

Amoretti commentary

Our commentary on the wedding volume will attend to the intricacies of calendrical structure in both the sonnet sequence and the marriage poem (Heiatt 1960, 1973; Dunlop 1970 Kaske 1978; Loewenstein 1987), and it will affirm the broad consensus that sees Spenser as seeking to reform the erotic discourse of Petrarchism by way of a courtship leading to Protestant marriage.¹ It will also seek to make some headway against the critical situation described by Roland Greene, writing for the *Oxford Handbook of Edmund Spenser* in 2010: the poems, he asserts, ‘have not received their due from readers and critics. . . . We have not attended to the poetics of the *Amoretti* and the *Epithalamion* with the kind of particularity that has been expended on that of *The Shepheardes Calender* or *The Faerie Queene*’ (256). Building on Loewenstein’s intuition that the wedding volume was ‘fully imagined as an *interruption* of *The Faerie Queene*’ that ‘insists on the unity of that literary corpus which it articulates around itself’ (321n2), our commentary will attend closely not just to the recursive, self-revisionary interplay among the poems in the wedding volume, but also to the pattern of echoes and allusions linking these to Books III and IV of *The Faerie Queene*, ‘An Hymne in Honour of Love’, and Sidney’s *Astrophil and Stella*. The commentary will in this way solicit a reading of the poems intended to justify the description offered in our critical introduction, where we will argue that Spenser makes the blandly conventional verbal texture of the sonnet sequence do serious poetic work that often goes unnoticed.

Sonnet 1

Happy ye leaues when as those lilly hands,
which hold my life in their dead doing might,
shall handle you and hold in loues soft bands,
lyke captiues trembling at the victors sight.

And happy lines, on which with starry light, 5

those lamping eyes will deigne sometimes to look
and read the sorrows of my dying spright,
written with teares in harts close bleeding book.

lamping: flashing or beaming

And happy rymes bath'd in the sacred brooke,

of *Helicon* whence she deriued is, 10
when ye behold that angels blessed looke,
my soules long lacked foode, my heauens blis.

Leaues, lines, and rymes, seeke her to please alone,
whom if ye please, I care for other none.

2 **might,**] 1611; might 1595

The first sonnet in Spenser's sequence addresses neither the beloved nor the reader, but the poems themselves, an appropriate point of departure for the only English sonnet sequence named after its poems. In doing so it plays with the conventions of the *envoi* in a manner reminiscent of 'To His Booke', turning what is conventionally a concluding gesture into an introductory one. (Spenser may

¹In doing so, we will acknowledge the vigorous dissent registered by Sanchez 2012.

be following Ovid's precedent in the opening of the *Tristia*.) Both envoys anticipate the response their respective volumes will receive, although the *Calendar*'s focus is on a public reception, in contrast to the intensely personal scene of reading imagined here, in which the book as material object takes on the bodily and emotional vulnerability of the poet-lover, and his 'trembling' passes over into that of the volume's 'leaves'.

1. *Happy*: see glossary article on *hap* and its relatives. Here the term blends *OED* sense 1 (lucky) with 5a (enjoying 'a deep sense of pleasure or contentment, esp. arising from satisfaction with one's circumstances'). Larsen 1997, noting the threefold repetition (1, 5, 9), detects an allusion to St. Hilary (L *hilarius* happy), author of a treatise on the Trinity.

1-4. *lilly hands . . . trembling*: Larsen 1997 notes the echoes of Shakespeare *TA* II.iv.44-5, 'lily hands / Tremble like aspen leaves', and *FQ* III.iv.41.1, 'the lilly handed Liagore'.

2. *dead doing might*: McCabe 1999 notes the echo of Trompart's appeal to Braggadocchio, 'Hold, O deare Lord, hold your dead-doing hand' (*FQ* II.iii.8.1).

2-4: The imagery of domination and captivity derives in a general way from Petrarch, *Triumph of Love*; it will be a recurrent motif in the sequence; it also recalls the description of Cupid beholding his 'proud spoile' of Amoret at *FQ* III.xii.22. Spenser introduces here a reversal of the roles assigned to Cupid and Amoret in the House of Busirane, a motif extended in the lines that follow and elaborated throughout the sequence. (For an extended treatment of the relation between these texts, see Johnson 1992.)

4. *trembling*: cf. *FQ* III.xii.21.1-2, 'At that wide orifice her trembling heart / Was drawne forth', and *Am* 67.11, 'till I in hand her yet halfe trembling tooke'. On the significance of this pattern see D. Miller 2015.

6. *lamping*: flashing or beaming. This adjective, coined by Spenser, extends the resonance of 'starry light' in the preceding line; cf. *Epith* 288, where the poet addresses the evening star, Hesperus, as 'Fayre childe of beauty, glorious lampe of love'.

7. *dying spright*: Citing Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* (Part I, Sect. I, Memb. 2, Subs. 2), McCabe 1999 identifies 'spright' here as 'vital spirit', a "most subtle vapor" begotten in the heart and enabling the soul to operate in the body'. Cf. *FQ* III.xii.20.7, 'Yet freshly bleeding forth her fainting spright', and note.

8. Cf. *FQ* III.xii.31, where Busyrane writes charms to enforce the love of Amoret 'with liuing blood . . . Dreadfully dropping from her dying hart' (3-4). There is a contrast between Amoret's heart, 'drawne forth' from her breast (21.2), and the poet's 'close bleeding book', where the adverb suggests secrecy, enclosure, and imprisonment. The leaves of the book tremble because they disclose this secret inscription of the heart; cf. *Am* 45.

9-10. *Helicon* is the mountain where the Muses reside by the spring of Hippocrene, but in English poetry the mountain's name is often transferred to the spring (cf. Chaucer, *HF* 522: 'Elicon, the clere welle'). In acknowledging that, while his rhymes are 'bathed' in this 'sacred brooke', the beloved is 'deriued' from it, the poet implicitly concedes that the image of the beloved as triumphantly 'dead doing'—or as an 'Angel'—is his own creation. In this way the opening sonnet introduces what will be one of the central issues of the sequence, namely the lover's struggle to stop projecting his own erotic fantasies and emotional vicissitudes onto the beloved long enough to see her as she is: another

person. For a different reading of the idolatry implied in the speaker's worship of his own creation, see Sanchez 2012 (9-10); for a trenchant analysis of the speaker's efforts throughout the sequence to impose an idealized image upon a resistant subject as enacting a proto-capitalist dynamic of commodification and social distinction, see Warley 2005.

11. *blessed*: Synonymous with 'happy'.

looke: May refer to the 'Angels' appearance or to her gaze in return, an ambiguity that evokes the lover's struggle to 'behold' not merely her image but her independent being.

13-14: The closing couplet, with its emphatic rhyme pair 'alone' and 'none', insists on the paradox of the poet-lover who fearfully sends his rhymes to disclose his innermost being to the person he fears (and desires) most, even as he publishes the same rhymes to a reading public whose gaze the fiction of intimacy would seem to exclude. (On the implied contrast between manuscript and print, see Gold 2001.)

Sonnet 2

Vnquiet thought, whom at the first I bred,
Of th'inward bale of my loue pined hart:
and sithens haue with sighes and sorrowes fed,
till greater then my wombe thou woxen art.

sithens: since then

woxen: grown

Breake forth at length out of the inner part,
in which thou lurkest lyke to vipers brood:
and seeke some succour both to ease my smart
and also to sustayne thy selfe with food.

5

But if in presence of that fayrest proud
thou chance to come, fall lowly at her feet:
and with meeke humblesse and afflicted mood,
pardon for thee, and grace for me intreat.

10

humblesse: humility; *afflicted*: cast down

Which if she graunt, then liue and my loue cherish,
if not, die soone, and I with thee will perish.

4 art:] 1611; art. 1595

1. *Vnquiet thought*: Cf. *FQ* IV.v.35.9, 'vnquiet thoughts, that carefull minds inuade'. Renwick 1925 (*Var* 8:421) cites Petrarch, *RS* 125 (*Se 'l pensier che mi strugge*, 'If the thought that torments me'). As dilated in *HL* 218-72, the lover's 'vnquiet thought' begins with the contemplation of heroic exploits 'he may do, her fauour to obtain' (218-19). The thought then 'forceth further on' to insist on exclusive possession of the beloved's 'inmost brest' (247-8), where it proceeds to fabricate 'a wretches hell' out of suspicions, anxieties, and 'that monster Gelosie' (265, 267). *Am* will explore this program in the first person, concluding with a betrothal after which the lover is 'left disconsolate' (lxxxix.5), separated from the beloved and tormented by 'the false reports that flying tales do beare' (*HL* 261, *Am* lxxxvi).

whom: Extending the envoy rhetoric of the first sonnet, now personifying and addressing not the book, but the fantasies it bears.

I bred: Acknowledging himself as the creator of the fantasy. For the corresponding acknowledgment in *HL*, see 74-5 (Love ‘through the world his way . . . gan to take, / The world that was not till he did it make’) and 127-33, which describes human lovers similarly navigating ‘a world that doesn’t exist until they create it’ (D. Miller 2010: 297).

3. *sithens*: since then

4. *my wombe*: A conventional metaphor in which the fecundity of the female body (‘I bred’) is appropriated to the male poet’s brain (C. Neely 1978, K. Mauss 1993), here tempered by the first sonnet’s association of the lover with Amoret, and by the suggestion in both sonnets that his mental procreativity is a source of delusive fantasies. Cf. *AS* i.12, ‘great with childe to speak, and helplesse in my throwes’. Other instances in Spenser include *FQ* I.v.1.1-4, III.ii.11.6-9, and IV.ii.17.3-4.

woxen: grown

OED s.v. ‘wax’, sense 8b (‘to wax forth, to be born or created’) cites Langland, *Piers Plowman*: For wib word þat he warp woxen forþ Beestes (A.x.33).

5. *Breake forth*: Refiguring the act of disclosure presumed in the first sonnet (sending the book to the beloved) now as an unnatural parturition, involuntary, destructive, and poisonous.

6. *vipers brood*: Echoing Matt 3.7-8, ‘Now when he sawe many of the Pharises and of the Sadduces come to his baptisme, he said vnto them, O generacions of vipers, who hathe forewarned you to flee from the angre to come? Bring foorth therefore frutes worthie amendment of life’. (The Geneva gloss to ‘generacions’ reads, ‘Or, *broodes*’.) *Var* cites Bartholomaeus Anglicus (*De Proprietatibus Rerum* 18.117), who in turn ‘cites Isidore 12 to the effect that “Vipera hath that name for he bryngyth for the broode by strenghte / For whan her wombe draweth to the tyme of whelpynge: the whelpys abdydyth not conuenable tyme nother kynde passynge: but gnawyth & fretyth the sides of theyr moder: and they come so in to this worlde”’. J. Loewenstein 1987 suggests that *Physiologus*’ description of the breeding and parturition of vipers ‘might have haunted the author of *Amoretti and Epithalamion*’; he sees the vipers returning in the Medusa simile of the marriage poem (185-90) as a token of ‘debilitating terror reconditioned as awe’ (320-1).

7. Cf. *AS* i.4, ‘Knowledge might pittie win, and pity grace obtaine’. Spenser’s first two sonnets carry out a complex transformation of Sidney’s ‘Loving in truth, and fain in verse my love to show’.

8. Cf. *AS* xxix.12, ‘Her flesh his food’; lxxi.14, ‘But ah, Desire still cries, Giue me some food’; lxxxvii.2, ‘*Stella*, food of my thoughts’. The ‘succour’ of line 7 sits uneasily between the lurking violence of 5-6 and the predatory appetite of this line.

9-12. The lover here instructs his thought (now published) to alter its character completely in an act of self-abasement. The ‘pardon’ it will seek refers to the indecorum of its monstrous birth, the ‘grace’ to amorous favor.

11. *humblesse*: humility

afflicted: literally, ‘down-cast’.

Cf. *FQ* I.pr.4.8, ‘The argument of mind afflicted stile’, and Colin Clout’s breaking of his pipes at *S.C.* Jan. 72. Note the contrast between the fiction of singing in *S.C.* and the emphatically *written* character of *Am.*

14. The lover’s imminent death is conventional, and rhetorical: cf. *HL* 127-133, where unsatisfied lovers ‘make full piteous moan’ and, ironically, ‘still [continually] dye’. At *FQ* VI.vii.31.7-8, Mirabella boasts that she can ‘with the onely twinkle of her eye / . . . or sauе, or spill, whom she would hight’.

Textual Apparatus

Format and collation: Small Octavo. 68 unnumbered leaves. A-H8; between [A1] and A2, inserted half-sheet, four leaves, signed ¶ on first leaf. First three leaves of each gathering signed except t.p., ¶2, ¶3, and G3; A4 is signed.

Design: Ornamental band above epistle dedicatory shows a floral design with central blossom, unlike the rest of the volume. Ornamental capital is an S with two amoretti and open book. Amor on the right is gesturing down at the open page with the right hand, up at light source above with the left hand.

¶3 begins a pattern of ornamental bands at top and bottom running throughout rest of volume. Top band = 9 pieces set in pairs facing in toward each other, with the odd number meaning that there is always an odd piece. The composition of this ornamental band shifts across the pages. Bottom band = 16 pieces in matched pairs. Sickle shape with floral embellishment. *Variorum* claims that this combination is set ‘correctly’ only 8 times out of 126 and offers [G3r] as example, presumably of correct setting.

Eleven copies are extant, of which one is in private hands (unknown). Since that copy was in the Folger’s collection at the time the *Variorum* was edited, it has been collated; we may consult the *Variorum* editors’ collation but not verify it.

Textual work on this volume, by Renwick 1929 and by the *Variorum* editors, seems to be both thorough and complete—a sharp contrast to the situation as it exists with *The Faerie Queene*. (The exception is an error in Renwick’s collation, noted by Johnson 1933: 29-30.) We have collated nine of the ten copies to which access is permitted and will collate the tenth during the summer of 2015. Our results are cross-referenced with those recorded in *Var* 7.2 697-705 (Appendix X).

Eventually, we plan to study the re-setting in 1611, to see (for example) whether changes in punctuation confirm *Variorum* editors’ judgment that the 1595 volume is ‘carelessly printed, and mechanically punctuated’ (697).

The small number of extant copies suggests a limited print run. There are no variants in the forme from which our sample text is taken, and very few throughout the volume. Handwritten corrections to extant copies may be evidence that their owners had an unusually personal relationship to the text. The Huntington copy, for example, shows hand-pagination indicating that it was bound into an owner’s miscellany, probably with a table of contents matching the hand-numbering of the pages. In what appears to be the same hand, catchwords have been added when the original is lightly inked, indecipherable because of paper damage, or (in two instances, at A8v and B8v) incorrect. In the

British Library's Grenville copy, another catchword ('Thrust') at C8v has been scraped and hand-corrected to 'Trust'. In the Bodleian copy (Malone 346), missing pages (including the title page) are reproduced with painstaking hand-inscription on blank inserts, and an error on H6 ('they' for 'thy') is hand-corrected.

Abbreviations

<i>Am</i>	<i>Amoretti</i>
<i>Anat</i>	<i>Anatomy of Melancholy</i>
<i>AS</i>	<i>Astrophil and Stella</i>
<i>Epith</i>	<i>Epithalamion</i>
<i>FH</i>	<i>Fowre Hymnes</i>
<i>FQ</i>	<i>The Faerie Queene</i>
<i>HF</i>	<i>House of Fame</i>
<i>HL</i>	<i>An Hymne in Honour of Love</i>
<i>RS</i>	<i>Rime Sparse</i>
<i>TA</i>	<i>Titus Andronicus</i>

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