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Reflected Scenes: Ekphrastic Tension in the Allegory of Chastity

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Abstract of the Thesis

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This thesis aims to explore the tension with how Edmund Spenser uses images and the method of ekphrasis and how they lead to interpretive tension on the part of the reader in the epic poem *The Faerie Queene*. Close readings of selected passages within Book III of *The Faerie Queene* as well as discussion of secondary scholarship pertaining to the piece will be used in this research. The study will conclude with how Spenser as the author was able to use interpretive tension to serve his pedagogical aims in writing this work.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1

Reflected Scenes: Ekphrastic Tension in the Allegory of Chastity

Both the beginning and the culmination of Britomart's actions in Book III of *The Faerie Queene* involve two scenes of important and vivid visions that occur in quite different ways. These two focal bookending scenes in Book III create tension for Edmund Spenser's didactic project with the allegory he is employing within his epic work. What exactly are the limits to how image truly instructs and how may these images be problematic to the reader? Spenser parallels the virtue of chastity being formed by the individual's innocence being broken with the power of the allegory to instruct by the power of images, even as the reliance on the reader to read images aright may have the entire allegorical project teetering on the edge of ruin. As Jane Grogan examines the didactic project of Spenser, his "pedagogy is diffuse and unorthodox, and seems to be realised not solely in the body of the poem but principally in the act of reading it" putting the onus on the reader with his ability to approach and then "unpack" the poetic descriptions aright (11). Whether or not the poet has enough rhetorical energy within the poetic language to sustain the instructive project remains to be seen. This question is crucially important as image and seeing play important roles in how Spenser elucidates the nature of chastity and love and how exactly they are to be morally guarded. Both Britomart's revelation of Arthegall in

Merlin's mirror and the masque presented before her in Busirane's castle, involve distinct ideals of love shown before her. First, the Book opens with an image of Britomart, but her identity, especially as she is perceived, is not straightforward and is disguised, involving not only her office, but her gender as well. Then subsequently, the ideal image of Arthegall, with his handsome visage and heraldry that bears his antique lineage, and Merlin's explication of Britomart's destiny involving her love for Arthegall for whom she must remain chaste, spurs her actions and sets in motion her travels that the reader finds himself in the midst of at the opening of Book III. Britomart comes across this vision in her father's magical device which is marked by its history of martial purposes and use in warfare. As the model of the virtue of Chastity, Britomart must be shown not only receiving this vision of her love, but also seen engaging with her love newly awakened in a right and chaste manner. The assurances of her destiny by Merlin distinguish Britomart as not only being able to perceive rightly, but also acting on what she sees in a tempered manner.

The succession of various tapestries and processions that Britomart views in the house of Busirane offers even more visions of idealized love but also the scenes of the violence that can accompany love. The magic employed here is a much different kind then when Britomart first gazes in the mirror earlier. As Merlin was ultimately the one who wrought the mirror that Britomart had the vision of Arthegall, the scenes that she witness in the various masques are devised

by Busirane. These images are problematic as they are illusory in nature as well as being guided by the ill-will of Busirane which is in contrast to the nature of the vision that the wise Merlin's device gives. How Britomart encounters these images is key, especially as she wrestles with the inscriptions of "Be Bold" and Be Not Too Bold". How the reader resolves the experience of the visions in Busirane's castle in light of the actions of chaste Britomart encapsulate the role and relationship between seeing and consequently of correct perception.

It is worthwhile to pay close attention to these moments in Book III since they reflect so much of the reader's own journey through the text and Spenser's larger allegorical project to "fashion a gentleman", as noted in his introductory letter to Sir Walter Raleigh. Each scene in which Britomart is presented with images, from her entrance into the castle of Malecasta, to her vision in Merlin's mirror, to various masques and tapestries seen in Busirane's castle, involves a sort of architect that have influence over how each of her visions are brought about. Each of these sub-creators that function underneath the author through his fiction, mirror Spenser's own power to present specific images to the reader. It comes to the fore especially since this book shifts to a higher gear with the way these ekphrastic scenes are arranged. This requires the reader to be far more self-aware as "Spenser's method is to use poetic images, personifications, and narratives to subject the most privileged visual concepts and forms of his culture to scrutiny" (Grogan 19). This view of Spenser's approach to instruction with

this work does give the poet the benefit of the doubt that everything is immaculately arranged and it may perhaps be the reader's own limitations in failing to be adequately perceptive. Whether or not the power and breadth of Spenser's language overwhelms the text or not, it is clear that there are many layers to be delved.

Compared to the earlier books in *The Faerie Queene*, Books III and IV are marked by a stylistic change that places more of an emphasis on sets of scenes rather than a singular narrative since the subject of love (and specifically Chastity in Book III), has the poem employing "a number of stories proceeding side by side and relating by Spenser's favourite parallel and contrast to explore experience as it is revealed" (Williams 85). This is certainly of importance as Britomart's narrative takes center stage and the power of her image is in service of Spenser drawing on her imagery to equate with the royal Elizabeth. The fantastical glass that Merlin engineers functions similar to how the poem does. As the device's crafter, he resembles the poet and especially as the one who "gives an integrated vision of all life" to Britomart, he is "no creator of false images, but of true reflections . . . the poet par excellence" (Giamatti 119). If the vision provided by Merlin's mirror and his subsequent prophecy of Britomart's progeny and the future of the kingdom of the Britons is an accurate one that truly reflects reality, then the luring tapestries and masques seen in Busirane's castle is in sharp contrasts as they clearly are tempting Britomart to forsake her chastity.

In this instance, the "pageantry" present in the castle of Busirane "is a way of writing" itself (Giamatti 82). However, the separate episodes involving Merlin and Busirane "constrasts a visionary ontology of love with an illusory one" where the good magic (and its accompanying visions) unites human desire with heavenly will and the evil magic aims to disrupt (Cheney 3). If these sub-creators within the narrative have such potent power to impress various visions on Britomart for such good or ill aims, it begs the reader to ask what kind of effect the ekphrasis of these episodes within the work has on him.

Book III's discussion of the topic of Chastity is intertwined with the notions of what one perceives and the reality behind such appearances. This is exemplified by early scenes of mistaken identity involving Britomart. The first Canto opens with Arthur and Guyon perceiving what they see as "a knight, that towards pricked faire" (III.i.4.2). From what they can see, this figure is simply another knight bearing heraldry with whom a joust and fray may be engaged with. Guyon is enflamed with a hot passion to do battle, which is in contrast to the Britomart's enchanted spear that dispatches him with ease. Not only does Guyon take on this new-come knight, but is soon unseated which causes him humiliation and raises his ire. Here, the poet addresses Guyon directly and increases the shame and dishonor that the knight has just experiences by revealing the true nature of this stranger that has bested Guyon. The poet expands on the "greater griefe and shamefuller regret" Guyon receives from being knocked off his horse

by revealing that this strange knight was "That of a single damzell" whom Guyon jousted with "On equall plaine" and was indeed "the famous Britomart" (8.2, 4-6). This is a stark reversal of expectations that both the character and reader would have on encountering this new knight. Though the narrator poetically addresses this revelation to Guyon, it is a moment of dramatic irony where the reader is clued into the notion that certain appearances have much more to them than what is initially seen, yet Guyon is still left unaware of the reality behind what he sees naturally.

This first instance of mistaken identity contrasts the hot-headed Guyon, bold and eager to conquer on the field of martial activity with the tempered nature of Britomart. This is continued after Arthur establishes peace between the two combatants and the knights soon encounter a lady being chased by a "griesly Foster" who "Breathing out beastly lust her to defile" (III.1.17.2-3). Guyon, Arthur and the squire Timias go after to aid the maiden being characterized by the engaging of this rescue mission being "Full of great enuie and fell gealosy" which is in stark relief with Britomart, "whose constant mind, / Would not so lightly follow beauties chace" (18.2, 19.1-2). Again the distinction is being made between Arthur and Guyon's hot-bloodedness and Britomart's temperate and chaste demeanor though outwardly she embodies the appearance of a male knight that is normally marked by being inflamed with passion to save a maiden in peril. Instead, Britomart, the model of chastity, embodies that very ideal by coming to

the aid of the Red Crosse Knight who is fighting the six knights of Malecasta to preserve his fidelity to Una.

Ambiguity immediately opens Book III. It is interesting that from the outset of the Book, the reader at once is forced to consider the nature of what images they are provided. It forces the reader to be self-aware, lest he makes a similar, hot-headed but wrong assumption that Guyon makes. What is clear in the opening is that the ones that see and are then filled with passion for battle are male. Guyon is the one that the narrator is giving the priority of sight. Britomart, the ideal model of chastity, unbeknownst to anyone but the reader since she externally appears to be male in fashion and vocation, is the one to defend herself from the advances of the hot-blooded male. Ironically, Britomart's "temporary appropriation of masculine identity puts her in the position of the masculine viewing subject, but . . . her new masculine persona does not protect her from predatory sexual violence" (Grogan 118). It takes a male-oriented viewpoint to take what is seen and make it inflame the ardors of lust and passion. This sets up the problem to come once Britomart does see Arthegall in Merlin's mirror, especially as Britomart falls ill afterwards. Does chastity require an innocent lack of knowledge that is fueled by seeing? For the reader that Spenser aims to instruct, the issue that rises is how to navigate these ekphrases found in the Castle Joyeous.

With the confusion of gender taking place, there is a lot happening from the onset of this Book. Between the troop continuing to follow the maiden being chased to Britomart coming across Red Crosse Knight taking on multiple combatants, there is a strong sense of chaos to the modern reader. As Thomas Roche clarifies that even though the sense of narrative is frenzied and seemingly disjointed "this is not the thematic development of the novelist nor the ineptitude of Spenser as a narrator" but rather this is "the method of allegory" (12). In this case, Spenser is focusing on exactly on that which will meet his didactic ends. So far the gaze of the reader is at the mercy of the poet. With the flurry of scenes and settings being flashed before the reader's eyes, and he has to trust that Spenser is fully executing the right images that must be unpacked by the reader.

Britomart's entrance into Malecasta's Castle Joyeous brings vivid imagery to the reader. This being the first of Britomart's explicit visual encounters that will test her virtue, this scene kicks off the fact that Spenser's project contains "challenges in every quest tend to be visual trials to be correctly discerned, divined or denigrated: tournaments, pageants, dreams, divine visions, tapestries, underworld tours and temptations" (Grogan 70). This episode within Malecasta's castle typifies the fact that within Spenser's epic, his "villians are conspicuously accomplished in understanding the codified schemes of vision, but its heroes are naïve players of its visual games" (70). There is a striking similarity between how Spenser's villains accomplish much of the same type of tasks that the poet

does. Both the antagonist and the poet are in the position of power being able to wield images in accordance of their own designs. The reader finds himself in much the same place as the poem's protagonists as they are in a place of innocence and of need of instruction.

The portrayal of Venus and Adonis on the tapestry that clothes the walls of the castle are not subtle in the least. This is an impressive piece of artistry that is described as being "A worke of rare deuice, and wondrous wit" (III.i.34.6). The uniqueness of this tapestry and the great skill that had wrought it is exemplified by the lengthy account given of the tale of "The loue of *Venus* and her Paramoure / The faire *Adonis*, turned into a flowre,"(34.4-5). This inset story demonstrates the power of the images displayed by the use of elevated language it takes to describe the mere contents of the tapestry. The ardour of the love being told in the story is plain to see. In fact, this sensuous tale that takes several stanzas to tell, spills out into the room. The tale depicted informs the reader of the very nature of the castle and indeed that very room that was "clad in goodly wize" (39.1). This chamber is described being filled with beds and couches and

> Full of Damzels and of Squires,
> Dauncing and reueling both day and night,
> And swimming deepe in sensuall desires,
> And Cupid still emongst them kindled lustfull fires (39.6-9)

Here, the contents of what is seen are unambiguous. It is clear that main business of the Castle Joyeous is lecherous. In this sexually charged atmosphere, Malecasta sees Britomart and "Her fickle hart conceiued hasty fire, . . . / That shortly brent into extreme desire, / And ransackt all her veines with passion entire" and utterly consumed by her lust, does not see past Britomart's guise as a knight (46.6-9). The images found in the tapestry reflect the condition of the inhabitants of the house, which blinds the eye from being able to see past the superficial guise that the protagonist has on.

Britomart's encounter with Merlin's mirror and then Merlin himself is distinguished by the wizard's own power and skill, but especially by the generative capacity his magic seems to have. This magic is marked by Merlin's own history, the history of the devices he creates and how it generates love within Britomart. Merlin's magic is not only creative, but the application of his magical skills allows things to grow, including the right kind of understanding for Britomart. The all-seeing device that Merlin crafts for the king Ryence at first glance seems merely practical. It has the power "to shew in perfect sight, / What euer thing was in the world contaynd," and given to Ryence to defend his kingdom "That neuer foes his kingdome might inuade, / But he it knew at home before he hard / Tydings therof" (III.ii.19.1-2, 21.3-5). The looking glass that Merlin has made clearly does not work against any invaders but simply produces

sight for the intended viewer of the glass that he would not normally have. This vision seems to surely work all to the benefit of the user of the glass. There is an inkling that the mirror is not completely objective as it "is a site where personal and political worlds cross" and that "it shows things clearly only so long as they 'to the looker appertaynd'" (Gross 146). In this way, the mirror works as intended, but the ambiguity is on the part of the beholder. As a mirror, it can only reflect, so if the viewer is not true that is what will appear. However, being in faerie land and this instrument being more than just a plain mirror, it is also "a glass that reflects more than the viewer, for through it one gains access to a power" that "shows a face or surface of fascination which becomes intimately bound up with the struggles for definition of the erotic selfhood" (Gross 146). There is a danger that the mirror might just show the viewer back his own faults. As Britomart falls into sickness after receiving the vision in the mirror, she apparently has not gained a complete or true insight. It takes the counsel of Merlin for her to fully comprehend the vision. The slippery slope on the part of the reader of allegory is that they might have observed the images presented, but have not successfully unpacked its meaning without the aid of further guidance.

By comparison, Spenser offers "Greate *Ptolomæe*" who made his own tower, "Ybuilded all of glasse, by Magicke power, / And also it impregnable did make; / Yet when his loue was false, he with a peaze it brake" (III.ii.20.7-9). In the next stanza the reader is forced to assimilate these two magic constructions as

it is remarked that "Such was the glassie globe that Merlin made, / And gaue vnto King *Ryence* for his gard" (21.1-2). Now as these two objects are now linked, it could cast some doubt into the reader's mind as to what kind of false "loue" it would take to undermine Merlin's mirror as it did to Ptolemy's magical tower. Indeed, if the reader was to take this looking glasse for granted as a positive force, Cheney sees that this allusion to the magic tower "arrests our attention because it seems to question the 'truth' of Merlin's magic" (18). The speaker of The Faerie Queene himself breaks from the description of this particular mirror and Merlin's involvement to ask "Who wonders not, that reads so wonderous worke?" and further leads the reader to ponder the magical powers of this tower (20.1). This break brings Merlin's own mirror into sharp relief. It plants the question of what is different about Merlin's magic compared to other magical devices. Again, ambiguity in actually perceiving the true nature of the vision that is described rears its head. In one sense, the doubt that is placed in the reader's mind about what kind of internal state would cause the mirror to give a false impression might cause the student of the allegory to pause and consider their own introspection. In that way, by Spenser overreaching the parallels of magic and allegorical poetry to the point the instruction might fall short, he actually achieves his end by causing the gentleman in training to inspect their own internal state.

Cheney further expounds that the relief created shows the real danger of Merlin's magic—that without any other clarification of his magic's origins or true

purpose (as he will provide for Britomart in this narrative), the tower "forecasts what would happen to Britomart if she were to misunderstand her vision: like Phao, she would become imprisoned in her own glass world of imaginative desire" (18). There is no indication that Phao had suffered from not gaining this type of understanding, however the reader is presented with two different types of martial defense. First is the device Ryence possesses that allows him to gain knowledge of potential invaders which is juxtaposed next to Ptolemy's tower which can be seen a conventional defense mechanism. Merlin's mirror has the power to generate sight and understanding while the tower is seemingly reactive and though impregnable, has the major weakness of false love which can destroy the edifice. We have seen Britomart early in Book III adorned in her knightly guise, so she is no stranger to physical warfare.

By offering the example of Phao in this description of the history of Merlin's mirror, it sharply contrasts with Britomart herself and the trajectory of her development in virtue. The type of "martial eros" that Spenser has in mind for Britomart is not the type that continues to be chaste by remaining shuttered in, like Phao in the tower, but leaves "the possibility of love only through force or deceit" (Berger 104). Certainly, it is through this love "through force" that compels Britomart along her journey throughout the rest of the epic. This may be a point of tension within Spenser's portrayal of Britomart as the reader has seen Britomart adopt armor and a martial stance and it lead to a dicey encounter with

Malecasta. By adopting that masculine stance, it led Britomart to be assailed by passionate violence and also the problematic issue of taking in the images at the Castle Joyous from that male perspective.

The intended martial use of the mirror to engender a vision works in a curious way with Britomart. This is compounded after seeing what could happen to her if she does not perceive the magic found in the mirror rightly. The coming intruder here, is not a nameless horde, but Arthegall who will rightfully take away Britomart's virginity, indeed in her vision of her love, Britomart sees Arthegall as being a "comely knight, all arm'd in complete wize," further, "Portly his person was, and much increast / Through his Heroicke grace, and honorable gest" (24.2, 8-9). Indeed his adorning armor incudes a "crest . . . couered with a couchant Hound" that is pictured ready to pounce (25.1). Given the immediate history of this device as an early warning system, this kind of vision of a knight such arrayed and marked to be a great warrior shown to the chaste Britomart should be foreboding and signal caution. Instead, Britomart takes this vision in and what she saw "liked well, ne further fastned not, / But went her way" (26.2-3). This does not appear to be quite the reaction the reader might expect after learning about the history of the mirror and how it has been used. Perhaps the sight of an armed knight is to be expected, but how Britomart is not alarmed by this sight seems underwhelming.

Contrary to the Britomart the reader first sees in the beginning of Book III as a warrior knight, readily engaging in battle, here she is passive. Britomart just happens upon her father's device and is not initially bothered by the vision in front of her, but that she was pierced by "that arrow shot / So slyly, that she did not feele the wound, / Did smyle full smoothly at her weetlesse wofull stound" (III.ii.26.7-9). Britomart does not actively love Arthegall, but is left unaware that the magical sight has moved her. Instead of intentionally looking into the mirror for a vision of what is going to befall her, she has become heart-sick in reaction to this act. At this point it may seem that she has suffered a fate more in keeping with Ptolemy's tower which could be destroyed with false love.

Instead of producing a vision that leads Britomart to positive action, it seems as if the mirror has led Britomart to an illusionary vision. Britomart intimates to the nurse Glauce that in looking into the magical mirror she may have only seen an illusion. What she saw was not a man "nor other liuing wight" but characterizes what she saw as "But th'only shade and semblant of a knight" (III.ii.28.1,3). The reader is faced with a similar dilemma as Britomart herself—should her vision be understood as mere illusion? There is a barrier between what she did see and what she comprehends. At this point, what characterizes the magic she experiences is that what she has received is incomplete. Instead of a clear vision seen by a glass globe, there is mystery here, vision obscured that casts some doubt on the magic that is behind the mirror.

Earlier, when Britomart first looks into the mirror, she is characterized as not haven "lusted after any one," instead she is said to be "pure from blame of sinfull blot, / Yet wist her life at last must lincke in that same knot," thus establishing the kind of absolute chastity that she exemplifies (III.ii.23.7-9). She passes a moral test that allows her to proceed to the vision she is destined to have. After succumbing to an ill heart after the vision in the mirror, Britomart instead doubts her own virtue. She compares herself to the kind of passions found in various mythical characters with "Such shamefull lusts who loaths not, which depart / From course of nature and of modestie" (41.7-8). When she looks back at her experience of gazing into the mirror, she suspects that she has made a similar error as "Cephisus foolish child," Narcissus, in looking at a mere reflection and she "fonder loue a shade, the bodie farre exild" (44.6, 9). Britomart has confused her perception of this experience of looking as seeing a true reflection, but producing a false reaction to it. This mirror, however, contains a way of seeing that goes beyond what she can ascertain. By being smitten by the vision of Arthegall, Britomart receives a "truer vision of his essential quality than she could gain from a sight of the man himself" (Williams 94). Yet, with what providence has in store for Britomart, there is something deeper and more profound in play. Though it requires further knowledge, the act of Britomart gazing into Merlin's mirror can be seen as ekphrastic itself as seeing the image of Arthegall certainly as a profound effect on her. The whole thrust of her narrative and quest from this

seminal moment on "might be described as a response to ekphrastic *enargeia*" that the "image of a 'comely knight' is so lifelike and attractive that . . . she is compelled to pursue that desired object, to consummate her visual pleasure" (Grogan 120). This is an immensely compelling reading of Britomart's arc, though it seemingly ignores that her initial viewing caused great distress on its own. Indeed, this mirror creates tension between what she sees and her destiny as "Spenser's main use for the glass is to fix the romantic dilemma of the young heroine and precipitate a crisis in the narrative by introducing her 'self' to the alienating, divisive shadow of another" (Gross 147). Beyond just a narrative device to propel the plot into motion, Spenser lingers over the problems caused by seeing and perception.

On the surface, it appears that what Britomart has seen is subversive--she has seen one thing, but it has had an effect on her that she could not perceive. Instead, as Kathleen Williams notes, "Britomart has learned to love by 'fatall lore', and has seen Artegall's image not by chance of a wandering eye but by divine guidance" (94). Here, the mirror unveils truth so great that it requires even more knowledge on the part of the viewer. What is illusory is the appearance of chance. As Merlin later relates to Britomart, this event was meant to happen and it was not her

wandring eye,

Glauncing vnwares in charmed looking glas,

But the streight course of heauenly destiny,

Led with eternall prouidence (III.iii.24.1-3)

Britomart has a very visceral response to what she has seen, though it needs proper instruction to be set in the right understanding. In this early part of Britomart's story, the vision she encounters presents and even more encompassing truth than she can even fathom at first glance. What Britomart sees has an initial negative effect. It creates a problem for the reader or the one who is trying to perceive the allegory for its didactic merits. The example found in the allegory of Britomart works by observing and then dissecting the layers of the image so that the question of innocence and its relationship to ignorance is raised to whether the reader is "obliged to understand evil in order to resist it, or is it a kind of understanding a concession, an apology, and a risk to our purity?" (Dolven 166). The reader finds himself in a similar place as Britomart, also perhaps, questioning the true condition of his internal state and is "caught with in a net of contradictions, between suspicions of narcissism and feelings of otherness, between accident and necessity between true prophecy and empty illusion" (Gross 157). What is the line between the viewing of the image or receiving a visceral description through ekphrasis in its potential beneficial pedagogy and being fooled by it? Again, the necessity to receive instruction by images, drastically risks marring the innocence of ignorance in transforms one's

desire. If innocence is robbed, then perhaps the image viewed becomes idolatrous more than informative.

There is a stark difference between the folk magic and remedies that Glauce tries to use to cure Britomart and the kind of magic Merlin encompasses which leads to not only the restoration of Britomart, but generates even more understanding and insight. Out of the various methods Glauce tries on Britomart, "Nor herbes, nor charmes, nor counsel, that is chief / And choisest med'cine for sicke harts reliefe" could help Britomart (III.iii.5.4-5). Whatever skills or charms that the nurse tries on Britomart, they are aimed at being restorative and earthy. They seem rather trivial and quaint compared to the magic of Merlin. Glauce's "magic" includes her "taking thrise three hairs from off her head, / Them trebly breaded in a threefold lace, / And round about the pots mouth" which was filled with different herbs and entrails over which she casts spells over and asks Britomart to spit three times (ii.50.1-3). While Glauce tries to get Britomart to expel her heart-sickness, like demon to be exorcised, the tactics and magic Merlin that is imbued with is characterized by a creative power. The malady Glauce attempts to cure is perceived to be encountered by purely physical means. Though Merlin has mastery over the physical world, his remedy is largely spiritual.

In contrast to the earthy and ordinary means and magic of Britomart's nurse, the description of Merlin and his cave is nothing but ordinary. While Glauce's magical repertoire involves things above ground, Merlin begins underground. His cave is first described as being "Vnder a rocke that lyes a little space / From the swift *Barry*, tombling down apace, / Emongst the woodie hilles of *Dyneuowre* (III.iii.8.4-6). Here are the first intimations that his cave is not a dark, dank hole in the ground, but something that contains some bursting energy that starts with the river that runs by it. Merlin's cave is not dead or silent with inactivity, but there is the "noise of yron chaines, / And brazen Caudrons thou shalt rombling heare" as well as "loud strokes, and ringing sounds, / From vnder that deepe Rocke most horribly rebounds" (9.2-3, 8-9). There is life and much activity carried out by Merlin's "thousand sprights" that fill out that cave. It marks it as a place where things are being made, not slips down to decay. Merlin's cave and the nature of his magic, being full of verve, noise, and action, and as Cheney sees these as evoking the womb and childbirth where "by which humans transform sight and desire into understanding," fully typifies the notion of this magic being something that brings forth knowledge and life, rather than destroying it (16-17). There is a supernatural end to his magic that Glauce does not fully comprehend and thusly treats the wrong way. Merlin's generative and creative magic is oriented to get rid of the "impulses of self-deception" and instead "drives to revelation" where promotes "vision undeflected" rather than a

distorted one (Giamatti 120). Akin the bulb of a plant under the ground, Merlin's cave and powers work from beneath to create new growth and life. Also, the image of Merlin's cave undergoing massive earthworks evokes parallels with the image of mines searching for valuables in the depths of the earth. As his cave is being worked hard in order to extract its riches, Merlin's own "prophecies of history are described like the gold, the spoils, which Mammon hoards underground" (Helfer 227). These treasures, however, help mark and establish the future rule and reign of the English kingdom and especially Elizabeth as the chaste queen imaged in the character of Britomart.

The idea of how Merlin's magic is marked by how it generates knowledge and life can be seen throughout the episodes where Britomart encounters his magic. Before Spenser recounts anything of Merlin's own magic, he prefaces the whole episode by stating that by looking into this mirror, for Britomart there "did grow her first engraffed paine; / Whose root and stalke so bitter yet did tast, / That but the fruit more sweetnesse did containe" (17.5-7). The botanical images of grafting, roots and of fruit that are presented, speak of the passage of time where a seed may be planted and then sprout which produces later sweet and great rewards. Preceding the passage where Britomart seemingly misreads what she sees before gaining grounded knowledge from Merlin, it speaks to how "because of the potential for misunderstanding and formless multiplicity is increased, the poet is more deeply concerned with themes of balance, with concepts of deep-

rootedness, imaged in trees familial and natural" (Giamatti 68). There is order and precision with these events driven by destiny that occur beyond what the characters or the reader at this point may ascertain. As Britomart responds in reaction to what she sees in the mirror, there is more going on than what is initially perceived. What is first seen and presented as a "root and stalke so bitter", later is reversed and propels Britomart to progressive action.

Merlin continues the botanical trope as Britomart and Glauce seek his knowledge to cure Britomart. He reveals the true meaning of what Britomart sees in the mirror by explaining that her grief is like how

> all things excellent begin,
> And eke enrooted deepe must be that Tree,
> Whose big embodied braunches shall not lin,
> Till they to heauens hight forth stretched bee.
> For from thy wombe a famous Progenie
> Shall spring (III.iii.22.1-6)

His instruction of the "fruit" of Britomart's love-sickness here will be the greatness found in the offspring of herself and Arthegall, moves Britomart past an understanding of her pain being something passive that was influenced by looking into the mirror but of a larger truth that destiny has set in motion. By going to the maker of the device that has given Britomart her vision, "Merlin teaches her . . .that love is not a thing to be passively suffered, but an opportunity for responsible

action and personal growth" (Williams 93). Instead of Britomart learning that the mirror has revealed how she would be deceived, as if she needed to be alerted to a secret invasion to her chastity, Merlin unfolds the lore of the historical Arthegall and glory that will follow after him. This true sight goes beyond what see first perceives and gives her a perspective of what is growing and developing within herself. Britomart's knowledge, however, is passive in nature.

The sight of Arthegall affects her deeply, but she requires Merlin's own knowledge and foresight to complete it. Merlin being the maker of the device of sight has a unique position to be able to teach Britomart that an aspect of this love that will lead to chastity is not passive. In a way, it is Merlin's creative powers that propels and sustains Britomart's actions for the remainder of her narrative, he "seems to be able to negotiate such gap with enviable authority, not only distinguishing contingency from compulsion but also specifying the exact agency of control" (Gross 152). It is on account of Merlin's ingenuity through magic and wisdom in foresight is able to point Britomart to a more clear perspective on the image of Arthegall that she has seen. In parallel, the poet in the didactic tutelage of allegory that is able to correctly unpack the vision that his own creative powers are able to show. Indeed, "both magic and allegory, then, mirror each other as arts: both work through imagination to unite physical and spiritual reality" (Cheney 12). Within the narrative, magic has allowed Britomart to eventually receive correct vision and have a tangible object of her love in order to

keep chaste as well having the prophetic words of Merlin to inform her vision in order to motivate her actions. In this way, it is the force of the images and language of the poem in their descriptions that fuels Spenser's didactic approach. It is through the visual and poetic language that "the sheer, mute energy from and by which we project new forms, new worlds in the mind to sustain us in the world (Giamatti 120). The poet's aim in instructive purposes is for allegory to provide these ekphrastic images to teach virtue applicable in the reader's daily life. Just as the vision concerning Arthegall propels Britomart back into the world and the subsequent knowledge of the fate of the kingdom allows her to keep her battle-tested virtue safe.

The actual object of the mirror plays an important role in the various layers of meaning that could be teased out of an allegory such as rich as Spenser's. In fact it can be seen as a continuation of the "mirror-for-princes" literary genre of instruction from the medieval. These works were typically "given to a young and inexperienced ruler (or potential ruler) so that he could learn how to govern well and avoid problems both within and without his kingdom" (Dark 12). The similarities are striking as the literal device of the mirror in the poetic work is of older design and made to assist royals in their governance. Likewise, Spenser embarks on a parallel project devising his own poetic mirror in which to instruct young gentlemen. There is a clear confluence of the appropriation of older methods of instruction as Spenser reaches back into

the medieval courtly tradition to dress his early modern work. It is interesting in the very book of *The Faerie Queene* that marks a stylistic change to more loosely connected episodes that are punctuated by the images that are described within them, that Spenser introduces an actual mirror into the narrative. He knows the power of the type of instruction he is offering and wants to make it clear that utilizing an actual mirror in Britomart's instruction, it works by "intensifying the effectiveness of the trope nearly to the level of the mythic form through juxtaposition of the literal and the metaphorical" (Dark 9). Contrasted with Merlin's own scoffing of Glauce's folk remedies for Britomart's love-sickness, it is clear that the poet is elevating and privileging this form of transmission of knowledge. The effectiveness of this method is not without its own problems, as Britomart is wildly affected to the images presented to her. It highlights the immense power of not only of what is seen but the one who has the power to create or describe them.

Moving into Britomart's visual experiences at the house of Busyrane, she is confronted with various scenes that test the strength of her virtue. There are notions of the overtly idolatrous that threaten her morality, but also question to what extent does this particular poetic project require so much attention to visual descriptions. As Britomart comes across the knight Scudamore and he relates how the Busyrane has imprisoned the object of his love, Amoret, the description of his evil lair contrasts distinctly with that of Merlin's. Busyrane has Amoret

held captive “By strong enchauntments and blacke Magicke leare,/ Hath in a dungeon deepe her close embard,/ And many dreadfull feends hath pointed to her gard” (III.xi.16.7-9). Instead of the cave of Merlin, Busyrane does his business within a “dungeon deepe” and instead of numerous sprites working in that cave, “dreadfull feends are in employ. Busyrane’s “blacke Magicke” makes him analogous to Merlin. What separates the two is not necessarily that the magic is questionable, but the particular ends to which the power is used by each. The conceit of magic not only functions because the narrative is set in faerie land, but also by looking at both the supernatural forms of good and evil, “magic is useful to Spenser . . . because it distinguishes them mysteriously, becoming thereby an apt image for the mysteries of the universe and the dilemmas of the human soul” (Cheney 11). Magic as a conceit opens up a window into the inner workings of the heart, especially in a book primarily concerned with the virtue of chastity. Merlin’s magic not only gives sight, but his wisdom grants true understanding. The magic of Busyrane is only enchanting in order to seduce Amoret and eventually to attempt to enrapture Britomart. His evil magic seeks to overwhelm and intoxicate, especially through the visual as Britomart ventures into his castle.

As Britomart is able to penetrate the supernatural flames that surround and guard the house, the interior foyer is described having been decorated

With goodly arras of great maiesty,

Wouen with gold and silke so close and nere,
That the rich metall lurked priuily,
As faining to be hid from enuious eye (III.xi.28.2-5)

Where this "rich metall" was able to be seen, it "shone vnwillingly;/ Like a discoloured Snake, whose hidden snares/ Through the greene gras his long bright burnisht backe [declares" (28.7-9). Compared to the wondrous glass that Merlin creates which will always reflect and give sight, Busyrane's castle is characterized by being wrought with such "rich metall" that does not want to be shown. Instead, the construction of the very house appears to be deceitful and not wanting its true colors to be shown, but rather appears like the scaley skin of a snake hiding in the grass, seemingly ready to strike at a moment's notice.

The woven tapestries that can be seen in the foyer of the house have upon them

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; (III.xi.29.1-4)

The ensuing description of these tapestries recounts various scenes from Ovid, specifically those out of *The Metamorphoses* and of characters changing figure and appearances. Not only do these tapestries an attempt to conceal the true nature of the composition of the house, these illustrated stories lead deeper and further

into the castle showing duplicity. The images of "loue, and all of lusty-hed" work to influence the viewer to be tempted to participate in similar acts, much like the tapestries within the Castle Joyeous earlier in the book. From what the reader is able to take away from these descriptions of negative morals and unchaste scenes it is that while Merlin's magic works to ultimately provide understanding, Busyrane's is to subvert and test that knowledge and drive one to base passion.

What the tapestries within the Malecasta and Busyrane's castles differ from the images scene from Merlin's mirror is that while they are not explicit in visual content, they are crucial in charging the atmosphere. The couches and lecherous beds seem to spill out of the tapestries into the physical space of the Castle Joyeous and the those within Busyrane's castle culminate not only in the statue of Cupid but also leap into life with the pageants and masques that are shown to Britomart. All temptations either lead to worship the flesh in unchaste pleasure or to bow to the idol that is the deity behind such immoral impulses. What baffles Britomart within the space inside Busyrane's castle is that it has an eerie stillness though despite

> The goodly ordinance of this rich place,
> Did greatly wonder ne could satisfe
> Her greedy eyes with gazing a long space,
> But more she meruaild that no footings trace,
> Nor wight appear'd, but wastefull emptinesse,

And solemne silence ouer all that place;

Straunge thing it seem'd, that none was to possesse

So rich pureuyance (III.xi.53.2-8)

Again, compared to Merlin's magic cave that contains the "ghastly noise of yron chaines", "brazen Caudrons thou shalt rombling heare", and because of the raucous work of his "thousand sprights" there are "oftentimes great grones, and grieuous stounds" (III.iii.9.2, 3, 4, 6). The sound coming from Merlin's cave is full of industry and creative forces exerting themselves whereas the desolation and silence found within the wall of Busyrane's castle seem to seek to drain the vitality of the visitor. Festooned with such lustful depictions, the "vast, silent emptiness" of his castle "is an index . . .to the hollowness of man's carnality and pride" (Giamatti 100). It is the contrast between a good force occupying a natural space while an evil one has built an edifice meant to entice and entrap. There is time and space to really study and take in the tapestries on Britomart's part. Like the image of the snake hiding in the grass, the malicious intent to seduce Britomart to depart from her chastity is not immediately charging, but quiet and waiting in calculation. In a sense, Busyrane's magic forces the image on the viewer (Cheney 21). There is not all the busyness and the din of workmen distracting Britomart from looking at the tapestries and in time, the masques open right in front of her, very much unlike the cave of Merlin hidden away amidst the natural world.

The narrative within the castle seems to pause further and take keen interest in describing the statue and idol of Cupid that all the tapestries lead to. The reader acts alongside Britomart as both simultaneously take in the work. She gazes at

an Altar built of pretious stone,
Of passing valew, and of great renownme,
On which there stood an Image all alone,
Of massy gold, which with his owne light shone (III.xi.47.2-5)

The poet extenuates that this is an object of devotion for those who dwell in that house (though they are nowhere to be seen) and before this graven image of Cupid Britomart stands

amazed,
Ne seeing could her wonder satisfe,
But euer more and more vpon it gazed,
The whiles the passing brightnes her fraile sences dazed. (49.6-9)

Britomart's test is whether to submit to the wondrous images and scenes before her or to remember and act on the vision and knowledge provided by Merlin. While beholding this statue of Cupid, she is faced with the opportunity to join the other members of this house and bow to this idol or recall the vision of Arthegall that has propelled her quest. There is an underlying sense of uneasiness with unorthodox and pagan worship. Framed within the surrounding context of the

theology of the Reformation, “the idol is a false revelation, blinded and blinding” and that its image is something “made deceptive by its worshipers, who are themselves turned from true worshipers into fetishists as empty as their object” (Gross 161). A stern reading that perhaps comes with a requirement for the reader to pause. Once more, there is an astounding image that is being described before the reader of whether there is such a thing as too much imagery being described.

Can the language of ekphrasis and the poem itself become an object of idolatry just as much as beautiful and costly works of art that Britomart encounters become a temptation for her to give up her hard fought chastity? The masques and pageants found in Busyrane’s house, with the other visual sights, cause Britomart to at times pause and gaze, caught up in the magic of the spectacles. The masques, not only come with figure leading the processions with “a branch of laurel bore,/ With comely haueor and count’nance sage,/ Yclad in costly garments, fit for tragicke Stage”, but is followed by the rest of the company, finally seen, accompanied by

> a most delitious harmony,
> In full straunge notes was sweetly heard to sound,
> That the rare sweetnesse of the melody
> The feeble senses wholly did confound(III.xii.3.7-9, 6.1-4).

Here, the pleasure encompasses more than just sight but is full sensual experience; with the masque mellifluous sounds also fill the air. Along with the visual, language shares in with the musical. Both can be very compelling aspects to language to sway an individual. However, these pageants and masques that Britomart encounters with all their grand theater "can be empty and deceptive as pages (or books) can be deceiving or misleading, as language itself, notoriously unstable, can destroy as well as create" (Giamatti 86). There is the potential that poetry itself can be overwhelming and intoxicating and carry more power than is recognized, especially in an allegory that carries so much force and describes so many images and visions to the reader as in *The Faerie Queene*.

It should be no surprise that there is such a confluence in potency of the poetic image and magic it can be used to describe as the use of magic relates to allegory in the way they are both metaphysical in nature and relate to the mind and the spirit (Cheney 21). Even the mere act of reading and delving into the complex layers of the allegory works to instruct the reader by providing a kind of safe sensual experience. There is a detachment from the poem that mitigates its more heady attributes. The poetic force works so well to teach and elucidate moral instruction by affecting the spirit.

Ultimately, there is a blend of the magic and the rational that ground Spenser's allegory, even when there issues arise from its agenda. The interplay between the risk of ruining innocence and gaining enough knowledge of evil to be

instructed well in morality creates a tension that asks whether Spenser is in full control of his visual descriptions. If each scene that is filled with fantastic and dangerous images found within the allegory is meant to simply sit the reader down and instruct him through rote learning, then perhaps the project is undermined and breaks down since any exposure to immoral and alluring imagery becomes an opportunity for the reader to be lured away into sensuality, especially in discussing the advocating of the specific virtue of chastity. Instead, it is the overall sense of force that the allegory delivers that is meant to be instrumental in instructing the potential gentleman. It is Spenser's trust and use of the power of language to operate similarly to the magical images he relays to the reader that is the driving tool. Yes, the reader needs to be careful in the initial observation of the text, but it is in the gazing at these images, even with the moments of tension of whether or not the image being presented can be fully apprehended or may have some ill effect, that draws the reader deeper into the power of *The Faerie Queene*. As some wonderful images and scenes that describe extraordinarily artistic works may cause discomfort and uneasiness, akin to Britomart's initial response to her vision in Merlin's mirror, it takes receiving the entire picture, not just a part to complete the vision. Spenser, as the reader's own mage and Merlin, both a master craftsman and a magical sage is able to supply the entire landscape through his entire allegorical project in *The Faerie Queene.*

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