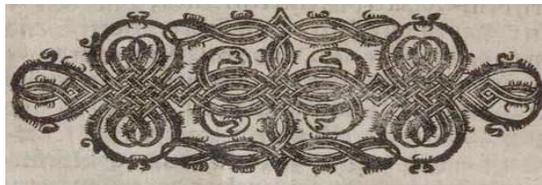


**“The End Is Not Yet:”
Monarchy, Choice, and the Problematic
Binaries of Representation**

William Rogers

Ten years before the publication of Edmund Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene* John Stubbs wrote an infamous pamphlet, *Into The Gaping Gulf*, that addressed not only the perils of Elizabeth’s foreign marriage, but highlighted the danger in portraying her most iconic virtue: her chastity. Certainly the issue of material danger and punishment—corporeal, economic, and social—must have influenced Spenser and his work. Indeed, while all of *The Faerie Queene* arguably depicts Elizabeth, Book 3—centered as it is on chastity—offers a particularly potent and dangerous experiment in representation, as any discussion of chastity would speak directly to the poem’s most important reader and her most powerful iconographic tool. In the midst of danger, Spenser creates a world in which the reader is forced to interpret the multivalent images of Elizabeth and thereby alleviates the perilous risks that accompany depiction of the monarch. By foregrounding the discussion of chastity in deliberately ambiguous terms through deep allegory and the metaphors of mirror, this paper argues that politically dangerous misrepresentations are avoided through ambiguity that ultimately is engendered through Spenser’s use of medieval political theology. In using multiple mirrors for Elizabeth, but also for himself, Spenser subtly acknowledges and uses the doctrine of the King’s (or Queen’s) Two Bodies to avoid catastrophe.



In his letter to Sir Walter Raleigh, Spenser explains the didactic aims of his work, “to fashion a gentleman or noble person in virtuous and gentle discipline,” and then discusses the general structure of the allegory and the consequences of drawing a “darke conceit.”¹ As Spenser notes “how doubtfully all allegories may be construed,” he articulates the choice in interpretation of his work and the consequences of that interpretation, which in turn constitutes the attendant anxieties in portraiture of the

Queen.² Tellingly, the letter is to another man, not to the Queen herself, and, although neither Elizabeth nor any other reader is addressed explicitly, Spenser's general thought concerning allegory is one of doubt—about how the work may be construed, about the reader, and about the influence of "gealous opinions."³ In the context of the Elizabethan court, he is certain however of the tradition from Virgil to Tasso of court-appointed creativity and the resultant allegorical invention in praise of one's political masters.⁴ In the midst of doubt, Spenser creates a world in which the reader is forced to interpret the multivalent images of Elizabeth and thereby alleviates the perilous risks that accompany depiction of the monarch. Book Three offers a particularly potent and dangerous experiment in representation, as any discussion of chastity would speak directly to the poem's most important reader and her most powerful iconographic tool. By foregrounding the discussion of chastity in the metaphors of mirror, Spenser acknowledges that whatever the readers see is a reflection not of Spenser but their own choice, thus both pointing to the very real problem of depicting the political and corporeal Elizabeth and also to the very material danger that the wrong representation can bring.⁵

Choice is completely governed, however, by Spenser's manipulative hand: Elizabeth/Amoret/Belphoebe/Britomart/Gloriana can choose, but only from the mirrors that the author has presented. Feminine choice is mediated by masculine imperative. In the context of Book Three, the masculine imperative manifests itself in the seemingly diametrically-opposed aims of Busirane and Merlin but also in the shifting balance between Virgilian and Ovidian contexts. Examining these binaries structured by the political versus the personal and the historical versus the a-historical, I argue that Spenser's "encomiastic challenge" to the Queen and her existence as an entity consisting of two bodies, political and personal, functions as an elaboration of medieval political theology. I therefore discuss Ovidian and Virgilian mythologies, teleologically-progressive narration, and Busirane's hellish machinations through the lens of a dual-bodied sovereign.⁶

In utilizing the term "encomiastic challenge" I join other critics in highlighting the dual nature of the poem, one that is necessary in describing Elizabeth, a woman who is indicative and constitutive of a supposedly enduring political institution but also representative of her own corporeal body.⁷ By interpreting Book Three as "encomiastic challenge," I also acknowledge that the boundaries between encomium and challenge often blur. An interpretation of Britomart as wholly political and unaffected by the machinations of Busirane denies the movement of meaning and significance with which each part of Spenser's problematic binaries are invested. According to Susan Frye, the conflation

of Britomart and Amoret in the House of Busirane signaled by Spenser's ambiguous use of a singular pronoun and plural noun (virgins) causes the textual distinction between personal and political to collapse.⁸ Throughout the essay I assert a reading of the poem that is invested in these dual bodies of the Queen, the poet, and the mythological context in the context of medieval political theology. By concentrating on the choice that Spenser offers Elizabeth at the beginning of Book Three and his use of metaphorical mirrors, I first argue for a depiction of Elizabeth articulated primarily through the figures of Britomart and Amoret. In the discussion of male narration that follows, I examine the contraposition between Merlin and Busirane, and I demonstrate how Spenser first presents a gulf of difference and then bridges the textual chasm. Finally, to address what Spenser characterizes as his deference to "all the antique Poets historical," I discuss the origin of Merlin, the tapestries in the House of Busirane, and the manner in which Spenser utilizes these two discrete figures to collapse the difference between Ovidian and Virgilian mythologies.⁹

Amoret and Britomart: The Queen Indeed Has Two Bodies

Book Three opens with a discourse upon art and its limitations in depictions of the Queen. Framing his discussion of royal representation by his enumeration of the limitations of his living art, Spenser defines the scope and parameters of his project. In giving voice to the need to write "of Chastity," he quickly asserts that the very entity and physical manifestation of it, the perfection and apogee of chastity, resides in his sovereign's heart (3.1.1.1-9).¹⁰ Through an act of deference to the queen, Spenser succeeds at two direct objectives: he subjugates his art to the reality of the Queen, avoiding any charge that he erred in representation, but he also manages to align the Queen with Britomart, without ever doing so explicitly.¹¹ Lacking an acknowledgement of Britomart and Elizabeth as mirror-image and object, Spenser's use of chastity to describe Elizabeth leaves little doubt that Britomart and her cardinal virtue of chastity serve as markers of regal identity. Through judicious use of a mirror metaphor, Spenser avoids a direct representation of his queen in his illustration of Elizabeth as a dual-bodied monarch. Rather Spenser invokes an indirect model of her, preferring to allow Raleigh's textualized mirror of Elizabeth, Cynthia, to choose between the characters of Gloriana and Belphoebe. The degree of distance here is immense: characterizing Elizabeth as Cynthia ties Spenser both to Raleigh and Elizabeth but also points to the very competition that Spenser faced in his representation of the Queen:

Ne let his fairest *Cynthia* refuse,
In mirrours more than one her selfe to see,

But either *Gloriana* let her chuse,
Or in *Belphoebe* fashioned to bee:

In th'one her rule, in th'other her rare chastitee. (3.1.5.5-9)

Invoking the image of mirrors, Spenser seeks to show that the Queen is composed of a body that rules—the essence of the body politic—and a body that is purely corporeal. The two are not the same. While *Gloriana* functions as a symbolized and somewhat fanciful notion of royal power, prerogative, and body politic as the ruler of Faerie Land, *Belphoebe* functions as the embodiment of chastity, a private deployment of a public feature of Elizabeth's rule. Acknowledging further questions that arise in investigation of this passage, I must emphasize that Spenser does not mention *Amoret* or *Britomart*; yet *Amoret* is *Belphoebe*'s twin (3.6.28.1-9). *Britomart* is not named, and the reason is not as clear. A powerful woman, ruler, and warrior, *Britomart* is the very image that Elizabeth desired to present at *Tillbury*. However, *Britomart* is affected by love and will marry, a choice foreclosed for Elizabeth in the waning years of her rule and health. Although un-named, *Britomart*'s connection with Elizabeth is obvious: as two women who mean to rule, both Elizabeth and *Britomart* could find their reflection in the mirror of the body politic, yet for both chastity remains a defining characteristic. Susan Frye notes that the figure of *Britomart* represents in many ways a cancelled association with Elizabeth, a way of linking them through a glass, darkly; *Britomart* is Spenser's own creation, a trope with which he can investigate the liminal qualities of a chastity that was revered and feared.¹² The rationale for creating *Britomart* to represent Elizabeth does not explain the absence of *Amoret* in the choice of mirrors, for clearly it is not only the option of *Britomart* that Spenser withholds. By refusing to write in the identity of *Amoret*, he denies Elizabeth the occasion to align herself with the primary victim of *Busirane*'s machinations, thereby omitting any direct association with corporeal assault on the body of the Queen. Who would choose to be raped in the House of *Busirane*? In a tactic that seems to be construed to give safe distance to his narrative of captivity, rape, and rescue in the House of *Busirane*, Spenser refuses any explicit identification of the sovereign with either figure that meets the dark side of male narration, as if to imply Elizabeth has nothing to fear from Spenser's own narration.¹³ The significant meaning of the ambiguity resides in its articulation of the masculine imperative. Giving *Cynthia* the opportunity to elect between a mirror of rule or of chastity is a false dilemma in the poetic world; she must have other opportunities. In reality, chastity, rule, or both are Elizabeth's options, and, in his treatment of the political exigencies that envelope her, Spenser submits Elizabeth to a form of domination through his narration. The choice between chastity and rule is not an option that Elizabeth would have had in reality nor would she have had Spenser's

poetic license to choose between them; in fact, owing to the quotidian state of affairs for a female sovereign, Elizabeth's position as ruler forced her to choose chastity and avoid the dominion by a foreign king or domestic noble in a married state.¹⁴

Clearly, Spenser's intention was to affirm the connection of Elizabeth and Britomart, albeit an implied and contested tie considering the omission of the stated bond that would wed their bodies together textually. In doing so, he is free to ruminate upon the consequences of married chastity, unmarried chastity, and the problematics of rule. As Susan Frye has noted, "the allegory organizing the House of Busirane, and indeed all of Book Three, as Spenser specifies, is Chastity, an allegory whose variant meanings record the struggle for representation between a queen and her courtiers."¹⁵ The problematic arises in recognition that Amoret is punished, and she is the twin to Belpheobe, who is clearly offered to Cynthia or Elizabeth as a mirror in which to see herself. In the pens of the masculine authors, Spenser glorifies the body of the Queen in its most martial and political setting as he consequently challenges the body natural, embodied in the person of Amoret. Giving Elizabeth the opportunity to decide whether to see part of her person in Belpheobe or part in Gloriana points to a tension that existed between the body natural and the body politic of the sovereign. Representative of medieval political theology, this identification of the phenomenon of sovereign and state as one body, infinite and finite, serves as an uneasy solution to the problematic of a chaste virgin as sovereign. Book Three celebrates the historical lineage of Elizabeth and serves to praise its culmination in the "royall Virgin." (3.3.49.5) However, in an effort to situate Elizabeth's reign as a product of a marriage and a fabled lineage, the lack of an heir and the inevitability of Elizabeth dying without direct, blood issue is a dilemma that only the eternal nature of the corporate collective can solve. Amoret can be hurt, but Britomart's health is paramount because she is symbolic of the state. In a poetic and dramatic sense, medieval political theology offered Spenser an avenue for his encomiastic challenge, one that is made possible only through Spenser's ability to construct textualized mirrors of his Queen, bodies of text that serve as markers of the Queen.

In the final cantos of Book Three, Amoret and Britomart both fall victim to the powers of Busirane in Spenser's description of hurt, captivity, and pain. Spenser's depiction of the action in Busirane's House creates an important argument concerning both chastity and the Queen's two bodies. Busirane's actions affect even Britomart:

That horror gan the virgins hart to perse,
And her faire locks vp stared stiffe on end,
Hearing him those same bloody lines reherse;
And all the while he red, she did extend

Her sword high ouer him, if ought he did offend. (3.7.36.5-9)

While his lines and characters strike both the virgins in their hearts, Britomart the representation of the body politic is strong enough to level her sword constantly at him; it is through the perseverance of her martial abilities that Britomart symbolizes the power and control of the body politic. Yet it cannot be denied that she is also affected. Mirroring the hurt she suffers in the House of Malecasta, Britomart feels the power of the rehearsed words. Spenser's choice of the line "that horror gan the virgins hart to perse" leads to an ambiguity in which the reader cannot discern which virgin's heart is meant. Frye notes that the "profusion of singular feminine pronouns referring one moment to Amoret and the next to Britomart serve to conflate them into a single feminine figure who, rescuer or rescued, is also an unwilling audience."¹⁶ As much as the reader cannot distinguish the narrative of Busirane from the narrative of Spenser, the difference between Amoret and Britomart has all but disappeared. Owing to the mystical nature of the Queen, this conflation of feminine audience also is intertwined with the doctrine of the Queen's Two Bodies. As Elizabeth's jurist Edmund Plowden stated, there is a degree of indivisibility to the two bodies, yet the body politic is superior in quality and condition.¹⁷ The political and legal conflation of the two bodies explains the merger of the two virgins and also the sympathetic pain Britomart feels in witnessing Busirane's attack upon Amoret. Yet, the pain is more than just sympathy: Spenser writes that Busirane rehearses the bloody lines, and in hearing the lines repeated, Britomart feels their piercing power. In the rescue of Amoret, however, Spenser is clearly making the point that the body politic is stronger than the body natural. Britomart does not flinch nor lower her sword. In keeping with the doctrine of the King's Two Bodies in which the worthier draws to itself the less worthy, Britomart draws Amoret toward her and away from Busirane. In doing so, Spenser accomplishes two seemingly contradictory goals: he affirms the hierarchy of the bodies in which the body natural is clearly the lesser, but he also dares the reader to find the separation between Britomart and Amoret, between encomium and challenge.

It's A Man's World: The House, The Cave, and Men's Work

Describing the genesis of Britomart's task to find Artegall and complete the destined course of action, Spenser points to the masculine agency of the project from its very beginning: "The great Magitian Merlin had deuiz'd/...A looking glasse" that Britomart had found in her father's closet (3.2.18.6). Through the act of looking into this "glassie globe that Merlin made," Britomart sees Artegall and is smitten with his visage. In the service of history, even the distinction blurs between the masculinity

needed to narrate the teleology of Britomart's prophesied union and the femininity upon which this masculinity will write. Contained within Britomart's discovery of Merlin's mirror, Spenser's description of her could easily be transposed onto a male character: Britomart is able to find the mirror in which she will discover her destiny because no part of her father's house, and consequently, his power, is forbidden. "For nothing he from her reseru'd apart/ Being his onely daughter and his hayre" serves as a textual reminder that Britomart is not wholly feminine, indicative as she is of masculine power, both here and in discussions of the political body (3.2.22.3-4). Naming Britomart as her father's "hayre" naturalizes the idea of a female ruler and points to the direct connection between Elizabeth and Henry VIII. In the glassie globe, however, Spenser then reaffirms her current role as feminine and offers the act of finding the mirror as genesis. An encounter with the mirror functions in two senses as the genesis of Britomart's journey to find Artegall; in one sense it is merely the beginning of a young girl's adventure but in another, deeper sense, the reader is privy to the beginning of a union that will produce a fabled line.

Illuminating the production and dissemination of the lineage that will create a third Troy, Spenser's use of Merlin is illustrative not only of the two bodies of the Queen but also one option for poet. In his description of Busirane discussed later, Spenser presents a seemingly negative and dominating option for the poet. These authorial depictions resonate together; in the collapse of their tenuous distinctions, I see them as another aspect of medieval political theology, the blending of two bodies, political and personal. With the use of the poet-magicians' "straunge characters," the control of history as productive and non-productive, and the role of the two magicians, Spenser creates a binary of opposition and then collapses it through commonality. In his introduction in the third canto of Book Three, the description of Merlin mirrors the depiction of Busirane at the end of Book Three:

First entering, this dreadfull Mage there found
 Deepe busied bout worke of wondrous end,
 And writing straunge characters in the ground,
 With which the stubborn feends he to his seruice bound. (3.3.14.5-9)

Spenser's delineation gives the reader a portrait of the writer who uses his craft for domination; Merlin is no less a magician than Busirane. The difference primarily rests upon their choice of canvas: while Busirane would write his characters upon Amoret's heart, Merlin writes his characters to keep his "feends" in his service. According to Harry Berger, Merlin functions as the means to explain to Britomart not only her personal responsibilities to Artegall but also her responsibilities to the deeper historical plan.¹⁸ Busirane's aim is not connected with history in any large and connected sense; rather he is a function of male domination

and female submission.¹⁹ Berger explains this dichotomy between history and non-history in terms of the competing narrators. Yet I argue that Busirane's machinations share both a smaller, personal history with the sixteenth century monarchy of England and also with Western civilization more generally. Busirane's domination and violent discourse recalls the writings of John Stubbs whose pamphlets threaten Elizabeth, her monarchy, and England if she should make a wrong choice in marriage, all in a tone of gentle paternalism. In a blurring of the political and personal, Stubbs sees Elizabeth led as a lamb to the slaughter if she chooses a foreign and Catholic marriage.²⁰ He characterizes the proposed marriage of Elizabeth and Alençon as a "great horse of hidden mischiefs and falsehoods."²¹ The connection cannot be missed. Harkening both to the mythological past of the British, but also to the Trojan War, a major misogynistic moment in history, Stubbs aligns the wanton passions of Paris and Helen with Alençon and Elizabeth. Seeing Busirane's domination as outside the temporal arc of the poem denies the fact that misogyny, especially authorial misogyny, connects in a grand and coherent sense with the wider history of Western culture.

The deeper historical plan prophesied and written by Merlin is the narrative of a woman's quest to find love and found an empire but is also a narrative that posits that masculine agency is necessary for Britomart to start, continue, and finish her quest. The point cannot be overstated: empire is a teleological-driven marriage between the forces of masculine knowledge and feminine power that would permit the feminine to know her duty and how to perform it. Besides the marriage of material man and woman, Spenser clearly builds upon a mythology that completes itself in the wedding of masculine directive and feminine capacity. With the phenomenon of masculine agency personified by the machinations of Cupid the "false archer" in canto 2, Spenser has already introduced the topos of writing, especially upon the heart of a woman. Pondering Artegall with whom she has fallen in love, Britomart "thinke[s] of that fair visage written in her hart" (3.2.29.9).²² As with Amoret, a certain amount of discursive energy is placed upon the heart of the women; in the conflation of the subjects of that energy, as well as the creators, Spenser demonstrates the efficacy of the Queen's Two Bodies to represent the Queen in her bodies politic and natural. As the similarities between both Merlin and Busirane, and Amoret and Britomart make clear, this doctrine can be used for purposes that are not purely epideictic. The rhetoric surrounding Cupid and Spenser's characterization of the archer as false betray a negativity toward a base form of love and lust; yet it is the false archer who sets into motion the historical match that will presage the third Troy on the shores of the North Sea and glorify a virgin who effectively ends the blood line. Spenser's characterization of Cupid and

the urge toward *luxuria* should result in a debased and unnatural lineage; yet instead, greatness is foretold. The rhetoric turns as history must: Merlin, as a symbol of the sober, rational, and yet magical male solves this lovesickness with the knowledge that Britomart is destined for great things. The penetration of her heart remains: the image of an arrow piercing the soft and vulnerable heart cannot be lost upon the reader. Analogous to the rape of Amoret in terms of imagery, Britomart's wound functions as a symbol of rape, as even the martial and political body of the sovereign could be implicated in *luxuria* and the weakness of the flesh. As further evidence in his affirmation that the boundaries between the glorification of Elizabeth as body politic and denigration of her body natural as represented in Amoret's rape are blurry at best, Louis Montrose proposes that in the face of political, social, and economic exigencies coupled with the isolation of the ageing queen, Elizabeth "was promoted as a semi-divine being, an exception to disabling gender norms, whose inviolate sexuality was a mystical source of the nation's welfare."²³ By placing her natural body in danger and incorporating the cult of this inviolate sexuality into his poetry, Spenser is "shaping his literary medium in such a way as to resubject the discourse of royal autocracy to a challenge from within the political nation."²⁴ Along with Frye, Montrose affirms her assertion that both the slippage of the meaning of chastity and also the battle over representation of the Queen are in many ways both encomium and challenge. Ultimately, the will of men writes itself upon the heart of women; an escape from a naturalized patriarchy in which men direct and transcribe history, destiny, and present on the hearts and bodies of women is lost.

Representing a teleologically-driven history that produces through procreation a fabled line and culminates in the person of a virgin whose "inviolate sexuality" determines the end of the lineage, Spenser creates a problematic indicative of Frye's "encomiastic challenge." Merlin's prophesy ends appropriately in the epoch in which "a royal virgin raine[s]" and the land is united in a "sacred Peace" (3.3.49.3, 6). The consequences of this epoch are unspoken; yet to any Elizabethan courtier or to the Queen herself (since David Lee Miller argues she is the most important reader of the work in a court dominated by a reversed Petrarchanism) the outcome would be clear: the death of the Queen is the death of her succession.²⁵ The moment of present history and the divinations for the future as it involves the current sovereign are a potent elixir for the poet to mix. Merlin's fit at the end of his narration of an increasingly productive, procreative history becomes a moment in which the encomium of history turns to negativity and the inevitable death of Elizabeth cannot be uttered:

But the end is not yet. There *Merlin* stayd,

As ouercomen of the spirites power,
 Or other ghastly spectacle dismayed,
 That secretly he saw, yet note disclose:
 When suddein fit, and half extaticke stoure
 When the two fearfull wemen saw, they grew
 Greatly confused in behaueoure;
 At last the fury past, to former hew

Hee turned againe, and chearfull looks did show. (3.3.50.1-9)

Merlin's physical composition is shattered by the events that follow the reign of the sceptered Virgin whom he has described in the stanza before. The moment does pass, but Merlin as narrator of Elizabeth's political history not only instills her reign with a sense of eternal destiny but also of human frailty and death. The unspeakable thing is that Elizabeth will die and as a Virgin will leave the fruit of the procreative tree bare.²⁶ The fact that the vehicle that carries the textualized version of the body politic (Britomart) should hear this and not Amoret is a recognition of the pain that the State will face in the changing of corporeal beings as ruler without blood issue as sure transition of power. The challenge presented by Merlin is analogous to the *momento mori* presented by Busirane. His rehearsal of dominating characters is a moment in which the poet-magician becomes interchangeable with Merlin. While Busirane can present canvases of past gods and memories of debauchery, a moment of powerful tension arises when he rehearses his lines to release Amoret and Britomart is wounded:

And rising vp, gan streight to ouerlooke
 Those cursed leaues, his charmes back to reuerse;
 Full dreadfull things out of that balefull booke
 He red, and meas' d many a sad verse,
 That horror gan the virgins hart to perse,
 And her faire locks vp stared stiffe on end,
 Hearing him so same bloody lynes rehearse;
 And all the while he red, she did extend

Her sword high ouer him, if ought he did offend. (3.7.36.1-9)

Earlier, I argued that this stanza presents a conflation of Britomart and Amoret, offering an instance in which the body politic (Britomart) is wounded. Through trying to reverse and therefore having to rehearse the lines, Busirane wounds the body politic as he has wounded the body corporeal. Building upon that knowledge evidence of the consequences of presenting a sitting sovereign with predictions of death and the baleful state that could ensue, Busirane (here also Spenser) has a sword presented high above, the marker of regal authority and instrument of sure death.²⁷ While the connection to prognostication is weaker here than in the episode with Merlin, the expressed mortality of Amoret functioning as the body corporeal, the rehearsing of the lines to the body politic, and the

threat of violence from a feminine figure point to the dangers of fortune and its telling by both Merlin and Busirane. Spenser's equivocation in presentation of narrators, Merlin and Busirane, and their self-same projects in prophecies of doom and disorder following death blurs the boundary between dominator of "feend" and dominating fiend.

Though the death of the Queen's body natural would certainly present both legal and iconic problems to the monarchy, Spenser grounds the clearest criticism of both chastity and Elizabeth in the rape of Amoret. His description of Amoret's rape is the depiction of a rape by pen. Britomart enters the House of Busirane searching for Amoret:

And her before the vile Enchaunter sate
Figuring straunge characters of his art,
With liuing blood he those characters wrate,
Dreadfully dropping from her dying hart. (3.7.31.1-4)

The "straunge characters" with which Busirane writes are indistinguishable from those that Merlin figures into the ground when Britomart and her nurse approach him in canto 3; moreover, it is clear that the use of these characters is domination for both Merlin and Busirane. Merlin uses writing to dominate his "feends" into subjugation and control, whereas Busirane attempts to manipulate and oppress the love of Amoret. Mirroring Cupid's writing upon Britomart's heart, Busirane inscribes his letters on the heart of Amoret; yet the similarity ends with this mirror quality. As surely as Britomart does not feel the original wound and feels only the fair visage written upon her heart, Amoret is clearly in great pain and bondage; this difference between the scenes can be attributed to the difference in body represented. Harry Berger, Jr. sees these interactions as battles between the reified Sexes, and his point concerning the nature and purpose of Busirane's project implicit in his nature is compelling: "Busirane is simply *Busy-reign*: the male imagination trying busily (because unsuccessfully) to dominate and possess woman's will by art, by magic, by sensory illusions, and threats-by all the instruments of culture except by the normal means of persuasion."²⁸ Montrose also posits that the poem is invested with a male and female dichotomy; in describing the monarchy of Elizabeth, he asserts, "the fact that the monarch was an unmarried woman had insured from the moment of her ascension that Elizabethan political culture would foreground issues of gender and sexuality."²⁹ The convergence in purpose of the male writers would cripple the assertion that the House of Busirane is simply a staging ground for the battle of the sexes; the commonality of their texts, "the straunge characters," bond them together in masculine strategies of female domination.³⁰ Spenser casts Busirane in the play of history, a player who seeks to end the performance. Berger writes "this much seems clear: in showing Britomart what and how Amoret suffers,

Busirane tries to dissuade both from their promised futures."³¹ I argue that Busirane and Merlin are connected in the wish to persuade and dissuade Britomart—Busirane's desire to affect the will of Britomart is strikingly similar to Merlin's prognostications. Both prophesy the end of Elizabeth. In his wish to affect history--both the political history that begins with Britomart and the personal history and future of Amoret--Busirane's narrative strategies are meant to harm both. In the ends that Busirane pursues, Spenser seemingly illustrates the exact opposite of Merlin: Merlin attempts to mend the personal pain of Britomart and yet also imbue to her with the tools and knowledge necessary to exact her historical destiny. However, the poem is ambiguous in its support of Merlin over Busirane. In his use of "straunge characters," Merlin affects historical change, but the thought that this change is forever tied with his domination of the "feends" through narration is an inescapable formulation. Should the reader accept as a priori knowledge the lowly status of these "feends," knowing that both narrators are guilty of domination? Rather, this similarity erases much of the moral distance between them. In the shifting meaning between personal and political and between historical and a-historical, the "straunge characters" of Merlin look very similar to those of Busirane. Characterizing male narration as based upon domination, Spenser presents the cancelled association of Busirane and Merlin and himself and Busirane, eliding any difference in the body of the poet or the body of his text.

Old Men At Work: Virgilian and Ovidian Mythologies

In speaking of two bodies, I must necessarily confront the discrete mythological traditions of Book Three; these two inseparable bodies of mythology function together to produce the figures of Merlin and Busirane and the uneasy distinction among love, lust, and history. While readings of the poem tend to view the mythologies of Book Three as mutually independent and separate, I argue for a nuanced reading in which Virgilian and Ovidian mythologies serve the same master.³² The distinction between the art of love and the craft of nation-making is fluid and contested; within the context of *chaste*, procreative marriage, empire grows as a child. I contend that Spenser merges both Ovidian and Virgilian mythologies to create an epic romance.³³ Drawing the distinction between Virgilian and Ovidian seems simple at first glance. Merlin's prophecy illustrates the grand arc of history, reproducing the wide sweep of epic set forth in the *Aeneid*, the text that chronicles the historical progression from the end of Troy and that celebrates the founding the Empire to which Virgil himself belongs.³⁴ Busirane's machinations copy superficially the narrative of male seduction and rape

that characterize much of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. In the story of Arachne from *Metamorphoses*, Ovid deals specifically with tales of seduction and rape by gods as narrated by someone who has lost the knowledge of her own boundaries. Enshrined in the tapestries decorating the House of Busirane, the story of Arachne's weaving prompts the reader to recognize the lustful nature of Busirane's abode and to judge it accordingly.³⁵ If Ovid functions as a *locus classicus* of lust and Virgil of empire and obedience to history, then Book Three serves as the stage on which slippage between this binary occurs.

Spenser deviates from Virgilian unity almost immediately in Book Three by writing Merlin as the figure of dynastic history and imperial glory. Merlin clearly is a figure of Arthurian origin, a member of a cycle of British mythology that is both nationalistic and curiously anti-imperial.³⁶ Spenser's use of Merlin, though warranted by history and folklore, becomes confused by Merlin's own place in history. As a Briton and a figure of Celtic mythology par excellence, his place is unsure within a poem that typologically celebrates the Tudor line. Spenser figures the House of Tudor as the culmination of the Britons, a fact that elides the knowledge of Tudors' links to both the ruling houses of the Saxons and the Normans. Spenser must navigate between a Merlin who is a symbol of the Celtic people, a long-defeated race and a Merlin who is emblematic of the historical drive of the English state. Virgilian mythology appears in a figure who is composed of two different bodies. Spenser's choice of Virgilian vehicle creates another problematic binary. Besides his contested place within an imperial mythology, Spenser also utilizes Merlin as a figure who must advance a marriage and the lineage it will produce. Yet, the problems that this creates for a marker of Virgilian unity and obedience are immense. One must remember that in the *Aeneid*, Aeneas is buffeted in a contest between Love (Venus) and Marriage (Juno). As a descendant of love, he shuns the queen that Marriage personified protects. Moreover, his mother Venus denies the union of Dido and Aeneas that Juno proposes as a deviation from fate:

Now Venus knew this talk was all pretence,
All to divert the future power from Italy
To Libya. (4.149-151)

Marriage is not the force that it becomes in Book Three of *The Faerie Queene*. In the context of Virgilian epic, marriage ruins empire, causes indolence, and prohibits the rise of true power. The view from heaven is the same: later in the same book of the *Aeneid*, Mercury comes from Olympus to goad Aeneas into action and abandonment. The personal abandonment of desire is preferred to the larger renunciation of historical action that marriage symbolizes.

In any examination of Merlin's role, the place of love in its centrality cannot be accounted for in a purely Virgilian sense. Merlin's cave is the place in which Britomart sees the parade of English worthies, the culmination and catalogue of virtue that she can produce. In an echo of Book Six of *The Aeneid* in which Anchises shows Aeneas the future warriors of Rome, the activities in the cave revolve around history and the exhortation to marry Artegall and complete the genesis of the third Troy. Here, the glory of future kings is a blandishment toward a marriage, as opposed to the episode in the *Aeneid* in which it serves as an effort to relieve the pain of Aeneas's heart from both renunciation of marriage and tales of future woe and war. Therefore in an effort to promote the marriage, Merlin assures Britomart that her chastity is intact and that the love of Artegall is no lusty endeavor but history working through her:

It was not, Britomart, thy wandering eye,
 Glauncing vnwares in charmed looking glas,
 But the streight course of destiny,
 Led with eternall prouidence, that has
 Guyded thy glaunce, to bring his will to pas:
 Ne is thy fate, ne is thy fortune ill,
 To loue the prowest knight, that ever was,
 Therefore submit thy ways unto his will,
 And doe by all dew meanes thy destiny fuffill. (3.3.24.1-9)

Merlin resists reading the "glaunce" as merely a gaze, or a fickle marker of lust; instead, he chooses to interpret this act of looking as a fulfillment of destiny and as an act that is guided by a heavenly order and unity. The tendency to view Britomart's "wandering eyes" as emblematic of prophecy initially casts Merlin as a figure of Virgilian unity, a pose that he uses to convince her that love fits the will of the prime mover. But what should strike the reader as odd is the (mis)reading of love allows the progress of history to move forward. Spenser has indeed changed the meanings surrounding the deployment of love.

In describing love and Cupid earlier in Book Three, in the context of Britomart's original wounding, love is characterized by art, artifice, and tyranny. Cupid is false, and love reigns with the same tyranny as Busirane. In "the gentlest of harts," love is personified as a despot who "tyrannizeth in the bitter smarts" (3.2.23.1-3). This is not the love of empire, not the construct by which destiny forges history. Rather, love here is the private glance, the lascivious touch that burns and hurts. In the slippage of the term, love describes not only the lust of Venus for Adonis, an Ovidian construction, but also the ability to produce a genealogy of heroes that is a strikingly Virgilian.³⁷ Once again in a work dominated by medieval political theology, Spenser's dual deployment of love illustrates the two bodies of the archer, and of love. In fact, even Britomart's inability

to know what has affected her is indicative of the problems in defining love as something clear and unambiguous in Book Three. Which figure of Eros strikes at Amoret and which strikes at Britomart?

As a poet-magician who is clearly ambiguous, Busirane seemingly epitomizes the Ovidian nature of rape and seduction through the articulations of his personal space and the horrors that occur there. In canto 11, Britomart views the tapestries that adorn the walls of Busirane's palace. Memorializing the victory of love and the triumph of *luxuria*, the tapestries depict acts of love between god and humans:

And in those Tapets weren fashioned
 Many faire pourtraicts, and many a faire feate,
 And all of loue, and all of lusty-hed,
 As seemed by their semblaunt did entreat;
 And eke all *Cupids* warres did repeate,
 And cruell battels, which he whilom fought
 Gainst all the Gods, to make his empire great;
 Besides the huge massacres, which he wrought
 On mighty kings and kesars, into thralldom brought. (3.11.29.1-9)

Busirane decorates with the same zeal that Arachne weaves. In *Metamorphoses*, Arachne's work celebrates and denigrates the power of the gods through their lusty encounters with humans. As humans who function as would-be boundary-crossers, both Arachne and Busirane tempt history and deny it. Busirane attempts to wound the personal, and later political body of glory-bound empire. The only empire that Busirane recognizes is one built around lust and the tortures of the enamored, not the "enarmored" of Rome and Britain. Arachne's weavings commit the same offense:

"Arachne also / Worked in the gods, and their deceitful business / With mortal girls" (6.104-106).³⁸ To Arachne deceitful business means the working of history: Leda is mentioned, the mother of Helen. Without Helen, Troy would not have fallen, and the Aeneas's migration would not have been necessary. However, Arachne reads in the same manner as Busirane. Ignorant of the cause and effect beneath the events, they both aim for merely personal ends and flout the ends of history.³⁹ By turning Arachne into a spider, Minerva aims to keep Arachne "thoughtful for the future," a reality she denies in her tapestry (6.138). In presenting Busirane as a figure that reads Ovid without seeing the larger causes beneath the lust, Spenser betrays the seemingly Ovidian construction of Busirane's palace. Denying the simply destructive ends of love, Spenser interprets Ovidian mythology as more than lusty encounters with masculine abductors. In the same instance, he cracks the veneer of Virgilian self-control and renunciation by allying marriage, chaste love, and empire. The

two bodies of Merlin and Busirane point to the production of both as amalgamations of discrete mythological traditions. Book Three becomes a marriage bed for the two bodies of mythology, creating a collective that allows Britomart to triumph and Amoret to live.

The End Is Yet: The Image of the Hermaphrodite and Medieval Political Theology

Considering that it is structured around several different binaries, Book Three rather appropriately possesses two different endings. In ending of the 1590 edition, one of the last images given by Spenser is that of the Hermaphrodite:

Had ye them scene, ye would have surely thought,
That they had beene that faire *Hermaphrodite*,
Which that rich *Romane* of white marble wrought,
And in his costly bath causd to bee site:
So seemd those two, as grown together quite,
That *Britomart* halfe enuying their blesse,
Was much empassiond in her gentle sprite,
And to her selfe oft wisht like happinesse,

In vaine she wisht, that fate n'ould let her yet possess. (3.7.46.1-9)

While nominally the image of the hermaphrodite celebrates the reunion of Scudamour and Amoret, as a body composed of two distinct, yet inseparable bodies, the hermaphrodite can serve as an image of the poet, the Queen, or the mythology that *The Faerie Queene* celebrates and challenges. After this image, the last four lines feature Britomart, desperate to have that sort of union with Artegall. I would argue, however, that she has had this union all along; with the somewhat refused and obscure identification with Elizabeth and with the corporeal vulnerable figure of Amoret, Britomart has colluded in a relationship that was gendered male and female, yet characterized by an ambivalence and mutable meanings. The use of the pronoun "they" points to this very ambiguous nature of meaning: Amoret has not been mentioned by name for the length of several stanzas; Scudamour is last mentioned by name in stanza 43, thereafter referred to as he. In stanza 46, all pronouns are replaced by "they" and this shifting of pronoun points to the ever-present ambiguity of Book Three: "They" could refer to Scudamour and Amoret, Britomart and Scudamour, or Britomart and Amoret. Representative of the struggle to represent what almost cannot be represented, Book Three's meaning and imagery and the slippery use of pronouns in the one of the final images characterize the mutability necessitated by the very odd nature of Tudor iconography, the dual-bodied Sovereign.



¹ Edmund Spenser, "Letter to Raleigh," in *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A. C. Hamilton (London: Longman, 2001), 715.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., 716.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ I am deeply indebted to Ernst Kantorowicz's pioneering work on the issue of dual-bodied sovereigns and eternal corporate collectives that he discusses at length in *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1957). What is at issue is the tension involved in depictions of the state and the corporeal human incarnation of that institution, invested at coronation in Elizabeth. The material danger that Spenser perhaps faces in an epic, in which a mirror of the Queen is raped, is well-documented. Only a decade earlier, John Stubbs lost his right hand for injury to the Queen and the State for his pamphlet *Gaping Gulf*.

⁶ Susan Frye, *Elizabeth I: The Competition for Representation* (New York: Oxford UP, 1993), 98. In using the term "encomiastic challenge" I acknowledge Susan Frye's immensely important work in *Elizabeth I*. In defining the waning years of Elizabeth's rule and life as years of increased isolation, Frye notes that "the ageing of the Queen and the widespread anticipation of her death left her vulnerable in new ways to material and figurative tests of her authority."page?

⁷ As I mention earlier, the terminology is borrowed directly from Frye, but I must note that other critics have taken notice of dual and often, antithetical aims of the poem. See also David Lee Miller, *The Poem's Two Bodies: The Poetics of the 1590 Faerie Queene* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1988), in which Miller argues for a dual reading of the poem that examines Kantorowicz's dual-bodied sovereign—the *corpus mysticum*—in a psychoanalytic context. While I build upon his thesis, I resist using psychoanalytic theory in any discussions of Spenser's poetics. I am thinking also of Frank Dobin's work on the "encomiastic undoing" in terms of prophecy, monarchy, and the figure of Merlin. Frank Dobin, *Merlin's Disciples: Prophecy, Poetry, and Power in Renaissance England* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1990).

⁸ Frye, *Competition for Representation*, 123.

⁹ Spenser, *Letter to Raleigh*, 715.

¹⁰ I quote exclusively from the Longman edition of *The Faerie Queene*. Hereafter in citations of *The Faerie Queene*, I utilize the format of book, canto, stanza, line number.

¹¹ Although in his *Letter to Raleigh*, Spenser acknowledges the characteristic virtue of Britomart to be chastity, he refuses any direct identification between Britomart and the Queen; instead he focuses upon the part of Elizabeth he describes as "the most virtuous and beautifull Lady" and seeks to depict by stated analogy only her personal and corporeal body.

¹² Frye, *Competition for Representation*, 119. See also Robin Headlam Wells, *Spenser's Faerie Queene* (London: Croom Helm, 1983), 86: "Britomart is unique. Her relation to Elizabeth is not analogical, but typological: that is to say, while she adumbrates Elizabeth, the true significance of her story is only revealed by its conclusion in the distant future." Susan Frye has written about the queen-like quality of Britomart's chastity. See Susan Frye, "Of Chastity and Violence: Elizabeth I and Edmund Spenser in the House of Busirane," *Signs* 20 (1994): 61. "As book 3 progresses, it becomes increasingly clear that Britomart's self-sufficient chastity is of the regal kind."

¹³ Frye, *Competition for Representation*, 134-136. Frye notices that Spenser indirectly acknowledges the tie between Amoret and Elizabeth and then assaults Amoret through his uncontrollable association with Busirane, acting the only role available to a courtier who wished to challenge the queen.

¹⁴ A document that points to the choice between marriage and self-rule, both of the kingdom and her own person, is John Stubbs *Gaping Gulf*. Combining a misogynistic view that women are prone to change and powerless to resist the power of men with the view that a French marriage is a portal to cataclysmic religious and political upheaval, Stubbs offers an exhortation to Elizabeth to turn down the marriage unless she should wish to lose not only her life but her kingdom as well. See John Stubbs, *John Stubbs Gaping Gulf with Letters and Other Relevant Documents* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia P, 1968), 11.

¹⁵ Frye, *Competition for Representation*, 118.

¹⁶ Frye, *Competition for Representation*, 123.

¹⁷ Edmund Plowden, *The commentaries, or reports of Edmund Plowden, ... containing, divers cases upon matters of law, ... Originally written in French, ... To which are added, The queries of Mr. Plowden, ... In two parts. With two new tables, ... the one, of the names of the cases, the other of principal matters* (Dublin: Printed for H. Watts, 1792), 213-214.

¹⁸ Berger, Harry Jr. *Revisionary Play: Studies in the Spenserian Dynamics*. (Berkeley: U of California P, 1988), 120.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 172.

²⁰ Stubbs, *Gaping Gulf*, 4.

²¹ *Ibid.* 5.

²² cf Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, 3.2.26.1-9.

²³ Louis Adrian Montrose, "Spenser and the Elizabethan Political Imaginary," *English Literary History* 69 (2002): 917.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 918.

²⁵ Miller, *The Poem's Two Bodies*, 98.

²⁶ Dobin, *Merlin's Disciples*, 2. Dobin gives evidence that Elizabeth amongst other monarchs imprisoned subjects for attempting to read her future and death. He also interprets this fit of Merlin as a moment in which monarchical power is threatened and challenged through the temporal realities of Elizabeth's corporeal body. "This passage must have disturbed the Elizabethan reader as much as Merlin's fit disturbs his onlookers. Either the effort of prophesying overwhelms him, or else he foresees some 'ghastly spectacle' that he dares not disclose. Of course, what Merlin sees is Elizabeth's impending death. The poem records the collective shudder of the English nation looking forward to the possibility of domestic and foreign crises with the demise of the Tudor line. Despite *The Faerie Queene's* effort to employ Merlin to legitimate and glorify Elizabeth's reign, the prophetic impulse ultimately destabilizes rather than consolidates the machinery of power by presenting political change and disruption" (6).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 2. "Prognostication of any sort—whether based on the stars, the prophetic books of scripture, or the secular texts of the native British tradition of political forecasting—was a dangerous business when it touch upon the fate of the monarch and the succession."

²⁸ Berger, *Revisionary Play*, 173.

²⁹ Montrose, "Spenser and the Elizabethan Political Imaginary," 916.

³⁰ This gendering of conflict and assistance between Merlin/Busirane and Britomart/Amoret points to the issue of tensions of gender within both the poem and the larger, Elizabethan world.

³¹ Berger, *Revisionary Play*, 185.

³² See Chapter 4 of Syrithe Pugh, *Spenser and Ovid* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), entitled "Unbinding Love: Britomart's Ovidian Inquest." Central to her argument is a reading of the Garden of Adonis in Book Three that views the Garden as the central image. The distinction between love and lust figures into her view that Book Three embraces "the Ovidian, feminine, and amatory pole of the ethical and philosophical divide between Virgil and Ovid, epic and romance, using Ovidian intertexts and methods to pursue Ovidian ends: a sympathetic exploration of feminine psychology in his Ovidian heroine, and an analysis of desire which separates and rescues true love from the threat of its perversions" 7. Of course, I am indebted to the work of Barbara Bono who writes of the syncretic performance of Spenser in Book Three, effectively working from a tradition of epic and combining it with a romantic tradition. See Barbara Bono, *Literary Transvaluation: From Vergilian Epic to Shakespearean Tragicomedy* (Berkeley: University of California P, 1984).

³³ I owe the generation of this formulation to Barbara J. Bono and her idea that Spenser merges both Virgilian aims and Ovidian materials, creating a love that builds empire.

³⁴ What should not be lost is that both Virgil and Ovid, citizens of the Roman Empire, narrate the legend of Aeneas.

³⁵ Here I am thinking particularly of John Watkins, *The Specter of Dido* (New Haven: Yale UP 1995). See page 168: "But the tapestries foreground another yet another literary discourse Book Three repudiates: the interpretation of classical texts as exhortations against desire. Busirane's retellings of Ovid expound the same lesson that Virgilian commentators found in Dido's tragedy. As in the *Aeneid*, Cupid's wound prefaces individual despair, public disgrace, and imperial disaster. As an implicit rejection of this lesson, Britomart's triumph distances Spenser's own text from the *Aeneid*'s reception as a classical call to continence." What is needed is a good reader who can remember that Arachne ends badly by illustrating lust just as Busirane does.

³⁶ Michael Faletra has pointed to medieval historiographers and their work on Merlin in his article "Narrating the Matter of Britain: Geoffrey of Monmouth and the Norman Colonization of Wales," *The Chaucer Review* 35.1 (2000): 61-2. Geoffrey of Monmouth in fact uses Merlin as a figure of Celtic mythology par excellence, but cannot escape the arc of history that has the Britons defeated by the Saxons. Beginning on page 61, Faletra notes that Geoffrey of Monmouth, "though appearing to embrace the contradictions of competing histories, finally supports the Normans in the tenure of an *imperium* over all of Britain."

³⁷ Bono, *Transvaluation*, 77: "Britomart's feminine epic quest differs pervasively in tone from its Vergilian model. Most basically, the Christian and neo-Platonic background of *The Faerie Queene* not only assures us of an ultimate order but also reveals it as love, rather than imposing it as an authority."

³⁸ Ovid, *Metamorphoses* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1983).

³⁹ Watkins, 168-172.