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Author(s): PETER M. CUMMINGS

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PETER M. CUMMINGS

Spenser's AMORETTI *as an Allegory of Love*

I

It is necessary to distinguish between words in themselves, aesthetically indifferent, and the manner in which individual words make up units of sound and meaning, aesthetically effective. It would be better to rechristen all the aesthetically indifferent elements "materials," while the manner in which they acquire aesthetic efficacy may be called "structure. . . ." "Structure" is a concept including both content and form so far as they are organized for aesthetic purposes. The work of art is, then, considered as a whole system of signs, or structure of signs, serving a specific aesthetic purpose.[1]

ASSUMING THAT THE ABOVE STATEMENT OF LITERARY THEORY HAS general validity, it would be possible to say that Spenser's *Amoretti* has, in past criticism, been more often regarded as a work of biography than as a work of art serving an aesthetic purpose. As a system of signs, it has most often been seen as serving the purposes of personal revelation by Edmund Spenser about himself and his courtship of Elizabeth Boyle during the years 1594–1595, and of preparing for the personal revelation of his wedding day in the *Epithalamion.*[2] Beginning with J. W. Lever's chapter on the *Amoretti* in his book, *The Elizabethan Love Sonnet,*[3] however, there have been some efforts to interpret the sequence as a structure "serving a specific aesthetic purpose." Louis L. Martz has most notably done this in his article "The *Amoretti*: 'Most Goodly Temperature.' "[4] Martz finds that the sequence portrays two mature and

[1] René Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature,* 2nd edn. (New York, 1956), p. 129.

[2] The best biographical criticism of the *Amoretti* is the following: the commentary in the Variorum edition, ed. E. A. Greenlaw, F. M. Padelford, C. G. Osgood, R. Heffner, *et al.* (Baltimore, 1932–1957), III, 631–638; H. S. V. Jones, *A Spenser Handbook* (New York, 1930), pp. 335–347; Janet G. Scott, *Les Sonnets élisabéthains* (Paris, 1929); and Waldo F. McNeir, *"An Apology for Spenser's Amoretti," Die Neueren Sprachen,* XIV (January, 1965), 1–9, although this last item is only incidentally biographical.

[3] London, 1956, pp. 92–138. Lever's editorial handling of the *Amoretti* (the excision of eighteen sonnets that contradict his view of the sequence) weakens his interpretation.

[4] In *Selected Papers from the English Institute,* ed. William Nelson (New York, 1961), pp. 146–168.

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realistic lovers toying with love conventions, trying out various moods and disguises in the spirit of playful theatricality, and finally moving toward the calm assurance of stable love in marriage. The basic unstated assumption that the relationship described is an actual, though of course fictionalized, one tends to keep Martz's interpretation in the realm of biography, however. Moreover, his assertion that the lady is the primary object of interpretation forces him to ignore the unrelenting, immediate presence of the lover-poet's psychological monologues, which make him the crucial personality of the sequence.

What has been needed to establish more clearly the boundaries of nonbiographical interpretation is a statement of literary theory applied specifically to the *Amoretti.* In 1965 Robert Kellogg provided such a statement in his article "Thought's Astonishment and the Dark Conceits of Spenser's *Amoretti.*"[5] In Kellogg's view the speaker of the *Amoretti* is a fictional "poet-lover-worshipper," not to be confused in any way with Edmund Spenser. If specific references seem to point to Spenser, these may be read as intentional efforts to give the anonymous poet something of a local habitation and a name. The speaker may be seen, then, as the conscious allegory of a poet, and the sonnets he writes as an allegory of the man-woman love relationship. Kellogg explains how this is consistent with literary practice in Spenser's time, and how the allegorical method in fact provided the sixteenth-century artist the most natural philosophical and psychological vocabulary available with which to explore and explain complex human institutions and abstract emotional states.

II

In the present essay I would like to declare my indebtedness to the theoretical content of Kellogg's article but to expand the quite limited practical criticism he includes. In my view Spenser's *Amoretti* is an allegory of love—love not as a social code controlling the public behavior of whole classes of people, but love as an experience, both private and shared with one other person, that determines the social and psychological behavior of individuals. The *Amoretti* may well be read as the tale of love between this man and that woman; it may also be read as a metaphor for love between Man and Woman, a sophisticated metaphor in which a specific man and woman become the exempla of Man and Woman. None of this is at the surface of the sequence, but it may explain that surface, which looks like the conscious imitation of a poetic

[5] In *Renaissance Papers 1965,* ed. George W. Williams (Durham, N. C., 1966), pp. 3–13.

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tradition on Spenser's part, with all its ready-made conceits and other sonnet-sequence paraphernalia. Spenser is once again in the background, allowing a fictional poet to pour forth fictional metaphors, and making him do so with such nuances and within such a structural arrangement that the conventional metaphors suggest and interpret man's realities and the fictional poet-man becomes a speaker for real men.

Because the figure of the poet in the sequence is part of its metaphoric significance, we must consider the medium of the allegory as well as the ground of the allegory: we must consider the book of sonnets as well as the characters about whom it is being written. This complicates matters; a narrator who dramatically assumes the role of poet is more difficult to interpret than one who assumes only the role of man or lover.

It is this complex situation to which the first sonnet introduces us. The book, as an entity now separate from the poet and requested to try to please the lady it celebrates, calls attention to itself as somehow different from the poet's pain and love that produced it. As a poetic account of love, the book may have a better chance of success than love itself. The book can perhaps lift the process of love out of the world where slander and bad luck operate, where time and chance rule. The first sonnet encourages us to regard the account of love that follows as something less ephemeral than a particular courtship, as something as permanent as the whole relationship between Man and Woman. It is in this sense that the *Amoretti* may be read as allegory—not conventional allegory with its abstractions distilled and embodied in concretions, but allegory understood as metaphor, as a way of saying what can not be said directly. The *Amoretti* may be an objective correlative for the elusive experience of love between Man and Woman.

This relationship is neither deliberate nor public, however, and the initial phrase—"unquiet thought"[6] of Sonnet 2 serves to describe the restlessness and the internal quality of the love experience. In this sonnet we witness the beginning of the artistic concern over how to deal with love, whereas in the first sonnet we saw the end of that concern as the poet released his book. In Sonnet 2 the poet introspectively deliberates with his thought, encourages it to express itself as both relief for pain and stimulation to further thought. Clearly the sonnets that follow receive their impetus here.

That impetus in "unquiet thought" may provide an explanation for the frenetic, often contradictory succession of moods, ideas, attitudes, and recollected incidents that characterize the sequence. The *Amoretti*

[6] *Spenser's Minor Poems,* ed. Ernest de Selincourt (Oxford, 1910, with corrections in 1960, 1966), p. 375. All quotations from the *Amoretti* are from this edition.

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itself, with all its inherent contradictions, seems to duplicate the mode of "unquiet thought": doubting and assurance, ignorance and enlightenment, boredom and excitement, kindness and antagonism. But through all this one can not escape the private, psychological tone of the narrative that the *Amoretti* provides. Like Sidney, whose muse commands him to "look in thy heart and write," this poet is forced (in Sonnet 3) by "thoughts astonishment" and "fancies ravishment" to abandon speaking and writing, forced to turn inward to employ the communications of his heart. Although the *Amoretti* were somehow written down, the poet of the sequence has a right to identify the mood or mode of his book, and that is clearly the introspective mood of a man alone with his heart.

The initial sonnets of the *Amoretti,* then, encourage the reader to observe and participate in the private mental process of a poet in love as various moments of that process are arrested and held in language. Obviously, it is not possible to interpret each one of these moments individually here; nor is that what the content of the *Amoretti* seems to require. For one of the structural principles of the sequence is chronology, and, as time passes, certain familiar moods and attitudes recur. These are carefully handled; they are more than empty repetitions of conventional metaphors. Indeed, it would be hard to accept the notion that the energy behind Spenser's writing of eighty-nine sonnets was merely a desire to illustrate his talent at repeating traditional conceits. With the possibility that in the language of traditional imagery we have a serious commentary on the nature of love between Man and Woman comes the necessity to identify and interpret the fundamental structure of the sequence.

The idea that the poet may be uplifted from natural baseness by the inspiration of the lady's divinity—an idea borrowed from the *dolce stil nuovo* and Neoplatonic traditions in Italy—is surprisingly quick to make its appearance in the *Amoretti* in Sonnet 3. Whereas in Petrarch's *Canzoniere* Laura is a woman who begins as flesh and blood and only gradually—hindered, it seems, by Petrarch's reluctance to abandon flesh for spirit—ascends to the position of *la donna angelicata,* this lady[7] is a creature of "soverayne beauty" and "celestiall view" even before she is identified as a fleshly woman. She quickly becomes fleshly, however. When the poet urges her, in Sonnet 4, to "prepare your selfe new love to entertain," sexual suggestions are implicit. Again, as early as the first

[7] She is named in Sonnet 74 as one of the three Elizabeths who grace the poet's life. Nevertheless, I have chosen "the lady" and "the lover" or "the poet" for identifications of the characters in the sequence in order to steer clear of biographical reference as much as possible.

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two sonnets, the traditional Italian sequence of flesh to spirit is reversed: Sonnet 1 identifies the recipient of the book as an Angel (l. 11), whereas Sonnet 2 sees the subject of thought as the "fayrest proud" (l. 9), that is, the earthly creature of beauty and disdain. These easy reversals of the serious Neoplatonic ordering of physical and spiritual qualities have the effect of playful mocking and capriciously suggest that such idealism is purely literary.

What is here only briefly suggested within the space of four sonnets might not seem crucial, but, as one looks at the *Amoretti* in larger outline, this early qualification of spiritual idealism appears to inform the structure of the whole sequence. In several sonnets throughout the *Amoretti* one encounters again the idealistic notion of the inspiration the lady's spiritual beauty provides and the related idea that her nature is in fact divine. It is important, however, to note the position and the tone of these particular sonnets. In Sonnets 8 and 9 there are rather facile and confident assertions of the lady's divinity, with no sound logic to support them. In Sonnet 8 the lady is

> More then most faire, full of the living fire,
> Kindled above unto the maker neere.

Of her eyes, the poet writes in Sonnet 9:

> to the Maker selfe they likest be,
> Whose light doth lighten all that here we see.

As early as Sonnet 10, however, the poet discovers that the lady's apparently celestial disdain for base earthly things may also be seen simply as the flaw of pride, a serious crime in terms of the language of courtly love.

Sonnet 10, then, seems to mark a definite turning point in the sequence, since before this time only an outsider, in Sonnet 5, had criticized the lady's "too portly pride," and there the poet quickly came to her defense. The tone of Sonnet 10, however, marks a clear change in the poet's attitude toward the lady. From this point on she may from time to time be seen as divine in nature, but she is more often seen as very much a woman of flesh and blood, with an inordinate sense of disdain, haughtiness, indifference, scorn, and heartlessness. True, there is a recognition of her double nature as early as Sonnet 7: "both lyfe and death forth from you dart," but this is only a device by which to make a plea for life. After Sonnet 10 the poet allows himself to criticize her faults in uncompromising terms. The attitude this implies, an indirect assertion of the poet's own equal importance in the relationship and his refusal to assume forever the role of base and humble lover,

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can not be overemphasized. Both the lady and the lover have now been humanized out of literary clichés: she has been brought down from the height of Neoplatonic divinity, and he brought up from the abject baseness of mere flesh, to the realm of ordinary humanity in which both man and woman may feel the tugs of both body and spirit. At this early stage, then, we hear the nagging complaint of realistic man against realistic woman; ideal poses have been discarded and the way cleared for an examination of probable and pragmatic human situations—although of course those problems will continue to be examined by means of conventional language and metaphor.

Sonnets 10–12 introduce the topic that becomes a major concern of the sequence. It is the lady's "daunger,"[8] her hesitation or reluctance to give herself or her affection to her lover. One could list any number of particular manifestations of this sense of hesitation and unwillingness to yield to the lover's solicitations. Depending on the particular interpretation the poet gives her "daunger," the lady will be seen as cruelly proud or indifferent or even malicious. But we must remember that she is described from his point of view: all we know with certainty about the lady's part in the relationship is that she has been "dangerous," the opposite of affable; she has not complied with his wishes.

Since we have no alternative, we are forced to pay a great deal of attention to his interpretations of her attitude. The impression one gets from the poet's varying and contradictory interpretations is not that the lady is a creature of a thousand moods, but that the poet, frustrated by her mysterious, noncommittal reluctance, by the metaphoric "no" of her attitude, allows his thought to invent imaginative explanations for it. A specific indication that the poet's interpretations of the lady's attitude are imaginative is the interrogative tone of many of the sonnets between 13 and 59. The poet seems to engage in an interior monologue, asking questions, providing possible answers.

> Ah, why hath nature to so hard a hart
> given so goodly giftes of beauties grace,

he asks in Sonnet 31, and answers himself that with such beauty she can more easily lead her prey to destruction. The transient nature of his answers, perhaps to be contradicted in the next sonnet, seems to identify them as fanciful constructions. In the same way the fantastic, far-ranging, and transient or contradictory nature of the analogies that the poet draws for the hardness of her heart, her cruelty, and her combina-

[8] For a discussion of the lost meanings of this word see C. S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love* (Oxford, 1936), Appendix II, pp. 364–366. See also *OED,* Vol. III, s.v. "danger," meanings lc, 2, 2b, and "dangerous," meaning l.

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tion of beauty and cruelty, all point to the poet's fancy, and not to the lady's moods, as subject to nervous, if energetic, change.

Further evidence that the wide range of interpretations the poet gives to the lady's nature are his imaginative variations on her attitude of "daunger" is to be found in two sonnets, one placed near the beginning and one near the end of the long series (13–59). These two sonnets, acting like parentheses around the poet's extravagant interpretations, describe the theatrical nature of his various postures. In Sonnet 18 the poet says,

> But when I pleade, she bids me play my part,
> and when I weep, she says tears are but water:
> and when I sigh, she says I know the art,
> and when I wail she turnes her selfe to laughter.

Later, in Sonnet 54, the poet says that his lady is like a spectator in the theater of the world. She sits,

> beholding me that all the pageants play,
> disguysing diversly my troubled wits.
> Sometimes I ioy when glad occasion fits,
> and mask in myrth like to a Comedy:
> soone after when my ioy to sorrow flits,
> I waile and make my woes a Tragedy.

The lady maintains the indifference of a spectator. Her silent, steady, mysterious reluctance to grant what the man solicits, her desire to maintain a distance before the onslaught of the masculine personality, is the cause of his "troubled wits" and "unquiet thought," that kind of excessive mental energy which motivates all his imaginative disguises, ploys, roles, and masks.

In the last two lines of Sonnet 54 we have a cryptic summary of the serious concern which has occupied the poet's mind during an expansive, tireless display of energy throughout the early-middle sonnets of the *Amoretti.*

> What can move her? if nor mirth nor mone,
> she is no woman, but a senseless stone.

"What then can move her?" the poet asks, as he concentrates the frustration of male emotion confronted by feminine "daunger." Her mood consists of reluctant hesitation, reservation, defense against compromise, preservation of the special qualities, from sexual to spiritual, that make her so different from man. Confronted by the lady's indestructible will to remain apart, the more simple, dominion-prone man is baffled; the

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energy of thwarted domination is steered into imagination. Imagination then accepts the challenge of her stand, tries to see it from all points of view, ruminates on it, attacks it with coaxing praises, clever analogies, furious tirades, self-pitying protests, and outright pleas, and in many ultimately theatrical actions generally displays itself before her seemingly disinterested observations.

All these seductive moods and actions are present in the long middle section of the *Amoretti* already cited. The poet seeks peace and truces (11, 12), urges his forces to rally (13), falls into despair (23), and yet stubbornly persists, moving against the unmoved (18). But always behind his animated displays there is her stillness and mystery, seemingly unaffected by all he does. He swears religious faith (22), pities himself (32), and in Sonnet 35 dedicates himself ruinously to his object, like Narcissus. And like Narcissus the poet is ultimately led back to himself, and the dead end, in terms of a love relationship, which that represents.

The shape of the sequence, and of love itself, becomes clearer. Maleness displays its forces and reveals the full range of the resources available to it in its attack on femininity. One can see from reviewing the sequence even casually that the poet's tactics range from exaggerated compliment (15, 17) through defiance (20) and threat (36) to censure (41, 47). The problem to be dealt with now is the structure of the relationship from the point at which these tactics seem to have some effect on the lady.

During the course of the lover's seemingly hopeless suit there are some moments that hint at a change in the lady. As early as Sonnet 28 the poet glimpses the possibility of her cooperation:

> The laurell leafe, which you this day doe weare,
> gives me great hope of your relenting mynd:
> for since it is the badg which I doe beare,
> ye bearing it doe seeme to me inclind.

The ray of hope is short-lived, and in Sonnet 30 the poet returns to his hopeless courting with one of the most traditional similes of the sonnet tradition: "My love is lyke to yse, and I to fyre." Shortly hereafter, however, the lover is favored with a smile, and Sonnets 39 and 40 celebrate the appearance, meaning, and effect of that smile, which temporarily alleviates the effect that his stormy suit has had:

> So my storm beaten hart likewise is cheared,
> with that sunshine when cloudy looks are cleared.
>
> (Sonnet 40)

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Again the hope is soon extinguished, and the poet returns immediately in Sonnet 41 to his interior monologue, asking and answering for himself questions about her manner:

> Is it her nature or is it her will,
> to be so cruel to an humbled foe?

Finally, however, the poet, once again sailing in the metaphoric ship that in Sonnet 33 was lost in darkness far at sea, seems at last to sense the approach of success:

> After long stormes and tempests sad assay,
> Which hardly I endured heretofore:
> in dread of death and daungerous dismay,
> with which my silly barke was tossed sore:
> I doe at length descry the happy shore,
> in which I hope ere long for to arryve.
>
> (Sonnet 63)

It is interesting to note here that the phrase "daungerous dismay" in line 3 may mean the dismay caused by or having its origin in danger, a psychological disturbance caused by the "daunger" the lady's nature forces her to display.

We have reached a crucial point, the stage at which the lover senses success. Already in Sonnet 60 one can begin to sense the tone of an approaching crucial moment, for the poet has reached the end of a full year of prostrating himself before his lady. He is weary and emotionally aged from the effort. His concluding utterance here, in its undirectedness, takes on the attributes of inner wish, plea, prayer, and command:

> But let my loves fayre Planet short her wayes
> this yeare ensuing, or else short my dayes.

Sonnet 61 maintains the tone of preparation for significant change. The poet admonishes himself to respect her:

> The glorious image of the makers beautie,
> My soverayne saynt, the Idoll of my thought,
> dare not henceforth above the bounds of dewtie,
> t'accuse of pride, or rashly blame for ought.

After the great range of derision that the poet has expressed, the return to Neoplatonic idealism in this sonnet is significant. The poet seems to be making amends by a return to excessive praise and idealism. The lover and lady seem to be moving closer.

In Sonnet 62 the poet actually voices the new attitude as if it rested on a mutual agreement:

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> So let us, which this chaunge of weather vew,
> chaunge eeke our mynds and former lives amend,
> the old yeares sinnes forepast let us eschew,
> and fly the faults with which we did offend.

The next sonnet, 63, as we have seen, uses the traditional ship simile to suggest that the poet nears "the happy shore." But the significant event, toward which the poet has tonally seemed to move, takes place in Sonnet 64:

> Coming to kisse her lips, (such grace I found)
> Me seemd I smelt a gardin of sweet flowres.

It is a significant moment; the reticence and reserve the lady has shown before have, at least for a moment, disappeared, and the space that seemed at times so great between them has been closed. The separate halves that constituted the relationship and created such tension in doing so have now, if briefly, been brought intimately together. The kiss allows the lover to smell the aroma of the lady's lips, cheeks, brows, eyes, bosom, neck, breasts, and nipples. The brief, parenthetical appeal to idealism in the poet's assertion that he found "grace" in her kiss is nearly lost in the abundance of sensual details that follow it. One senses behind the overt compliment to the lady's lovely smells the assertive power of masculinity which threatens almost to go beyond decency before the physical bounds of the sonnet restrain it.

Sonnet 65 confirms the suspicion that with the sense of achievement the kiss gave the lover has come a tendency to assert masculine lordship over the lady. Clearly the kiss has caused her some "doubt," caused her to sense the threat to her individual freedom that male dominion presents. The lover hastens to assure her that the "bondage" he intends is "sweet," that "loyal love" motivates his control over her. Nevertheless, the note of male conquest still sounds through his assurances of good faith. In Sonnet 66 the poet deprecates himself as a mere "meane" creature who is blessed by the love of such a "surpassing" lady. But the poet is not completely self-deprecatory here. In the last two lines he asserts his ability to brighten her life. Perhaps we may see in this confidence a hint that his declarations of humility are not intended to be understood as totally sincere. The lover's pride in his conquest can not be fully disguised.

Sonnet 67, which contains the famous hunting simile, again returns to the notion of capture, but now with a difference. The poet seems to recognize that his "long pursuit and vain assay" in the display sonnets of the early and middle parts of the sequence did not ultimately have much to do with the actual "conquest" of the lady. In a tone approach-

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ing bafflement the poet tries to explain the lady's apparent self-capture to himself.

> Strange thing me seemd to see a beast so wyld,
> So goodly wonne with her owne will beguyld.

The final line is ambiguous. The lady has been deluded and deceived by her own will, and yet it was by her own will (i.e., 'allowance') that she was so deluded and deceived. The sonnet may be read as an economical interpretation of the nature of the feminine will and resolves the problem as much as it can be resolved, with a baffled, ambiguous pause.

But the poet is not content to rest with ambiguity in working out this closer relationship with the lady; he continues to seek answers to problems inherent in it. Sonnet 68 suggests a potential resolution to the problem of the antithetical nature of spirit and flesh, which has appeared already and will do so again. This is the Easter sonnet, which reiterates Christian doctrine about Christ's "triumph over death and sin." The couplet that concludes the sonnet,

> So let us love, dear love, lyke as we ought,
> love is the lesson which the Lord us taught,

takes on significant force when we consider that Christ's lesson of love centers around the notion of the incarnation as a combination of spirit and flesh. For the lovers to love as they ought in the light of this lesson, they must achieve a successful combination of sensual (after marriage, sexual) and spiritual life. However, it becomes apparent in the following sonnets that Christ's lesson is not one easily learned.

In Sonnet 69 the poet wonders, after citing the practice of the "antiche" world,

> What trophee then shall I most fit devize,
> in which I may record the memory
> of my loves conquest.

He seems to have abandoned a Christian sense of humility, to have become domineering, proud of his conquest and of his ability to celebrate it in verse. In the next sonnet the *carpe diem* theme maintains the pagan tone of 69 and clearly has as its basis the view of the lady as a creature of flesh and the related assumption that the function of flesh is sexual consummation before its youth passes. The quiet assurance that the religious humility of Sonnet 68 provided is now gone; man's proud, monument-making spirit and his troubled flesh seem to be struggling for priority; they will not be quietly combined in a relationship of mutual cooperation.

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Moreover, the lady has clearly not accepted the Christian resolution. In Sonnet 71 it is evident that she has been occupied with defining the incompatible natures of man and woman. The poet says,

> I ioy to see how in your drawen work,
> your selfe unto the Bee ye doe compare;
> and me unto the Spyder that doth lurke,
> in close awayt to catch her unaware.

"Right so," says the poet, and proceeds to give what is ostensibly her own interpretation of her view. But we suspect the poet again and sense that his interpretation of her needlework distorts her intention. The quoted lines convey the image she has created and contain a rather somber view of the relation between the sexes. In her view man is a dangerous spider lurking in secrecy to capture and destroy her as prey. The lady's drawn work suggests the mood and situation of Spenser's "Muiopotmos," where delicate innocence is preyed upon by destructive malevolence. It is not a cheerful view of man and woman, and greatly qualifies the poet's optimistic conclusion,

> And all thensforth eternall peace shall see,
> betweene the Spyder and the gentle Bee.

But, in keeping with his constantly shifting view of the relationship, the poet in Sonnet 72 records a sudden sense of spiritual weakness. The sonnet expresses a tough-minded and traditional view of the human condition: it sees man as subject to the attraction of ideal spirituality but shows how he is hindered in his response to it by the "burden of mortality." This sonnet both suggests the attraction of the spiritual pole and documents the strength of the physical pole, situating the lady and lover dynamically in the middle distance of life's full potential. It is important to note, however, that what constitutes the "burden of mortality" at this particular moment is the attraction of the lady as a physical reality. It is the sight of the lady as "sweet pleasures bayt" that holds him at the physical level and causes him to sense delight, and his "frayle fancy" to "bathe in blisse." The poet's conclusion in 72 cancels the doctrine of Neoplatonic progression through flesh to spirit to God, and, as it does so, it seems to ignore the exhortation in Sonnet 68. There he urged, "So let us love" as the Lord taught; here he sighs,

> Hart need not with none other happinesse,
> but here on earth to have such hevens blisse.

But the poet's inability to achieve an equilibrium in his view of love suggests the protean nature of love itself, and in Sonnet 73 he finds himself "captyved here in care." In this rather weak sonnet he retreats

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from responsibility in a fanciful image of himself as a dependent bird that willingly becomes caged in the lady's heart. The answers seem momentarily to have run out, and the poet wishes himself protected from the struggle of love and the human world by a set of bars.

Sonnets 74 and 75 continue to suggest the poet's desire to escape present exigencies, as he dwells on and repeatedly writes her name. His mind is no longer engaged, the poetry stalls into pretty, well-arranged praises in Sonnet 74 and, in Sonnet 75, into mechanical inscriptions of her name in the sand, which are as thoughtless as the waves that wash them away. The lady reproves his action in Sonnet 75 by calling him a "vayne man" and thus jolts his attention. He fails to renounce his habit of thought, however, and falls into yet another irresponsible fancy in which the celebration of their love for posterity thinly disguises a death wish:

> my verse your vertues rare shall eternize,
> and in the hevens wryte your glorious name.
> Where whenas death shall all the world subdew,
> our love shall live, and later life renew.

In Sonnet 76 "frayle thoughts" continue as the poet praises the lady's bosom. Beginning as "Virtues richest treasure," her bosom quickly becomes

> The neast of love, the lodging of delight:
> the bowre of blisse, the paradise of pleasure,
>
> (ll. 2–3)

and the frailty of his thoughts becomes clear. These sexual fantasies of waking thought merge in Sonnet 77 into the dream mode as the poet's thought, once again dwelling on the same subject, makes a metaphoric banquet of the "apples" laid out on the table of her breast. Although the poet is careful to insist that his lady is "voyd of sinfull vice," it is clear that sensual fantasy threatens to warp the poet's view of the lady in favor of fleshly rather than spiritual qualities.

Now a way out of delusion and weakness appears, as the poet comes to see the superficiality of his "frayle" thoughts and the vanity of indulging in mere fantasy. Sonnet 78 records the temporary absence of the lady, when the poet has a greater tendency to picture her in imagination and sees in this imaginative process the significant difference between fancy and thought. During her absence the poet seeks to find her in her usual haunts, but as he looks his eyes always return to himself:

> they ydly back returne to me agayne,
> and when I hope to see theyr true object,
> I find my selfe but fed with fancies vayne.

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On the strength of the insight he renounces his habit of relying on her physical presence for his fantasies.

> Ceasse then myne eyes, to seek her selfe to see,
> and let my thoughts behold her selfe in me.

Vain fantasy is rejected for the solid worth of thought, and the poet breaks the spell that has held him since Sonnet 73. These pivotal lines, which show that he has taken her criticism of him as a "vayne man" to heart, suggest that his thought will lose some of its unquietness and become more deliberate.

Sonnet 79 marks this change with a return to the idealism of the Neoplatonic system as Ficino explains it, but here clearly different from the facile idealism of Sonnets 8 and 9. In Sonnet 79 the poet develops the solidity of the thought mode of Sonnet 78, clearly contrasted with the vanity of the dream mode in Sonnet 77. Here the poet lists the logical steps by which he rises to the Neoplatonic assertions, which "argue [her]/to be divine and borne of heavenly seed." Careful, tough-minded, and logical, he has found at last a responsible, imaginative way out of the stagnation his "fraile fancy" had caused. Sonnet 80 celebrates this sense of release from a stagnant and tyrannical habit of mind as the poet speaks of breaking out of his "prison" and beginning work again on other projects. Creative energies are now freed, no longer is the poet blocked as he was in Sonnet 75.

Experience has now taught the poet a lesson much like that which the Easter message in Sonnet 68 suggested. He has touched the opposite poles of love's full potential and he has realized, as he demonstrates in Sonnet 81, that both must continually be present to make love full. As he revels in the lady's hair, cheeks, eyes, breasts, and smiles, he also discovers beauty finer than this, a beauty that is "harts astonishment," in the fact that the words of her beautiful mouth carry "the message of her gentle sprite." The image of the lady speaking is a concentrated expression of the discovery he has made about love. Her mouth is a "gate with pearls and rubyes richly dight," and yet through it she reveals her beautiful spirit. The images reveal his discovery that spirit is mysteriously apart from and yet also impossible without flesh. It is the discovery of incarnation. Although the poet has said it before, in Sonnet 55, he has now experienced something that makes his statement more credible: he says, in Sonnet 83,

> All this worlds glory seemeth vayne to me,
> and all theyr shewes but shadows, saving she.

It is at this point, however, that unexpected complications enter the relationship and remind us that no amount of imaginative resolution,

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however realistic, can guarantee permanence. Beginning with Sonnet 84, the remainder of the sequence ruptures the mood of spiritual transport and suggests that human glimpses of spirituality can be but brief. Contrary forces in the self and the world, which is hostile to spirit, determine that brevity. Love must now encounter more serious and less personal foes than feminine resistance and emotional unsteadiness. When the poet's voice sounds in Sonnet 84 saying,

> Let not one spark of filthy lustfull fyre
> breake out, that may her sacred peace molest:
> ne one light glance of sensuall desire
> Attempt to work her gentle mindes unrest,

it is the voice of a stranger, but the remainder of the sonnet identifies the offender as the poet himself. He has effectively become a stranger to himself in allowing the look of lust, and she is no longer the "Joy of [his] life," as in Sonnet 82. The distancing of the poet from himself in Sonnet 84 is accompanied by the distancing of the lady from the poet, and the changed tone makes us see her, not as the wise and gentle spirit of Sonnet 81, but as a distant creature of "too constant stiffenesse."

"The world" makes its appearance in Sonnet 85, and, in a sonnet that captures the mood of "l'enfer, c'est les autres," we see the lovers further distanced and objectified as their relationship is seen for a moment through the eyes of those outside the relationship. The poet asserts the true value of his respect and praise for the lady, and, as he does, it sounds almost as a note of sad reference back to the intimate privacy of the relationship that existed before the disturbances:

> Deepe in the closet of my parts entyre,
> her worth is written with a golden quill:
> that me with heavenly fury doth inspire
> and my glad mouth with her sweet prayses fill.

That privacy is now no longer possible as "the world" outside, in the form of slander, further encroaches upon the inner world of love. The terrible power of slander is clear as the poet lashes out in Sonnet 86 against a "venemous toung, tipt with vile adders sting." The slanderers have plotted to cause a breach between the lovers, and in the remaining sonnets, 87, 88, and 89, it is clear that they have succeeded. The lovers have been separated; the intimacy between them has been shattered; the physical and psychological closeness between them has been forced apart.

The last three sonnets sound an almost uninterrupted note of lament, modified only at the end by the poet's slight suggestion of hope for future reconciliation in the "many a wishfull vow, for [her] returne" of Sonnet

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89 and by the assertion in Sonnet 88 that the poet is sustained by the "Idaea playne" of the lady, which is still in his "purest part." But the poet is left alone, and "Dark is [his] day," a reminder of and return to the mode of unquiet thought that began the sequence.

III

The sequence seems to leave the reader suspended. Not only does it not end with a triumphant resolution in the form of a marriage or an ascent to Neoplatonic idealism, but it ends with the lady gone and the poet embittered by the way of the world. But the sequence has not entirely ended. A coda-like addition, in the form of the four brief Anacreontic poems, remains to recapitulate and integrate the contrasting themes, as a coda would after a fugue.[9] They remain also, I think, to guide our response to the sequence as a whole.

It is important to notice that the coda poems are naïvely allegorical. Moreover, in their details we can see the outline of the sequence's larger structure. In the first one Cupid prods inexperienced man (the "I" in the poems) to explore overboldly the dangerous realm of love. Man does so but becomes involved with and injured by love and is then left alone to seek his own solution. Similarly, we have seen the poet struck by love, become painfully involved, and yet left alone to work out his own understanding of the experience.

The second poem describes Diana's replacement of one of Cupid's arrows with one of hers and the subsequent wounding of "my lady" with the arrow of chastity. This may be read as allegorical of the lady's "daunger" or resistance to the amorous suit of the lover, the situation that has produced the disturbed, restless energies of major portions of the sequence.

The third poem may be seen as allegorical of the dual nature of the beauty of the lady, which provides the momentum and constant tension of the sequence. The poet, too, like Cupid, has from time to time "err'd in this beauty" by assuming the lady to be a Venus-like creature of the flesh. But he has also, as his being able to see and laugh at Cupid's error indicates, discovered her spiritually beautiful aspects.

The fourth poem sees Cupid as the great troubler of gods and men, indifferent to the disturbance and ruin he causes in their lives. Whereas Cupid, when stung by an outside, indifferent force, can crawl to his

[9] See the entry under "fugue" in *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (London, 1954), Vol. III, for a series of interesting parallels between a fugue with its coda and the *Amoretti* with its Anacreontic verses. The similarity between the structure of a fugue-coda and that of the *Amoretti* sequence as it has been interpreted here is striking.

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mother's lap for comfort, man finds himself suspended in the anguish of love until Cupid "pleases to appease" him. Having just completed the *Amoretti*, we identify this anguish with the tortured, almost manic workings of the poet's mind in pursuing and keeping his lady.

Although these poems warrant more attention than they have received here, perhaps this is enough to show that these brief, apparently playful poems are in fact allegories of serious ideas about love, ideas that have been major considerations in the love relationship described in the *Amoretti* sequence itself. Coda can illumine fugue, and envoy poems can illumine the major poem. The little Anacreontic poems for this reason should not be ignored; they steer our interpretation of the sonnets that they follow toward an allegorical one, and, although they cannot recapitulate and clarify the entire thematic content of the *Amoretti*, their presentation of particularized tales that beg allegorical interpretation suggests that the particularized tale of love in the *Amoretti* should also be read as a metaphoric story of love between Man and Woman.

Hobart and William Smith Colleges
Geneva, New York

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