
SPENSER'S SONNET DICTION

Author(s): William C. Johnson

Source: *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 1970, Vol. 71, No. 1 (1970), pp. 157-167

Published by: Modern Language Society

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43342529>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*

JSTOR

century poet concentrated more on rhetoric. This provided him with the poetic framework which syntax owing to the instability of the language did not. Rhetoric was so widely adopted in the fifteenth century that, although one can attribute some of its appeal to Chaucer's example, there may well be a more fundamental reason for its use, such as the contemporary condition of the language. At the same time the poets relied on a heavy aureate vocabulary, because this heightens the style in a way which is least influenced by the changes in English. Indeed, the borrowed words from Latin or French have a more stabilised form than the English ones. The poets also used a heavy rhyme, rhymes which are on words of three or four syllables. Lydgate, for example, can rhyme *superfluity* with *prolixity*. This usage may perhaps be accounted for by their desire to emphasize that they are using rhyme rather than alliteration; the point where their verse is different receives special stress. Like the use of rhetoric, it provides an alternative to the traditional syntax of English. The changes in the language operated against subtlety of expression and the fifteenth century reacted by developing ornamentation at the expense of clarity.

The theory I have put forward here seeks to explain some of the conditions of fifteenth-century composition in order to explain why so much of the literature seems second-rate. Whether it can be substantiated or not will depend upon individual studies of detailed points which have yet to be made. I would hope, however, that this paper might suggest some ways in which research into the fifteenth century could proceed. Although the historical approach is profitable, it has tended to obscure the many purely linguistic and literary problems which need further investigation. And it is necessary to understand these more fully in order to do justice to the fifteenth century.

University of Liverpool

N. F. BLAKE

SPENSER'S SONNET DICTION

The language of Spenser's *Amoretti* has, in general, been exposed to the same critical attitudes as the poetic diction of *The Faerie Queene*, with the exception that in recent years the vocabulary of the latter has finally been defended against the adverse accusations of early commen-

tators.¹ Ever since E. K.'s prefatory epistle to *The Shepheardes Calender*, in which he brought to Master Harvey's attention that there are

many things which in [Spenser's poetry] be straunge, I know will seeme the straungest, the words them selues being so auncient, the knitting of them so short and intricate, and the whole periode and compasse of speach so delightsome for the roundnesse, and so grave for the straungeness,

and Jonson's comment a few decades later that "Spenser, in affecting the ancients, writ no language," scholars have argued, back and forth, the merits as well as the shortcomings of Spenser's poetic diction.

While Sidney was regretting

that Poesie, thus embraced in all other places, should onely finde in our time a hard welcome in England, I thinke the very earth lamenteth it, and therefore decketh our Soyle with fewer Laurels then it was accustomed,²

he was, at the same time, commenting that, although the "*Shepheardes Kalendar* hath much Poetrie in his Eglogues: indeede worthy the reading," that "same framing of his stile to an old rustick language" could not, he felt, be allowed. Francis Meres was a bit kinder, proudly stating his belief that the "English tongue is mightily enriched and gorgeously inuested in rare ornaments and resplendent abiliments by Sir Philip Sydney, Spenser, Daniel . . ."³ *etc.*, and Edmond Bolten went so far as to commend Spenser's *Hymnes* as being one of the best "garden-plots out of which to gather English language."⁴

Such favorable comments on Spenser's language as Mere's and Bolten's are far fewer than those which criticise it, and although the *Amoretti* is seldom specified in the adverse commentary on Spenser's diction, it nevertheless shares in the general opinion because of its having been written by Spenser. Lever, for example, comments on the uniqueness of Spenser's sonnet diction by pointing out that

¹ Cf., for example, Emma Field Pope, "Renaissance Criticism of the Diction of the *Faerie Queene*," *PMLA*, XLI (1926) 575-619, and Bruce Robert McElderry, Jr., "Archaism and Innovation in Spenser's Poetic Diction," *PMLA*, XLVII (1932), 144-170.

² G. Gregory Smith, *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, Vol. I. (Oxford, 1904), p. 194.

³ Smith, *Elizabethan Essays*, Vol. II., p. 315.

⁴ J. E. Spingarn, *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century*, Vol. I, (Bloomington, 1963), p. 109.

there is hardly a sonnet which does not contain words deliberately chosen for their strangeness. Medievalisms fast passing out of current use were revived and liberally introduced. We find 'mote' for 'might have', 'eke' for 'also', 'sith' for 'since', etc. Completely antiquated, almost forgotten words reappear, such as 'beseeme,' 'assoyle', 'stoures', 'amearst'. Side by side with these, Spenser introduced foreign loan-words, taking pains, when they had already been assimilated, to restore the marks of their alien origin. Such romance forms as 'semblant', 'pleasance', and 'richnesse' replaced their familiar, anglicized variants . . . Spenser's mannerisms, . . . were a deliberate retrogression, aiming to associate with his treatment of courtship a sense of remoteness from the everyday world.¹

Although the validity of what Lever catalogues cannot be questioned, he quite overestimates the "strangeness" of the *Amoretti* language. And although he apparently makes a valid attempt, he cannot disguise his obvious disapproval of Spenser's sonnet diction, feeling that it more obscures than clarifies the author's meanings.

In much the same way Rubel² underestimates both the variety and poetic complexity of the vocabulary in the sonnets when she writes that "aside from one or two words, Spenser's vocabulary in the sonnets is far simpler than that of most of the other sonneteers in this eventful decade." Such a comment does no justice to Spenser or to his sonnets.

It was not out of any frivolity of spirit or lightness of intention that Spenser utilized, in the *Amoretti* as in all his poetic works, the language that is so peculiarly his own. On the authority of the Pleiade,³ in imitation of, and with the authority of the precedent set by men like Skelton, Surrey, Gascoigne and especially "Dan Chaucer," Spenser invented, borrowed, reused, adapted and modified his language to suit his poetic needs. By "affecting the obsolete . . . Spenser was not exceeding the privileges of his profession;"⁴ he was observing the tenets established by those predecessors whom he revered. It is most important, however, to keep in mind that his changes in language were not primarily just for enlarging English

¹ J. W. Lever, *The Elizabethan Love Sonnet* (London, 1956), p. 133.

² Veré Rubel, *Poetic Diction in the English Renaissance* (London, 1941), p. 259.

³ Space does not permit an examination of either the views of the Pleiade writers on diction or the influence of the Pleiade on the writers of the English Renaissance. Rubel, in *Poetic Diction*, has many scattered references to these topics; Sir Sidney Lee's *The French Renaissance in England* (New York, 1910) is still a good source for the background. Grahame Castor in *Pleiade Poetics* (Cambridge, 1964) examines in detail some of the major concepts of that group.

⁴ B. E. C. Davis, *Edmund Spenser* (New York, 1962), p. 134.

vocabulary; his chief concern was to have a more expressive and flexible diction with which to convey his ideas. It is this which underlies any "strangeness" of language found in any of his works, from the pastoral *Shepherd's Calendar* to the philosophic *Hymnes*. The perpetuation of the negative views of Spenser's poetic language has been caused by a "confusion of diction with its effect,"¹ and the result has been very damaging. Ironically, it is this same "strangeness" which helps make the *Amoretti* unique among the sonnet sequences of the period.

But "strangeness" is not the issue; what we are concerned with is the variety of the language found in the sonnets. That some of the words seem odd to modern ears is to be expected—we find the same situation with the vocabulary of Shakespeare, Jonson, and Donne. All too easily readers fall into the error of judging all of Spenser's works, and particularly when considering diction, in light of *The Shepherd's Calendar* and *The Faerie Queene*. Such judgment must, of course, be avoided, for Spenser created each new work with a new design and new methods. When the exigencies of the situation and subject demanded it, he felt quite free to create new poetic forms, as well as new vocabulary, to fit his needs. The following examination will help show that the language of the *Amoretti*, far from being terribly obscure or archaic, stilted or plainly conventional, is among the least "antiquated," among the most lyrical, and in diction, among the most "modern," of Spenser's works. It is in the strict confines of the sonnet-form limitations that we find, more than in any other of the minor works, Spenser's love of language exhibited in the profusion of innovative wordplay and language. In the sonnet variations on a theme of love, Spenser was able to display his virtuosity in creating and enlarging vocabulary to fit specific situations, maintaining the tone and texture of the entire sequence steadily throughout eighty-nine sonnets.

One of the central issues in the various criticisms of Spenser's poetic diction has always been his "archaic" words. Modern studies have sufficiently shown that many of the words illustrative of such "archaism," however, were not at all uncommon in the poetry of the late sixteenth century. The examinations made by Emma Field Pope and Bruce Robert McElderry have shown this rather conclusively, and in considerable detail.² What these critics point out is twofold: 1. criticism of *The Shepherd's*

¹ S. P. Zitner, "Spenser's Diction and Classical Precedent," *PQ*, XLV (1966), p. 361.

² Pope, "Renaissance Criticism", and McElderry, "Archaism and Innovation".

Calender, with its deliberately antiquated language, has colored the approaches to language studies of all of Spenser's works, and 2. remoteness, rusticity (or the seeming effect of temporal distance) has been confused with archaism in Spenser's language. In light of Spenser's earlier works, by the time one gets to the works of the period in which the *Amoretti* was written, the language and the grammar of the sonnets are almost automatically classified as bending towards the medieval – as Lever comments in his criticism. But let us look at the language of the sonnets itself.

E.K. found it necessary to gloss not a few of the words in *The Shepheardes Calender*; the language of this early set of pastorals is relevant to our study only insofar as Spenser, later in his career, used several of these same glossed words when he wrote the *Amoretti*:

deigne (S. C. Dec. 13; Am. I. 6); forlorne (S. C. Apr. 4; Am. XIII. 11); scathe (S. C. Dec. 100; Am. XXXI. 9.); sheene (S. C. Nov. 38; Am. XV. 12); sterne (S. C. Feb. 149; Am. XXI. 7); woundes (S. C. Feb. 176; Am. LVII. 5); wrack (S. C. Feb. 10; Am. XXXVIII. 1); peeres (S. C. June 35; Am. XLIV. 1); waste (S. C. Nov. 64; Am. XXV. 3.)

What is important here is not just that Spenser used these words first in his pastoral *Shepheardes Calender* of 1579 and then again in the courtly *Amoretti* of 1595, nor that E.K. glossed them because he considered them unusual. It is important, however, that none of these words was particularly "archaic" when Spenser used them in the first place. The O.E.D. lists no less than five other appearances for each of these words within only a decade or two preceding their use in the *Calender*. The popularity of that work undoubtedly made these words much more widely known than they had been, but their association with rusticity also became a part of their related meaning. As used in the *Amoretti* these supposed archaisms were by no means antique terms in the 1590's; if they were deemed at all distinctive it was because of their being part of a poetic diction (as opposed to prose diction), not because of any strangeness or obsolescence inherent in them.

There is one group of words in the *Amoretti*, however, which one might classify as "deliberately archaic-sounding." Again, these words were glossed by E.K. because of their "unusualness," but, as before, they were not really unfamiliar in poetry by the time the sonnets were published. One of the most frequently used of these words is "bower;" the word appears 97

times in Spenser's poetry; 6 of those times are in the sonnets (IV. 6; LXV. 14; LXX. 6; LXXVI. 3; LXXVIII. 6 and 7; and LXXXIII. 8). To this group also belong "emprise" (LXIX. 4) and "make" (LII. 13) used in the sense of "to versify."¹ The ambiguous "stoures" (LVII. 10), used in various senses in Spenser's poetry, "thrilling" (XXXVI. 6), in the sense of piercing, "dight" (IV. 7; LXXXI. 10), "earst" (LXV. 4), and "deeme" (LXXXIV. 1,8) are others Spenser incorporated in the sonnets. "Disease," in the old, literal sense of "dis-ease," appears in L. 5. As is clear, many of these "archaisms" are not unfamiliar poetic terms; as such, their unusualness depends mostly, not on their frequency of usage, but on the manner in which they are employed. Lever's comment about Spenser's using these words to associate "with the treatment of courtship a sense of remoteness from the everyday world," aptly fits these particular words. But it is to Spenser's credit that he uses them in this way, for the courtship about which he writes, as all readers of the *Amoretti* know, is not one typical of the "everyday world" at all; it is, in fact, the purest, most ideally Christian relationship, portrayed in an English sonnet sequence.

For use in all of his poems Spenser revived many words which had been utilised by earlier English writers but which had not been commonly used for many years. Many of these words Spenser used only once or twice, and most of them, after their brief resurrection, were again allowed to rest unused. This is particularly true of those words comprising what we now call "courtly diction." Spenser's magnificent display of the high language of court in *The Faerie Queene* put the diction of the courtly makers at his easy disposal when he came to write the *Amoretti*. The "courtly archaisms" of the sonnet indicate the ease with which he was able to utilize such terminology. "Humblesse" (II. 11; XIII. 5), "sue" (in the sense of "to follow") (LVII. 3), and the neo-platonic "inspyre" (LXXXV. 11) are examples of such words whose revivals are attributed to Spenser. The unusual "warreid" (XLIV. 7), used both transitively and intransitively in Spenser's poetry, also belongs to this class of revived words.

One also finds those words, used in both his early and in his late writings, which Spenser intended "not to give an effect either of rusticity or remoteness, but rather of a heightened poetic tone appropriate to the verse forms and the subjects."² From the *Amoretti* we may extract such words as "eeke"

¹ Also see: S. C. January 66; February 98; April 19, and June 82.

² Rubel, *Poetic Diction*, p. 263.

(LXXV. 8), "hewe" (meaning color) (III. 8; VII. 5; XLV. 7; LXXIX. 6) and the courtly "pleasance" of XVII. 11 and XXXIX. 7, as examples.

Variations in the meaning of words, between the standard interpretation and a specific employment to which Spenser adapts them, create problems for some readers today just as they must have done for some people in the sixteenth century. Many of the variations in meaning, it should be noted, did not appear in *belles lettres* before Spenser, and many also appear unique because their interpretation relies on the reader's knowledge of the word's etymology, as in the case of "paragon." Words such as

"aslake" (in the sense of "to appease a person." XLIV. 8), "assoil" (meaning "discharge" XI. 9; LXXX. 7), "dight" (meaning "to raise" IV. 7), "dismay" as a noun (XIV. 11; XXXIV. 7; XL. 11; LXIII. 3), "false" (in the sense of "feign" LIX. 8), "fell" used as a noun and implying animosity (XI. 7), "paragon" (meaning rivalry, or comparison, LXVI. 5) and "enchased" (meaning "to engrave", LXXXII. 7),

all belong to this category. In addition, the special adaption of the word "sue" to wooing appears in XI. 1, "read" as "to see" in I. 7 and XXI. 14, "hove" as "to rise" appears in LXXXVIII. 9, and the variously spelled "garland" (spelled six different ways in Spenser's canon) meaning "glory" is found in XIX. 4. "Imbrue" appears in the sense of "to thrust," in XXXI. 12. Although some of the meanings do seem quite varied from standard interpretations, close reading of the sonnets generally removes any doubts about interpretations.

Variations in the forms of words appear in several instances in the *Amoretti*; Spenser always felt perfectly free to liberally add prefixes or suffixes when he felt the language didn't already have a form of a particular word sufficient to his purposes. Many of these affixial forms are quite natural extensions of words; the adding of -ful or -ing, for example, had merely not been done with these particular words before Spenser (although there is no doubt that these forms would eventually have appeared). Spenser's use of "untimely" (LXXIX. 14) is an example of one of these words, as is "change'ful" (LVIII. 7), "durefull" (VI. 5), "lamping" (I. 6), "misintendedly" (XVI. 12) and "tuneless" (XLIV. 9) – the last two being words used once by Spenser. "Tyranesse" (X. 4), "unaware" (LXXI. 4) and "trade-ful" (XV. 1) may be categorized here too. That these were new forms of current words gave them an appeal we, who are so familiar with the techni-

que of word alteration in contemporary advertising, for example, can readily appreciate.

Associated with these variations in meaning and form are also four words from the *Amoretti* which McElderry catalogues as "adoptions:"¹ "eternize" (LXXV. 11), "unstaidd" (LVIII. 5), "unwarily" (XVI. 1) and "wishful" (LXXXVIII. 3). These words are "variations known to have been used once or twice within thirty years or so prior to Spenser's first use, but which do not appear to have been generally used."

Concerning the variations which Spenser himself created, it is interesting to note that the *Amoretti* contains only one example of a shortened form of a word ("sdeign"); his other creations are longer variant forms. Even in the words which were poetic property before Spenser, in the sonnets we find Spenser using but a few shortened words, as in "gaynst" (XIV. 3), "stonisht" (XVI. 3) and "unwares" (XXIV. 6). The type of verbal music Spenser endeavored to create in his sonnets obviously was not the kind attuned to clipped terms; multi-syllabic forms suited both the tone and the stanza better than shorter forms, and his variations were almost always in the direction of the longer ones.

Not all of the words used in the *Amoretti* are, by any means, words which Spenser revived from the vocabulary used in his other works. Some words, like those listed under variations, were used earlier by other writers, but in the sonnets were employed with different meanings. There is, however, an amazingly large group of words in the *Amoretti* which Spenser never used either before or after the sonnets; these words appear but one time in his poetry, at the amazingly late period of his sonnets. Because that single appearance of each of these words is in the *Amoretti*, and because these words add flavor and color to the fabric of the whole work, they deserve noting. Many of the words, to be sure, had been employed by other writers too; however, others of these words were Spenser's own variations or creations. Many also were still-born terms, used once and never used again either by Spenser or by anyone else. Rubel's comment concerning the vocabulary in the *Amoretti* being "far simpler than that of most of the other sonneteers" certainly does no justice to these sonnets and quite ignores the presence of the variety of words used. The introduction of 125 new words and names Spenser had never used before is certainly of no little significance when

¹ McElderry, "Archaism and Innovation", p. 163.

considering the range of vocabulary he possessed and the limited space of the sequence in which he had to express his thoughts. While many truly are "simple" variations of already-known words, or merely proper names he never had had the occasion to use earlier, still others (particularly in the compounds) are remarkable assemblages. Of these 125 words new to Spenser's poetic vocabulary, 21 are proper names of both people and objects:

Arion (XXXVIII. 1); Atalanta (LXXXVIII. 8); Bellamoures (LXIV. 7 – used in the singular, and with a different meaning, in *The Faerie Queene*); Broome-flowre (XXVI. 7); Cockatrices (XLIX. 10); Elizabeths (LXXIV. 13); Fir-bloom (XXVI. 4); Helice (XXXIV. 10); Helicon (I. 10); Hercules (LXXVII. 7); Idea (XLV. 7; LXXXVII. 9); Indias (XV. 3); Jessamines (LXIV. 12); Lodovic (XXXIII. 5); Mightys' (XLIX. 3); Moly (XXVI. 8); New-year (IV. 1); New-Year's (LXII. 9); Orpheus (XLIV. 4); Penelope (XXIII. 1); Persius (VI. 2).

The remaining 104 represent an assemblage of both common and unique words; all of them appear, in Spenser's canon, only in the sonnets:

abode's (XLVI. 1); adder's (LXXXV. 1); affection's (VIII. 6); affect's (VI. 12); amearsed (LXX. 12); archers (XVI. 9); argue (LXXIX. 9); beholder (XVI. 8); belay (XIV. 6); betokening (LXII. 4); blooded (XX. 14); blossomed (LXIV. 12); boldened (V. 10); captiving (XII. 11); clearer (XLV. 12); close-bleeding (I. 8); cote-armour (LXX. 2); columbines (LXIV. 10); comedy (LIV. 6); cuckoo (used three times, but only in the sonnets – XIX. 1, 14, and in LXXXIV. 3); dead-doing (II. 2); dints (VI. 11); disdaineth (XX. 7); dish (LXXVII. 5); divers-colored (IV. 11); dresses (XXXVII. 3); drossy (XIII. 12); dumps (LII. 11).

To this list may be added:

embaseth (XIII. 3); encage (LXXXIII. 10), eyelid (XL. 3); fiery-bright (XVI. 7); finishing (XXXIII. 3); firmer (VI. 4); flits (LIV. 7); forelock (LXX. 8); forts (XIV. 6); freezeth (XXII. 10); graceth (XIII. 1); harden (XXX. 10); hardens (LIV. 12); hart-frosen (XXX. 6); hart-robbing (XXXIX. 8); heresy (XLVIII. 7); heretics (XLVIII. 6); hinders (XIII. 12); hostages (XI. 2); ice (XXX. 1, 10, 11); implied (V. 5); laurel-leaf (XXVIII. 1); lookers' (XXI. 6); lordeth (X. 3); love-affamished (LXXXVII. 12); love-pined (II. 2); misintended (XVI. 12); nipples (LXIV. 12); nut (XXVI. 6); odorous (LXIV. 12); panther (LIII. 1); persevere (IX. 9, XXXVIII. 9); physician's (I. 12); pinks (LXIV. 8); portliness (V. 9); protract (LXXXVI. 4); pursueth (XI. 7).

Remaining in this category are the following:

reares (XIII. 2); reascend (LXXXVI. 8); rebounded (XIX. 7); reflex (LXVI. 14); reigneth (XX. 6); reneweth (XI. 4); repositeth (LVIII. 1); rich-laden (LXXXI. 5);

rubies (XV. 8, LXXXI. 10); rucs (LIV. 10); runneth (XVIII. 1); scorneth (LVIII. 2); self-assurance (LIX. 9); shinedst (XXXIX. 6); sithens (II. 3); smelt (LXIV. 2); spilling (XXXVIII. 14); storm-beaten (XL. 13); strawberry (LXIV. 9); supposeth (LVIII. 3); temperature (XIII. 4); tempest's (XXXVIII. 1); threescore (LX. 4); through-lanced (LVII. 7); tough (XXVI. 5); tradeful (XV. 1); trusting (LVIII. 10); tuneless (XLIV. 9); unreave (XXIII. 4); untrained (LI. 5); unvalued (LXXXVII. 6); unwarily (XVI. 6); viper's (II. 6); weather's (LIX. 8); well-tempered (LXXXIII. 6); worth's (LXVI. 5); and wrongest (V. 1.)

It deserves remarking that in this large group of words used by Spenser nowhere but in the *Amoretti*, only a very small number of them are what one could call "archaisms" or obscurities. The -eth and -st endings on some of the verbs, in context serve more to give the impression of courtliness and even religiosity to the language than to suggest an archaic diction. Again the variety of the words is important to this study mainly in being so extensive and in giving such diversity to the language of the sequence.

In addition to these words, there is a much smaller group consisting of words Spenser utilized only one time in the *Amoretti* but which he had made use of in other works as well. Some of the words, it will be seen, are widely used in his other poems; others were used only one or two times before or after the sonnets were written. Being used only one time in the sequence, however, gives many of these words a freshness, in context, which only such limited appearance could produce. The number of times Spenser used the word outside of its single appearance in the *Amoretti* is indicated in parenthesis:

culver (LXXXVIII. 1) (2); dolphin (XXXVIII. 4, 8) (11); Eglantine (XXVI. 3, LXXI. 10) (4); Gillyflowers (LXIV. 5) (1); hart-thrilling (XII. 1) (3); hart-robbing (XXXIX. 8) (1); Juniper (XXVI. 2) (1); junkets (LXXVII. 3) (1); lamping (I. 6) (1); laurel-tree (XXVIII. 12) (1); lily (I. 1) (12); long-lacked (I. 12) (1); love-learned (XLIII. 12) (1); Mavis (LXXIV. 3) (1); precept (XIX. 11) (1); pricketh (XXVI. 3) (1); ruthlesse (XXXVI. 2) (1); sapphires (XV. 7) (2); self-pleasing (V. 14) (3); selfe-same (LXVII. 7) (7); sledge (XXXII. 3) (1); snaky (LXXXV. 3) (1); stupid (XLIII. 8) (1); summer's (XL. 6) (21); sunshine (XL. 6,7) (6); Thessalian (XXVIII. 10) (1); and woodbine (LXXI. 10) (1).¹

Some of the more common words, used but once in the sonnets but often elsewhere, are:

Daphne (XXVIII. 9) (7); Cypress (XXVI. 5) (7); Greece (XLIV. 1) (11); lioness (XX. 10) (9); Mars (LX. 4) (13); Moon (IX. 6) (20); Narcissus (XXX. 7) (2); Nectar (XXXIX. 13) (11); Sun (IX. 5) (73); Tiger (LVI. 2) (14); Ulysses (XXXIII. 1) (1).

These lists make clear that the vocabulary of the *Amoretti* is not one which can be called typically standard or exceptionally eccentric. The best term we might use to describe it is "varied," for it is enriched by a wide variety of adaptations of words, variations in forms of words, newly created and purposely antiquarian words. These words give Spenser's sonnets not obscurity, as has been the unjust general statement concerning all of his poetic diction, but a "quaintness and vigor of Elizabethan English, made beautifully musical."¹ Far from producing a notable simplicity, as Rubel claims, such words give color and variety, stateliness and fluidity, to the expression. To the modern ear some of those words have the ring of archaism and strangeness; likewise, some were unusual to earlier readers as well. But this "remoteness," produced by Spenser's handling of his diction, served in his time, as it does now, to distinguish his sonnet sequence from those of other writers. This holds true for the love about which he writes too,² which is, in many ways, varied from the type of love presented in other sonnet sequences. Eighty-nine sonnets praising a lady in standard courtly terms could be a tedious matter; Spenser, therefore, varies the language, revises, adds, lengthens and shortens words, to present variety in diction just as he presents variety in the *amoretti*, the "little loves", of which he writes.

Always following the Renaissance dictum concerning decorum, Spenser's language in the sonnets conforms both to the established diction of *amour courtois* and to the courtly style and vocabulary he already had used in *The Faerie Queene*. His "imitation" of the Italian and French courtly writers is quite in keeping with the established traditions; his "innovation" quite in keeping with the freedom of expression found in all his other works. Together they combined to make the *Amoretti* strong in the tradition of courtly sonnetting, yet rich in variety, color, and in the personal expression of a master poet.

Northern Illinois University
DeKalb, Illinois

WILLIAM C. JOHNSON

¹ McElderry, "Archaism and Innovation", p. 165.

² Considering that these sonnets are *amoretti*, it seems quite appropriate that the single word which appears in the greatest amount of variations, is "love". In the *Amoretti* Spenser uses "love" (as a noun and as a verb), "loved", "lovely", "lover's", "lovers", "lovers'", "love's", "loves", and "loving". Like a leitmotiv binding together Spenser's "little loves", the word "love", including all its variations, is used eighty-one times, and appears in one form or another in forty-eight of the sonnets.