12) committed in "th'heat of youth" (10), and turned resolutely to sing a heavenly hymn "Unto the god of Love, high heavens king" (7). The dramatic nature of the apostrophe gives the impression that the poet had only suddenly awakened to what he must do, as if he had not already let go of earthly pleasures and lifted his thoughts to the things of heaven. But, in a real sense the poet has just reawakened: for, the understanding

---

<sup>15</sup> Martz, xxv.



he has gained of God's unlimited love in the course of composing this hymn up to this point, has aroused in him a desire to give himself fully to a loving God ("How can we thee requite for all this good?" [174]) and to impress upon others the need to do the same.

The way for the Christian to abandon himself to love of Christ is, the poet teaches, to "read through love his mercies manifold" (224). The reading activity the speaker purposes is, primarily, a simple spiritual exercise, a Christocentric meditation which he puts together for his own edification, and for that of his fellow Christians.<sup>16</sup> Up to this point in the hymn (22-224) the poet has himself engaged in a meditation which draws upon the three powers of his soul. The function of the third power of the soul--the will, was according to the Jesuit Puente "to draw forth sundry Affections, or vertuous Actes, conformable to that which the Understanding hath meditated".<sup>17</sup> The meditation on Christ's life which the poet now urges humankind to engage in is the virtuous act he performs in response to the spiritual truths he has recollected, understood and embraced. In other words, this second meditation is a

---

<sup>16</sup> Welsford states that the "medieval mystic way" is not to be found in the Fowre Hymnes, but rather that "Spenser is suggesting a method of meditation which could occupy an occasional quiet hour or a daily period of devotion practiced throughout a lifetime" (p. 52).

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Martz, p. 35.

direct outcome of his own reflections upon divine love.<sup>18</sup> Once the poet has understood his new-found Christian faith he imparts his knowledge to others through creating a spiritual exercise designed to increase devotion to Christ. This act marks a further progression in the poet's growth in other-centeredness: he has now turned from concentrating on his experience of unrequited love, to respond in compassion to Christ's own experience of the same.

The meditation the poet now sets down (225-59) is composed in the spirit of the affective meditations on the life of Christ--the most famous of which was St. Bonaventure's Meditations. According to Martz, we find in St. Bonaventure's book "a prototype of the imaginative meditation cultivated by the Jesuits, and at the same time

---

<sup>18</sup> DeNeef states that the ending of the poem "reconstructs a full preparatory meditation in the conventional Loyolan form. Thus lines 225-245 can be seen as a dramatic composition of place; lines 246-266, an exercise of the understanding; and lines 267-287, an emotional redirection of the will" (p. 320). I cannot entirely agree with this interpretation. Firstly, only in lines 239-245 does the poet call on the reader to imagine the composition of place in the way that the Jesuits taught. Secondly, given the definition of the second power of the soul as cited in Martz's study (which DeNeef also acknowledges dependency on) it is impossible to interpret lines 246-266 as an exercise of the understanding: there is nothing discursive in them. Thirdly, lines 267-287 describe not the emotional redirection of the will but rather the effects that will flow from the redirection of the devout's will towards God. My argument is that lines 225-287 are part of the threefold movement of the Loyolan meditation, but only to the extent that they are the direct outcome of the lover's own application of his will.

an immense difference".<sup>19</sup> Briefly, whereas in the more intellectual Jesuit art of meditating on the life of Christ, there was an effort "to fuse understanding and will, theology and emotion, abstract and concrete, divine and human",<sup>20</sup> in the medieval meditations the emphasis was on the humanity of Christ so as to stir the devout to pity and compassion. Thus, the Hymne poet's guided meditation begins with a call to "read through love" (224) the story of Christ's life. The speaker conjures up the nativity scene, calling attention to the "simple cratch" (226) within which Jesus lay, "And in what rags, and in how base aray,/ The glory of our heavenly riches lay" (228-9). The emphasis is on those aspects of Jesus' life that will arouse human empathy.

In the next stanza, the poet urges the meditator to:

reade on the storie of his life,  
His humble carriage, his unfaulty wayes,  
His cancred foes, his fights, his toyle, his  
    strife,  
His paines, his pouertie, his sharpe assayes,  
Through which he past his miserable dayes,  
Offending none, and doing good to all,  
Yet being malist both of great and small. (232-38)

The poet directs his readers to ruminate on the sufferings of the man Jesus. To impress upon the Christian the enormity of Jesus' pain he sets down a number of examples. The accumulation of heavily stressed monosyllabic nouns

---

<sup>19</sup> Martz, p. 73.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 78.

("foes", "fights", "toyle", "strife") forces the reader to take note of each occurrence, and, as it were, be hit by each aspect of Jesus' human misery. In the climactic stanza of this chronological account of Jesus' life, the poet urges his audience not to not simply "reade on" (232) but to "looke" (239), to imagine the crucifixion scene. He asks the reader/meditator to see:

how of most wretched wights,  
He taken was, betrayd, and false accused,  
How with most scornefull taunts, and fell  
despights  
He was revyld, disgrast, and foule abused,  
How scourgd, how crownd, how buffeted, how brused;  
And lastly how twixt robbers crucifyde,  
With bitter wounds through hands, through feet and  
syde. (239-45, my emphasis)

Here again the piling up of words, of the adverb "how", and of adjectives describing the torment Jesus endured, has the effect of reproducing in the reader the experience of being buffeted. The rhetoric drives home the point that the Christian must not passively read his text, but must imaginatively recreate the events in Jesus' life.<sup>21</sup> Indeed,

---

<sup>21</sup> This meditative procedure of imagining scenes from Christ's life as if the devout saw them with the corporall eye, was the method taught in Bonaventure's Meditations. Martz notes that the "central impact" of this work arose "from its insistence that every detail of [Christ's] story must be dramatized as if one were present" (p.73). But it was also a part of the Jesuit method of meditation, specifically of the preparatory exercise referred to as the 'composition of place' in which the meditator must attempt to "see the spot" of that which he intends to meditate upon. In light of this, it is interesting to compare the above stanza with the "premeditation" of the Jesuit Puente:

'Then I am to set before my eyes Christ Jesus crucified, beholding his head crowned with thornes; his face spit upon; his eyes obsured; his arms disionicted his tongue

what the poet asks of the meditator is nothing less than a total identification with the violent suffering of Christ:

Then let thy flinty hart that feeles no paine,  
Empierced be with pittifull remorse,  
And let thy bowels bleede in every vaine,  
At sight of his most sacred heavenly corse,  
So torne and mangled with malicious forse,  
And let thy soule, whose sins his sorrows wrought,  
Melt into teares, and grone in greived thought.  
(246-52)

This is the aim of the visualization process: perfect union with Christ, which then brings an understanding of the selfless nature of His love, and the desire to learn to love in the same compassionate manner. It is an identification of the self with the Other, an act of perfect other-centeredness.

The meditation humbles the devout, and mollifies his heart into an instrument of love capable of receiving and of reciprocating Christ's love (253-59). Thus what the lover had had hoped to accomplish in the first two hymns--to soften his lady's "disdainefull brest" (HL 146), to move her to pity--is now "Through meditation of [Christ]'s endlesse merit" (255), accomplished in his own heart. That is, in

---

distasted with gall, and vinegar; his handes, and feete peerced with nailes; his backe, and shoulders torne with whippes; and his side opened with a launce: and then pondering that hee suffereth all this for my sinnes, I will drawe sundrey affections from the inward part of my heart. (Quoted in Martz, p. 49). The parallelism between these two passages is striking, and supports the argument that the hymn poet does not follow any specific method of meditation inflexibly, but eclectically draws upon what he has read and heard about, to create his own spiritual exercise.

the process of turning from his need for love to meditating on the self-giving nature of divine love, his own heart is excited to pity; he is inwardly touched and outwardly directed. We recall that similarly, in the Amoretti, the lover discovers that it is not his lady's but his own heart that needs to be softened: once that has happened he can receive the love he longed to possess.

However, whereas the lover of the sonnet sequence recognized that the love he and his lady shared was in total harmony with the love of God (Amoretti 68), the speaker of the sacred hymns cannot, it seems, reconcile earthly and divine love. As Ellrodt notes "the poet carefully abstains from mentioning or suggesting any other love than Christian charity".<sup>22</sup> In fact, he seems to denounce all romantic love as base and unworthy:

With all thy hart, with all thy soule and mind,  
Thou must [Christ] love, and his beheasts embrace,  
All other loves, with which the world doth blind  
Weake fancies, and stirre up affections base,  
Thou must renounce, and utterly displace,  
And give thy selfe unto him full and free,  
That full and freely gave himselfe to thee.  
(260-66)

Unlike the poet-lover of the Amoretti, the speaker of the Fowre Hymnes has not been successful in his romantic pursuit. He has, for reasons not made clear in the text, become disillusioned with romantic love. Hence he does not share the Amoretti lover's experience that it is possible to

---

<sup>22</sup> Ellrodt, p. 147.

give oneself fully and freely to both God and a particular human being. The hymn poet is, as Oates perceptively observes, "a person who has undergone a profoundly compensatory religious experience after a series of miserable amatory adventures", thus, his view is not "of one who, like the 'I' of Epithalamion, for example, can see the part earthly love plays in the divine dispensation".<sup>23</sup>

At this point in his spiritual journey, the poet perceives a call to total self-abandonment to God; and the consequence of this absolute surrender of self is, he promises, an all-absorbing, entirely fulfilling love for God:

Then shalt thou feelee thy spirit so possest,  
And ravisht with devouring great desire  
Of his deare selfe, that shall thy feeble brest  
Inflame with love, and set thee all on fire  
With burning zeale, through every part entire,  
That in no earthly thing thou shalt delight,  
But in his sweet and amiable sight. (267-73)

The Hymne of Heavenly Love opened with the speaker asking to be raised up "to heavens hight" (2) that he might see "those admirable things" (3) which the God of Love "workest by [his] soveraine might" (4). In calling to mind these "admirable things", attempting to understand them, and finally embracing the "sight of those faire things above" (287), the lover's "barren spright" (45) is illumined, his soul inspired "With heavenly thoughts, farre above humane skill" (282) and his "feeble" (5) earthly sight replaced by

---

<sup>23</sup> Oates, p. 165.

"bright radiant eyes" that "plainely see/ Th'Idee of [Christ's] pure glorie" (283-4).

This vision of Christ glorified was the climactic end toward which the meditator moved in the exercise of his memory, understanding and will. According to Martz, the aim was that "through the integration of this trinity within man he might come to know and feel in himself the operation of the higher Trinity: might achieve through the reformed operation of these powers a renewal, a refreshing, of the defaced Image of God within man."<sup>24</sup> At the end of the Hymne of Heavenly Love the poet has been renewed, revived; the act of pure attention on something Other than himself has purified his heart and mind.

---

<sup>24</sup> Martz, p. 68.



CHAPTER SIX: AN HYMNE OF HEAVENLY BEAUTIE

The meditation upon Christ's selfless love has "inly toucht" (HHL 254) the speaker of the Fowre Hymnes. He has learnt that he is loved and that he is called to love in the same self-giving way. "Through meditation of [Christ's] endlesse merit" (HHL 255), he has been illumined and he wishes now to enlighten others spiritually. In the Hymne in Honour of Beautie the poet had also expressed this desire. However, in the last hymn he is not simultaneously trying to impress a lady with his spiritual knowledge. He has only one motivation for singing an Hymne of Heavenly Beautie:

that I may show  
Some litle beames to mortall eyes below,  
Of that immortall beautie, there with thee [Holy  
Spirit]  
Which in my weake distraughted mynd I see. (11-14)

The last line suggests the dramatic predicament in which the poet finds himself in this final hymn. His Christocentric meditation has cleansed the doors of his perception and he now sees more clearly than many other men. However, he has not achieved perfect enlightenment: he still sees with a "weake distraughted mynd" (14). Nevertheless, the turn away from self-absorption, from despair, towards others and towards hope, which the poet initiated at the very beginning of the Fowre Hymnes has here reached a climactic point.

The poet composes this last song to teach the hearts of men to "learne to love with zealous humble dewty/

Th'eternall fountaine of ... heavenly beauty" (20-1). He proposes to do this by engaging those who wish to learn in a Theocentric exercise which, according to the devotional manuals of Spenser's time, was meant to follow directly upon the Christocentric meditation.<sup>1</sup> The exercise demands three acts of contemplation: the contemplation of nature, followed by the contemplation of spiritual heavens, and ending with the contemplation of God's attributes.<sup>2</sup> Both in his selfless desire to show his fellowmen what he believes will bring them "full contentment" (287), and particularly in his decision to teach a Theocentric contemplation which is, as

---

<sup>1</sup> Joseph B. Collins in Christian Mysticism in the Elizabethan Age (Baltimore, John Hopkins Press, 1940) writes "The medieval mystics considered contemplation of divine beauty and goodness subsisting in Nature and in the Divine Essence to be grace-endowed privilege of souls already skilled in the meditation upon Christ. What Spenser has done in the last pair of Hymnes accords with their method. Vitally important is the unity of these two Hymnes by the bond of Christocentric-Theocentric contemplation" (pp. 216-17).

<sup>2</sup> Collins notes that "the framework of [the Theocentric] contemplation is Platonic; ... The things of the earth make up a visible ladder upon which the contemplating mind ascends to God. This familiar conception received its metaphysical basis from Plato" (pp. 45-6) However this type of contemplation was adopted by the early Christians (St. Paul, St. Augustine, St. Bonaventure etc) and it is, ultimately, from within a Christian context that Spenser speaks in this hymn. Welsford argues that, "Of all four hymns, Of Heavenly Beautie is the one which appears to conform most closely to the usual Neo-Platonic pattern ... Nevertheless this upward movement is not really to be equated with the mounting of the Neo-Platonic ladder, for the journeys begin and end differently. The Christian mountaineer starts by admiring, not a particular woman, but the order of Nature, and when he arrives at his goal, he experiences not an apotheosis, but a prostrating sense of creaturely nothingness" (p. 52)

the word implies, an exercise in Other-centeredness, the poet shows how he has grown in his capacity to turn his attention off the self and direct it towards the other.

I want to show that in this hymn the poet demonstrates a clarity of vision that reveals he is in a position to speak as a spiritual guide. Specifically, he can see and appreciate the beauty of the physical universe and can teach others to do the same. Also with his inner eye, the eye of faith, he can see the beauty of the heavens and reveal this invisible beauty to others. Most significant of all, he has caught a glimpse of "that heavenly beauty" (21) which he now hopes to guide others to see. However, while the poet at this point in the drama has come to a certain clarity of mind, in this hymn he also calls attention to his limitations as a poet and as a man. Although he now teaches others how to prepare the mind and heart to come into the presence of God, he also seems to suggest that on the journey into God, he is as much a learner as his readers are. In his preface to the Theocentric exercise (22-28) he compares himself to a "soare faulcon" (26), to a young hawk that is still learning to fly. The reference to himself, rather than to the reader for whom the exercise is set forth, suggests that the poet will not merely guide his readers but will also participate in the lesson he imparts. As in the Hymne in Honour of Beautie he does propose to teach others, but he does not present himself as someone who

confidently practices what he knows, even though at this point in his journey he is better prepared to speak as a spiritual advisor.

The Hymne of Heavenly Beautie is written for the conversion of the "hearts of men, which fondly here admyre/ Faire seeming shewes, and feed on vaine delight" (16-17). But at the very beginning of the hymn the poet confesses that he still sees with a "weake distaughted mynd" (14), and at the end of the hymn we learn that, while he no longer "feed[s] on vaine delight" (17), he is still distracted by "idle fancies" (289), and he longs for the time when "straying thoughts" (301) will vex him no more. The composition of this last song is, therefore, yet another effort by the poet to persevere in the struggle to rise above all that he believes narrows his vision and understanding of the nature of love. In engaging in this final creative act the poet continues the process of conversion--the education of his own heart--which began with the composition of the first hymn.

The poet begins the Theocentric exercise by calling on those who hunger for beauty to:

looke on the frame  
Of this wyde universe, and therein reed  
The endlesse kinds of creatures. (30-32)

To come to see "that immortall beautie" (13) which cannot be seen with the physical eye, the individual has to be receptive to the beauty of created things: he has to look

with the outward eye and attend thoughtfully to what is before him so as to see both its outer and inner beauty. It is this receptivity and attentiveness of mind and spirit, that will, in time, strengthen the inner eye of faith with which heavenly beauty can be seen. The poet possesses this inner faculty of vision. No longer obsessed by an object of desire he cannot have, he can see beyond himself to the physical reality of the things about him, and beyond these to the deep consideration, the "wise respect" (34) with which everything is made. It is this same kind of clarity of mind and faculty of perception that the poet wants those who nurture themselves on "vaine delight" (17) to acquire.

To this purpose he calls on his readers to look on the four elements and to note the principle by which they ascend to God's "perfect end" (46). The speaker's approach is didactic as he controls his pupils' perception very deliberately with directives: "First th'Earth, .../ Amid the Sea .../ Then th'Aire still flitting, but yet firmly bounded/... with pyles of flaming brands .../ And last, that mightie shining christall wall" (36-42, my emphasis). Upon surveying these, he instructs:

By view whereof, it plainly may appeare,  
That still as every thing doth upward tend,  
And further is from earth, so still more cleare  
And faire it growes, till to his perfect end  
Of purest beautie, it at last ascend. (43-7)

As R. Kellog and O. Steele observe, "these lines are a succinct statement of one version of the idea of the 'Great

Chain of Being'... the idea that all things in the universe are organized according to superiority of substance or function".<sup>3</sup> The poet describes a cosmos in which everything becomes clearer and fairer, the closer it comes to God's "perfect end/ Of purest beautie" (46-7). This is a process he sees not only in the elements but one which he tries to reproduce in himself and instill in his readers. His experience is that "straying thoughts" (301) prevent him from looking to the "perfect beauty" (296) which will bring him "full contentment" (287); as a man, as well as a poet, he is therefore deeply concerned with that clarity of mind which will bring him, and others, to "right seeing". By showing them a cosmos in which everything grows clearer and fairer as it moves upwards, he tries to make his pupils become part of this process. To come to this clarity of being, he engages them in a spiritual exercise that, like the discipline he followed in the previous hymn, demands the act of pure attention.

The poet now calls on his reader to concentrate, to cease all wandering of the eye and to fix it intently on the sky, on the highest visible object in the chain of being:

Looke thou no further, but affixe thine eye  
On that bright shynie round still moving Masse,  
The house of blessed Gods, which men call Skye.  
(50-2)

The poet, the man with the inner vision, looks at the sky

---

<sup>3</sup> Kellog and Steele, p. 516.

and sees "the house of blessed Gods" (52); by thus investing the physical sight with a spiritual significance, he teaches a less sensuous, more spiritual way of seeing physical phenomena and reveals his own sensitivity to, and personal understanding of, what he sees. His concern in this first part of the Theocentric exercise--the contemplation of nature--is to shift his fellowmen's focus away from "faire seeming showes" (17), and towards the substantial beauty of the universe.

Moreover, the poet wants those who "feed on vaine delight" (17) not only to see and learn from the world's beauty but to be in wonder of it. He wants their hearts to receive the full impact of the beauty apprehended by their "fleshly eye" (23), in the knowledge that a real delight in the visible world will provide the basis and strength for a deep appreciation of the beauty of the invisible realm.<sup>4</sup> Thus, he points to the "glistring stars" (53) in the sky, calls attention to the two brightest of these and puts forth the challenge:

tell me then, what hast thou ever seene,  
That to their beautie may compared bee,  
Or can the sight that is most sharpe and keene,  
Endure their Captains flaming head to see? (57-60)

The poet wants his pupils to look at the sun and moon and to be moved by their beauty. By putting the question

---

<sup>4</sup> In Faerie Queene V ii 39, Artegall makes a similar point when he asks: "Of things unseene how canst thou deeme aright, .../ Sith thou misdeem'st so much of things in sight?"

rhetorically he indicates his own consciousness of the superior beauty of that which he sees, and also calls on his pupils to acknowledge the same. He then asks, again rhetorically, how much less endurable than the sun's light must be the light of those things "much higher in degree" (61). By calling to mind the greater beauty of the invisible world, just when his pupils must admit that there is nothing more beautiful than the sun's light, the poet hopes, no doubt, to arouse their desire to know a greater beauty than that which can be seen with the physical eye.

The rhetorical questions in lines 57-63 effect the transition between "th'easie vew/ Of this base world" (22-3) and the "contemplation of th'immortall sky" (25), between the first and second steps in the Theocentric exercise. Continuing briefly in the same didactic manner he used to awaken his pupils to the beauty of nature, the poet now informs his fellowmen that "farre above these heavens which here we see,/ Be others farre exceeding these in light" (64-5). Up to this point, the poet has been looking and telling his readers to look at the beauty before them, but once he begins to describe the invisible heavens (78-103) the focus on the perceiving characters disappears: the poet no longer calls attention to himself as guide and to the reader as pupil, but simply displays what he sees. Indeed, it seems that in his attempt to transport his fellowmen "with celestiall desyre/ Of those faire formes" (18-9), the poet



becomes carried away by his own delight in what he perceives with his spiritual eye. For, as he ascends in mind through the hierarchial heavens so do the comparatives he uses to describe the increasing beauty of what he sees mount by degrees: the vision rhetorically ascends, through what is "Faire" (78), to what is "More faire" (82), then "Yet fairer" (85), "And fayrer yet" (89), "Yet farre more faire" (92), "Yet fairer then they both" (96), "Yet .../ Fairer then all the rest" (101-2). In piling on the comparatives, he creates the effect of a ladder built with words, which corresponds to the cosmological ladder he ascends in his mind, and which communicates most effectively his own escalating emotional rapture at the sight of what he sees.

What happens to the poet in these stanzas is, in effect, what he described at the very beginning of the hymn. He is:

Rapt with the rage of [his] own ravisht thought  
Through contemplation of those goodly sights,  
And glorious images in heaven wrought. (1-3)

There the poet explained that he desired to tell the things that he beheld, but felt his "wits to faile, and tongue to fold" (7). However, inspired by the Holy Spirit, he had begun to sing. Now as he approaches "that Highest farre beyond all telling" (101), words and images are indeed inadequate. Although the poet can see more than other men, yet because of God's very ineffability, he feels the burden of his limitations as a poet, such that, having already

abandoned his didactic stance, he now wants also to surrender his poetic skills:

Cease then my tongue, and lend unto my mynd  
 Leave to bethinke how great that beautie is,  
 Whose utmost parts so beautifull I fynd  
 How much more those essential parts of his.  
 (106-109)

Unlike in the Hymne in Honour of Beautie in which the poet, in his desire for his lady and in the fear of her rejection, was unable to be attentive to his spiritual insights, the poet here has become entirely engaged in his Theocentric exercise. The references to "my tongue", "my mynd", and "I fynd" reveal the extent to which he has let go of his didactic role and become personally involved. He does not mention his reader here and wishes to abandon himself further, it seems, to his "own ravisht thought" (1). As Russell argues:

The poem almost comes to a stop ["cease then my tongue ...", 106], but after he muses [for three stanzas] on the impossibility of fully knowing God, the poet gazes upon the beauty of the creation once again and, his hope renewed at thought of God's "beauty excellent" revealed in His "brazen book," begins his ascent again. (p. 148)

The call to read the world as God's book is a call to engage in a spiritual exercise much like the act of reading the story of Christ's life, an exercise which the poet urged his fellowmen to do in the third hymn. For just as the lover of Christ is asked to ruminate on the gospel and allow the Word to pierce his "flinty hart" (HHL 246), so the lover of God must contemplate His works and take to heart how "every

nooke" (131) reveals God's goodness. The poet teaches that to see God's glory men must fill their minds with the thought of God and to see Him in everything. Then, with their minds and hearts attentive to Him, to His goodness, they will, the poet teaches:

Mount up aloft through heavenly contemplation,  
From this darke world, whose damps the soule do  
blynd.  
And like the native brood of Eagles kynd,  
On that bright Sunne of glorie fixe thine eyes  
Clear'd from the grosse mists of fraile  
infirmities. (136-40)

Here, the poet has resumed his overtly didactic voice. He no longer speaks as one who is presently participating in the exercise, but indeed as one who has gone through the spiritual training and can now give precise instructions. He calls on his pupils to ascend to the third and final step in the Theocentric exercise: the contemplation of God's attributes. While the first two acts of contemplation can bring one into the presence of God, yet the mortal eye cannot, the speaker warns, look directly on His divine countenance. Indeed, before "his Majestie" (142), eyes "clear'd from fraile infirmities" (140) become "corruptible" (144), thus unable to behold "the dred face of that great Deity" (145). To come to the knowledge of God, men must look on His divine attributes, and as their spiritual guide, the Hymne poet proceeds to direct his fellowmen's gaze to God's "essentiall parts" (109).

At this point in the hymn (141-210) the speaker draws

heavily on the Bible. In substituting God's words for his own he tacitly admits his own limitations as a poet, and, more particularly, his total dependency as a man of faith upon revealed truth. It is a bowing down, an act of humility on his part. Indeed, when he comes to describe "Sapience," (183)<sup>5</sup> the most precious of God's attributes, he wishes to surrender all efforts at communication, and urges himself to be silent, and to "Let Angels which her goodly face behold/ And see at will, her soveraigne praises sing" (232-3) in the knowledge that:

Enough is me t'admyre so heavenly thing,  
And being thus with her huge love possest,  
In th'only wonder of her selfe to rest. (236-8)

On this note of wonder, of "awfull reverence" (41), the poet ends his Theocentric exercise.

However, though the last words suggest closure, and a "rest" (238), the poet continues to sing. In stanzas 35-41

---

<sup>5</sup> Much critical commentary has been focused on the figure of Sapience in this hymn. In her introduction, Welsford sums up the source of the controversy in the question: "Is this Wisdom a personification of a Divine Attribute, or is she one of the Persons of the Trinity and, if so which one?" Welsford argues convincingly that in the context of Spenser's poem it is "artistically impossible" to identify Sapience with the Holy Spirit, for, in the heavenly hymns "the spirit is invoked to infuse upward inspiration, whereas Sapience is an object of contemplation." As well, "the descriptive parts of the last two hymns, all suggest a distinction between the active, masculine Christ-love and the stationary, feminine Sapience-Beauty." Finally, while Sapience is described as sovereign, she is "The soveraigne dearling of the Deity" (HHE 184) and not the Supreme Being Himself. Thus, according to Welsford, Sapience personifies a Divine attribute. Ellrodt gives a summary of the various critical interpretations (pp. 153-193; see esp. 183-193).

he reflects upon the bliss which those who behold Sapience's "celestiall face" (242) enjoy. The poet's own "weake distaughted mynd" (14) only allows him, it seems, to catch "a glims" (221) of God's "owne Beloved" (241). However, he is aware of the more profound religious experience others have known, therefore he now describes that experience, in the hope of awakening the wish for the same in his readers-- and as we discover at the very end of the poem, ultimately to direct his own emotions to a similar condition of divine love.

The poet describes the experience of those who have totally surrendered themselves to the love of "that immortall beautie" (13) as one that leaves the individuals with no "fleshly sense,/ Or idle thought of earthly things" (267). It so transforms them that they can delight in nought:

But in th'aspect of that felicitie,  
Which they have written in their inward ey;  
On which they feed, and in their fastened mynd  
All happie joye and full contentment fynd. (284-7)

Had this last hymn ended with these lines, we might have been able to argue convincingly that the poet has finally found the satisfaction he has been seeking, and is himself one of those "thrice happie" (239) men of which he speaks.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Einar Bjorvand takes this position. He believes that "we should note that the rest achieved in the last stanza of the Hymnes also marks the end of the problems of the lover who started the first hymn by complaining that Cupid had subdued his heart and was 'raging' 'therein with restlesse stowre' (HL 1)" ("Spenser's Defence of Poetry:

However, An Hymne of Heavenly Beautie does not end on the ecstatic note with which it began. In the final two stanzas the poet does not speak as a man who knows "full contentment" (287), but as one who repents his "passed follies" (HHL 20) and regrets the hold they still have on him. The "satiety" (282) which "those" (253) others feel is not the experience of his own soul, which is still hungry and restless:

Ah then my hungry soule, which long hast fed  
On idle fancies of thy foolish thought,  
And with false beauties flattring bait misled,  
Hast after vaine deceptfull shadowes sought,  
Which all are fled, and now have left thee nought,  
But late repentance through thy follies prief;  
Ah cease to gaze on matter of thy grief.

And looke at last up to that soveraine light,  
From whose pure beams al perfect beauty springs,  
That kindleth love in every godly spright,  
Even the love of God, which loathing brings  
Of this vile world, and these gay seeming things;  
With whose sweete pleasures being so possest,  
Thy straying thoughts henceforth for ever rest.  
(288-301)

Superficially, the ending of the Hymne of Heavenly

---

Some Structural Aspects of the Fowre Hymnes," in Fair Forms: Essays in English Literature from Spenser to Jane Austen, ed. Maren-Sofie Rostvig [Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1975], p. 43). However, "rest" has not been achieved, and the poet himself says that his problems will only end when his "straying thoughts henceforth for ever rest" (301). I agree with Welsford's observation that "throughout the hymns, the poet seems to be standing just outside Paradise ... he can admire the incomparably more satisfying raptures of those who live in the presence of Sapience; but hankerings and regrets are holding him back from their company" (p. 61). Russell perceives the last stanzas in a similar way. In his view Spenser has "his poet/speaker look toward heaven without actually entering it, and pray for rest without receiving it" (p. 152).

Beautie recalls the ending of the complementary Hymne in Honour of Beautie. Indeed the movement in the two hymns is quite similar. Each begins with the poet in an exhilarated state of mind, and in each the poet expresses the desire to enlighten those less spiritually illumined than himself. In each hymn the lover expounds a lofty vision of beauty, earthly and divine respectively. But the hymns end not on a tone of triumphant exaltation but in a significantly lower key; in fact, initially the ending of each of the hymns is surprising: the poet's own spirit seems to "fall" just as his song crescendos to an exalted pitch.

This is the superficial similarity between the hymns, but in fact what happens to the poet-lover in these hymns differs. In the Hymne in Honour of Beautie the poet uses his vision to illumine others but also to influence his lady to give herself in love to him. His desire to get what he wants out of this song prevents him from being attentive to his own words, so that at the end he cannot draw upon his Neoplatonic teaching for his own illumination. In the Hymne of Heavenly Beautie, on the other hand, the poet's desire to enlighten is totally unselfseeking, and this allows him to be receptive to what he teaches, and to relearn it as he rehearses it. In the process he becomes acutely aware of the gap between what he knows will bring him fulfillment and his own failure to live out of that knowledge.

This awareness of the gap between knowledge and

experience is something the poet-lover gains in both the Hymne in Honour of Beautie and the Hymne of Heavenly Beautie. However, in the former hymn he is not able to respond to his predicament with the insights his vision brings, whereas in the latter hymn, he summons himself to respond to his situation as his song teaches others to do: by looking to that which is greater than human sinfulness, to "that soveraine light,/ ... That kindleth love in every godly spright" (295-7). The difference in the poet-lover in these two hymns is significant. He has undergone some spiritual growth; he is able to nourish and sustain his soul by following his own advice and directing his attention away from himself and towards something more eternal.

However, like the lover in the Amoretti, the poet-lover of the Fowre Hymnes does not undergo a total transformation. Although at the end of the poem he demonstrates a greater degree of attentiveness and therefore a greater potential for self-transcendence he still has far to go on his spiritual journey. This is especially evident in his closing remarks. Although in this hymn he taught his readers to see the beauty of the universe as a reflection of God's goodness and love for creation, now, speaking no longer as a spiritual guide but in dialogue with his own soul, he perceives the love of God to bring "loathing .../ Of this vile world" (298-9). The poet-lover of the Fowre Hymnes is in many ways like that of Red Crosse in Book One



of the Faerie Queene. According to Kathleen Williams

the training of Red Crosse, by Heavenly Contemplation, to look along the steep little path that "led his vew" to the heavenly city ... enables him to distinguish between its glory and the lesser, but still true, glory of Gloriana's Cleopolis. It is the greatest of all sights, but its brightness dazzles his earthly sense, and it is difficult for him to see again the things of this world. But he must learn nonetheless to see worldly reality in the light of that clear and ultimate vision.<sup>7</sup>

Similarly, the poet of the Fowre Hymnes must learn to see the world in the sacramental way in which he has tried to teach his readers to see. Oates observes that "although the rhetoric of the ending of the Hymne of Heavenly Beautie speaks of the relative ugliness of earthly things to the contemplator of heavenly beauty, the reader does not forget the beauties exhibited at the beginning of the poem as means to rise to these heights."<sup>8</sup> This, I think, is precisely the point: it is because the reader has not forgotten, that the words "loathing" (298) and "vile" (299) strike a jarring note; rather it is the poet-lover who has forgotten how to read the world in the more sacramental way in which he has taught his readers to see it. At the beginning of the hymn the poet intends to enlighten his readers, and throughout the hymn he teaches an exercise which can increase their devotion to God. At the end of the hymn, however, he

---

<sup>7</sup> Kathleen Williams, "Spenser and the Metaphor of Sight," in Rice University Studies, 60 ii (1974) p. 161.

<sup>8</sup> Oates, p. 162.

acknowledges that he himself has yet to go much further to come to the illumination which other, wiser pilgrims have achieved on this spiritual journey.

The poet-lover confesses at the beginning of the hymn that his mind is "weake" and "distraughted" (14). At the very end of the hymn he longs for the time when "straying thoughts" will "for ever rest" (301). If we are attentive to him, we do not, as Oates observes, have "to identify a Spenserian degree of enlightenment with this character who is from any point of view very far from having a clear idea of his own situation."<sup>9</sup> In this final hymn, Spenser's speaker demonstrates a clarity of vision which reveals just how much he has developed spiritually and emotionally in the course of singing his four songs of praise. Here especially, however, the imperfect poet-lover calls attention to his limitations and to the education of the heart he must yet undergo to become a perfect instrument of earthly and divine love.

---

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 165.

## CONCLUSION

In the Amoretti and the Fowre Hymnes Spenser presents two similar yet different dramatic fictions: both poems tell the story of a man's search for love. Both men begin their search by pursuing earthly ladies whose inner and outer beauty awakens desire for union with them. Both lovers draw upon Petrarchan conceits and Neoplatonic philosophy to win their lady's favour. Eventually each lover recognizes the error of this approach and abandons it. For both, these acts of letting go result in a marked change in their search: the Amoretti poet receives the love he longed for from his lady, and Fowre Hymnes poet discovers his God's unconditional love for him. At the end of the sonnet sequence the speaker is separated from his beloved but continues to value her love above all else. At the end of the Hymne of Heavenly Beautie (274-6) the speaker reiterates his rejection of his earthly lady and seeks fulfillment only in God's love. Thus the search for love which began in analogous ways ends differently for the two poets. Yet the dynamics of desire in both are similar. Both speakers begin their search for love in a condition of neediness, both are forced to let go of their self-interested attitudes to their beloved, and consequently both discover love as a gift, bestowed on them as an act of grace.

Furthermore, in each of the poetical works analyzed here Spenser represents the experience of love as essentially inconclusive in nature. At the end of the Amoretti the lover is not united with his lady. Rather, we leave him struggling with the lesson of detachment his love experience repeatedly forces him to learn. The appended Anacreontics end with Cupid continuing in his old ways, forgetful of the act of compassion his mother called on him to practice and which she taught him by example. At the end of the Fowre Hymnes the lover longs for the time when he can rest in the love of God alone. He still needs to urge himself to "ceasse to gaze on matter of thy grief/ And looke at last up to that soveraine light" (294-5); the self-exhortation reveals his ongoing struggle to turn from self to Other. Thus the experience of love as Spenser depicts it in these poems involves an ongoing education of the heart. Each lover has to learn and relearn how to continuously prepare his heart to receive the fulfillment in the love he longs for.

For Spenser then, the experience of love is superficially incoherent but with an underlying unity that involves continuous conversion: a process of self-creation that does not end, even though the poems themselves do. For, ultimately, if the poems are to be successful the drama is to be replayed in the reader, as the drama of the Fowre Hymnes becomes that of reading, which is always a form of

self-fashioning.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Primary Sources

- Spenser, Edmund. Book I and II of The Faerie Queene. Eds. Robert Kellog and Oliver Steele. New York: Odyssey Press, 1965.
- . Fowre Hymnes and Epithalamion. Ed. Enid Welsford. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1967.
- . Spenser's Minor Poems. Ed. E. de Selincourt. 1912; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910.
- . The Works of Edmund Spenser: A Variorum Edition. Eds. Edwin A. Greenlaw, G. Osgood, M. Padelford, and R. Heffner. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1932-49.

### Secondary Sources

- Anderson, Douglas. "'Vnto My Selfe Alone': Spenser's Plenary Epithalamion." A Renaissance Poetry Annual V (1984): 149-66. Eds. Patrick Cullen and Thomas R. Roche, Jr. New York: AMS Press, 1984.
- André, le Chapelain. Andreas Capellanus on Love. Ed. P. G. Walsh. London: Duckworth, 1982.
- Bean, John S. "Making the Daimonic Personal: Britomart and Love's Assault in the Faerie Queene." Modern Language Quarterly 40 (1979): 237-55.

- Bellarmino, Roberto. A Treatise, Framing a Ladder, Whereby our Mindes may Ascend to God. 1616. Menston, England: Scholar Press, 1970.
- Bembo, Pietro. Gli Asolani. Trans. Rudolf B. Gottfried. Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1954.
- Bennett, Josephine W. "The Theme of Spenser's Fowre Hymnes." Studies in Philology 28 (1931): 18-57.
- ". "Spenser's Fowre Hymnes: Addenda". PMLA 47 (1937): 138-57.
- Benson, Robert G. "Elizabeth as Beatrice: A Reading of Spenser's Amoretti." South Central Bulletin 32 (1972): 184-88.
- Bhattacharje, Moninomohan. Platonic Ideas in Spenser. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1970.
- Bieman, Elizabeth. "'Sometimes I ... mask in myrth lyke to a Comedy': Spenser's Amoretti." Spenser Studies: A Renaissance Poetry Annual IV (1983): 131-141.
- Bjorvand, Einar. "Spenser's Defence of Poetry: Some Structural Aspects of the Fowre Hymnes." Fair Forms: Essays in English Literature from Spenser to Jane Austen, ed. Maren-Sofie Rostvig. Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1975. 14-46.
- Boase, Roger. The Origin and Meaning of Courtly Love. Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1977.
- Bush, Douglas. Mythology and the Renaissance Tradition. New York: Pageant Books, 1957.
- Castiglione, Baldassaro. The Book of the Courtier. London: Dent, 1928.

- Colie, Rosalie. Resources of Kind: Genre Theory in The Renaissance. Berkeley: Univ. of Calif. Press, 1973.
- Collins, Joseph B. Christian Mysticism in the Elizabethan Age. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1940.
- Comito, Terry. "A Dialectic of Images in Spenser's Fowre Hymnes." Studies in Philology 74 (1977): 301-321.
- Cummings, Peter M. "Spenser's Amoretti as an Allegory of Love." Texas Studies in Literature and Language 12 (1970-71): 163-179.
- Dasenbrock, Reed W. "The Petrarchan Context of Spenser's Amoretti." PMLA 100 (1985): 38-50.
- De Neef, A. Leigh. Spenser and the Motives of Metaphor. Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 1982.
- , "Spenserian Meditation: The Hymne of Heavenly Beautie." The American Benedictine Review 25 (1974): 317-34.
- Donno, Elizabeth Story. "The Triumph of Cupid: Spenser's Legend of Chastity." Yearbook of English Studies 4 (1974): 37-48.
- Dunlop, Alexander. "The Drama of the Amoretti." Spenser Studies: A Renaissance Poetry Annual I (1980): 107-120.
- Durling, Robert. Petrarch's Lyric Poems. Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1976.
- Edwards, Calvin R. "The Narcissus Myth in Spenser's Poetry." Studies in Philology 74 (1977): 63-88.



- Ellrodt, Robert. Neo-Platonism in the Poetry of Spenser. Geneva: Librairie E. Droz, 1960.
- Ficino, Marsilio. Commentary on Plato's Symposium on Love. Ed., trans. Sears Jayne. 2nd rev. ed. Dallas: Spring Publications, 1985.
- Fletcher, Jefferson B. "Benivieni's Ode of Love and Spenser's Fowre Hymnes." Modern Philology 28 (1931): 18-57.
- Forster, Leonard. The Icy Fire. Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1969.
- Hinton, Stan. "The Poet and his Narrator: Spenser's Epic Voice." English Literary History 41 (1974): 165-81.
- Hiramatsu, Tetsuji. "Spenser's Myths of Venus and Cupid in the Faerie Queene and Fowre Hymnes: The Emergence of Marriage as a Romantic Ideal." Diss., Michigan State Univ., 1983.
- Hutton, James. "Cupid and the Bee." PMLA 56 (1941): 1038-1058.
- James, William. The Varieties of Religious Experience. New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1908.
- Jayne, Sears. "Ficino and the Platonism of the English Renaissance." Comparative Literature 4 (1952): 214-38.
- Johnson, William C. "Amor and Spenser's Amoretti." English Studies 54 (1973): 217-26.
- ". "Love's Ascent/Descent in Spenser's Amoretti and Fowre Hymnes. Unpublished paper presented at the Sixteenth-Century Studies Conference, 1987, Arizona State Univ., Tempe, Arizona.

Kaske, Carol V. "Spenser's Amoretti and Epithalamion of 1595: Structure, Genre and Numerology." English Literary Renaissance 8 (1978).

Lee, R. W. "Castiglione's Influence on Spenser's Early Hymns." Philological Quarterly 7 (1928): 65-77.

Lemmi, Charles W. "Britomart: The Embodiment of True Love." Studies in Philology 31 (1934): 133-39.

Leon, Ebreo. The Philosophy of Love. Trans. F. Friedeberg. London: Soncino Press, 1937.

Lever, J.W. The Elizabethan Sonnet Sequence. London: Methuen, 1956.

Lewis, C.S. The Allegory of Love. 1936. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1958.

-----. The Four Loves. London: Fontana Books, 1960.

-----. "Spenser's Cruel Cupid." Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Literature. Collected by Walter Hooper. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1966.

-----. Spenser's Images of Life. Ed. Alastair Fowler. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1967.

Lotspeich, Henry Gibson. Classical Mythology in the Poetry of Edmund Spenser. New York: Octagon Books, 1965.

Louth, Andrew. Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition from Plato to Denys. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981.

Marot, Claude. Oeuvres. Ed. Georges Guiffrey, IV. Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1969.

- Martz, Louis. "The Amoretti: 'Most Goodly Temperature.'" Form and Convention in the Poetry of Edmund Spenser. Ed. William Nelson. New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1969. 146-68.
- . The Poetry of Meditation. Rev. ed, New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1962.
- Miola, Robert S. "Spenser's Anacreontics: A Mythological Metaphor." Studies in Philology 77 (1980): 50-66.
- Nelson, John Charles. The Renaissance Theory of Love. New York and London: Columbia Univ. Press, 1963.
- Nelson, William. The Poetry of The Faerie Queene. New York and London: Columbia Univ. Press, 1963.
- Nestrick, William V. "Spenser and the Renaissance Mythology of Love." Literary Monographs VI (1975): 37-70.
- Nygren, Anders. Agape & Eros. Tr. Philip S. Watson. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1953, 1982.
- Oates, Mary I. "Fowre Hymnes: Spenser's Retractations of Paradise." Spenser Studies: A Renaissance Poetry Annual IV (1983). Ed. Patrick Cullen and Thomas Roche, Jr. New York: AMS Press, 1984. 143-69.
- Osgood, Charles G. "Spenser's Sapience." Studies in Philology 14 (1917): 167-77.
- Padelford, Frederick M. "Spenser's Fowre Hymnes." Journal of English and Germanic Philology 13 (1914): 418-33.
- . "Spenser's Fowre Hymnes. A Resurvey." Studies in Philology 29 (1932): 207-32.

Panofsky, Erwin. Studies in Iconology. 1939; New York: Harper and Row, 1972.

Petrarch, Francesco. Petrarch's Canzoniere in the English Renaissance. Ed. Anthony Mortimer. Bergamo: Minerva Italica, 1975.

Ricks, Don M. "Convention and Structure in Edmund Spenser's Amoretti." Proceedings of the Utah Academy of Arts and Letters 44 (1967): 438-450.

Rollinson, Phillip Bruce. "Spenser's Fowre Hymnes and the Tradition of the Literary Hymn." Diss. Univ. of Virginia, 1969.

Rougemont, Denis de. Love in the Western World. Tr. Montgomery Belgion. New York: Harper and Row, 1974.

Russell, David R. "The Unity of Edmund Spenser's Fowre Hymnes." Diss. Univ. of Oklahoma, 1981.

Saint Bonaventure. The Soul's Journey Into God. The Tree of Life. The Life of St. Francis. Trans. Ewert Cousins. New York: Paulist Press, 1978.

Sawtelle, A.E. The Sources of Spenser's Classical Mythology. New York and Boston: Silver, Burdett, 1896.

Siegel, Paul N. "The Petrarchan Sonneteers and Neo-Platonic Love." Studies in Philology 42 (1945): 164-82.

Sims, Dwight J. "The Syncretic Myth of Venus in Spenser's Legend of Chastity." Studies in Philology 71 (1974): 427-50.

Smith, Hallet. Elizabethan Poetry: A Study in Conventions.

Meaning, and Expression. Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1951.

Steinberg, Leo. The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion. New York: Pantheon Books, 1983.

Thompson, Charlotte. "Love in an Orderly Universe: A Unification of Spenser's Amoretti, 'Anacreontics' and Epithalamion." Viator: Medieval and Renaissance Studies 16 (1985): 277-335.

Williams, Kathleen. Spenser's World of Glass. Berkeley: Univ. of Calif. Press, 1966.

-----". "Venus and Diana: Some Uses of Myth." Spenser: A Collection of Critical Essays. Ed. Harry Berger, Jr. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1968. 97-114.

-----". "Vision and Rhetoric: The Poet's Voice in The Faerie Queene." English Literary History 36 (1969): 131-144.

-----". "Spenser and the Metaphor of Sight." Rice University Studies 60 (1974).

Wind, Edgar. Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance. New York: Norton, 1969.