"Mutual Comfort":

Courtly Love and Companionate Marriage

in the Poetry of Sir Philip Sidney and Edmund Spenser

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The interaction between courtly love poetry and the development of companionate marriage has received little critical attention. Rather, critics of courtly love poetry focus on authorial ambition and self-presentation. This paper explores how the revision of the courtly love genre in the poetry of Sir Philip Sidney and Edmund Spenser participated within the societal transformation toward companionate marriage. The individualized female characters in their poetry shatter courtly stereotypes, but the relationship options presented either fragment the sequence, as in Sidney's Astrophil and Stella, *or enable it to drive forward to completion, as in Spenser's* Amoretti *and* Epithalamion. *I argue the significant innovations in Sidney's treatment of the female love object paradoxically drive the desire in his sequence and ultimately undo it, given the lack of a pragmatic relationship outcome. That work lays the foundation for confrontation with courtly love in Spenser, in Book III of the* Faerie Queene, *and then the presentation of a reciprocal relationship in the* Amoretti *that flourishes in, later, the companionate marriage in* Epithalamion.

Critical analysis of Renaissance courtly love poetry entrenches the conclusion that it is really about male ambition and self-presentation rather than emotional love. In articulating these arguments, gender issues either disappear or take center stage only as a critique levied against the poets participating in the subjugation of women. Arthur Marotti points out that a sonnet sequence "wittily reconverts the language of ambition into the language of love."[1] The refashioning of language distorts love poetry's investment in emotional love.

1   Arthur Marotti, "'Love is Not Love': Elizabethan Sonnet Sequences and the Social Order," *ELH* 49, no 2 (Summer 1982): 402.

Elizabeth Heale sees the courtly love tradition as an opportunity for the male poet's "self-presentation."[2] She concludes that the issues at stake are "masculine vulnerability and loss of the gathered self."[3] The authorial status of the poet enables the resumption of male dominance. In other words, as Catherine Bates explains, the "poet's self-abasement before the venerated object of his praise is merely a posture."[4]

In this critical tradition, the poetry of Sir Phillip Sidney and Edmund Spenser typifies the assertion of male superiority. The above-mentioned critics cite Sidney's political motives and growing frustration with Queen Elizabeth. They view Spenser's sonnet sequence *Amoretti* and his marriage encomium *Epithalamion* as an example of the male figure seeking to control his bride[5] and advance his personal agenda. While these critics rightly focus on the relationships between the male poet and female beloved in the poetry of Sidney and Spenser, they fail to account for how these poets deploy the language of love. Both Sidney and Spenser appropriate and revise the courtly love tradition, and both present individualized female characters. Ultimately, Sidney's poetic innovations are interrupted and limited by the intrusion of a socially impractical relationship option. However, Spenser's texts uniquely personalize beloved and lover playing a game modeled on courtly love as their relationship develops to the point that both choose to commit in a companionate marriage, a union based on love, acceptance, friendship, and a greater recognition of female value.

While historians agree on the increasing prevalence of companionate marriage from the late medieval period through the Re-

2   Elizabeth Heale, "Misogyny and the Complete Gentleman in Early Elizabethan Printed Miscellanies," *The Yearbook of English Studies* 33 (2003): 235.

3   Heale, 243.

4   Catherine Bates, "Astrophil and the Manic Wit of the Abject Male," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 41, no 1 (Winter 2001): 2.

5   For this argument and a demonstration of the majority tradition accepting this position, see Judith Owens, "The Poetics of Accommodation in Spenser's 'Epithalamion,'" *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900I* 40, no 1 (Winter 2000): 41-62.

naissance, many questions remain concerning how the transition away from an economic model of marriage gained popular acceptance.[6] How did companionate marriage as a model for emotional investment and love come to replace more economic models of marriage as exchange of goods and land? Examining the treatment of relationships in popular literature provides a partial answer to this question. In Spenser's poetry, the prioritization of love and personalized depiction of the female love object cohere in a defense of companionate marriage as opposed to a more mercantilist or courtly love model.

I argue that even though the critique of Sidney ignores the significant innovations in his treatment of the female love object, that criticism does highlight the fact that the outcome in *Astrophil and Stella* does little to advance reciprocal relationships. However, in contrast, Spenser, in Book III of the *Faerie Queene*, first provokes problems with courtly love relationships and then legitimates the alternative of love as an emotional experience. The *Amoretti* further develops this alternative in the concord of courtship, and that alternative flourishes in the hermeneutic privileging of companionate marriage in *Epithalamion*.

Courtly Love and Sir Phillip Sidney

Critics have hotly debated the definition of what exactly constitutes courtly love poetry, and the role of the lady is a central component of that debate.[7] While Jacques Lacan and later critics like Bates and Sheila Cavanaugh identify courtly love poetry as synonymous with inequality, Sidney's presentation and treatment of Stella undermines

6   See Martha Howell, "The Properties of Marriage in Late Medieval Europe: Commercial Wealth and the Creation of Modern Marriage," in *Love, Marriage, and Family Ties in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. Isabel Davis, Miriam Muller, and Sarah Rees Jones (Belgium: Brepols, 2003) 17. She defines companionate marriage as associated with "sexual desire, mutuality, friendship, and exclusivity" (17). This concept will be more fully addressed in sections two and three.

7   See Janina Traxler, "Courtly and Uncourtly Love in the Prose *Tristan*," in *Literary Aspects of Courtly Culture*, eds. Donald Maddox and Sara Sturm-Maddox (Rochester: Boydell and Brewer, 1994), 162, where she says these are a natural attraction for the beloved, a belief that the lover is unworthy of the beloved, and "a tendency for the characterization of the love to rise above mere carnality to something more spiritual." See Bernard O'Donoghue, *The Courtly Love Tradition* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1982). He presents a more expansive definition. He says that the attraction/love results in the lover becoming the lady's servant. This master/slave dynamic plays a central role in most definitions of courtly love and particularly in critical approaches focusing on power and gender dynamics in the courtly love tradition. O'Donoghue also points out the key feature of separation or distance as frustrating the potential relationship between the lover and lady.

the validity of this critical conclusion. Similarly, Marotti and Louis Montrose in the New Historicist tradition symptomatically treat Sidney's political motives as evidence for his use of poetry to support his self-presentation. However, Sidney interrogates the Petrarchan tradition to recuperate Petrarch from the empty stereotypes in other poetry sequences. In so doing, he depicts Stella as highly personalized and affective, a woman both desired and desiring. Ultimately, however, the aforementioned critics do highlight a central fracture in both Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella* and the traditional courtly love genre; they sublimate anxiety about impossible relationship options. In the pervasive concern with shame and public perception concerning an illicit (adulterous) relationship, both Astrophil and Stella end the sequence as emotionally ambivalent, isolated, and fragmented. While none of the aforementioned critics examine the impossibility of pragmatic relationship options as leading to anxiety, their critical readings aid my effort to realign the treatment of Sidney to recognize the innovations he brings to courtly love poetry as well as acknowledge the frustrated ending.

In *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, Jacques Lacan uses the courtly love genre to represent the effort to control behavior and figure frustrated desire. He reads courtly love as defining an ideal "to be found at the origin of a moral code, including a whole series of modes of behavior, of loyalties, measures, services, and exemplary forms of conduct."[8] For Lacan, courtly love's connection with a moral code means that desire and anxiety are inextricably intertwined. Any code that states what is allowed simultaneously marks that which is not allowed, and in the realm of erotics, the transgressive nature of desire complicates any attempt to ascribe to an acceptable code.[9] His explanations of sexuality and identity shed light on how courtly love attempts to create a fictionalized, femi-

8 Jaques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959-1960: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book VII*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Dennis Porter (New York: Norton, 1992), 145.

9 Lacan, 151-153.

nized love object that "stands in for male lack."[10] The twisting of the language of love to express political goals and male desire centers the emotion in the sequence on the poet, implying that the female subject—both as topic of the sequence and person under the domain of the sovereign poet—is incapable of love. However, in his treatment of Petrarchanism, politics, and Stella, Sidney revises courtly love poetry.

Just as the invocation of Petrarchan tropes ranges from authentic to (un)intentionally parodic in the poetry, critics often confuse inaccurate assumptions about Petrarchanism with what Petrarch really wrote. As a result, critics like Marotti and Montrose have labeled Sidney's poetry as Petrarchan and sacrificed it on the altar of masculine lack. Their symptomatic treatment of Sidney often highlights his political and authorial projections to the detriment of the female love object. All of these critical assumptions regarding Petrarch and Sidney depend upon an inexact definition of Petrarchanism. To understand how Sidney, as Patricia Berrahou Phillippy states, "both struggles against Petrarchism and points toward its limits,"[11] we must look at how Sidney actually returns to the psychological ambivalence and high degree of personalization in Petrarch originally.

Sidney's sequence consciously avoids and even parodies Petrarchan stereotypes while also returning to the original emotional depth in Petrarch's *Canzoniere*. In sonnet 15, Sidney criticizes his own and others' reliance on stereotyped tropes:

10   Bates, 7. See also Neal Goldstein, "*Love's Labor's Lost* and the Renaissance Vision of Love," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 25, no 3 (Summer 1974): 339. What he calls anti-feminism depends largely upon what Lacan sees as characteristic of courtly love in which "nothing seems to point to what might be called the advancement of women or indeed their emancipation" (147). These readings focus on aspects of the courtly love genre as deployed by some writers, but as I will argue, this blanket approach does not properly apply to Sidney, who revises courtly love poetry.

11   Patricia Berrahou Phillippy, *Love's Remedies: Recantation and Renaissance Lyric Poetry* (Lewisberg: Bucknell UP, 1995), 142. I am in debt to her thoughts on the recasting of Petrarchanism, but I use it to support my argument that Sidney fundamentally changes the courtly love tradition to allow the genre to change from a lyric form for political and social purposes to a genre of poetry about and for the emotional experience of mutual love.

You that poor Petrarch's long deceased woes,

With new-born sighs and denizen'd wit do sing.

You take wrong ways, those far-fet helps be such,

As do bewray a want of inward touch:

And sure at length stol'n goods do come to light (7-11).[12]

Sidney is aware of the ease with which Petrarch's woes can be domesticated, "denizen'd," and in that process of appropriation, the authenticity of Petrarch's original is lost, becoming nothing more than "stol'n goods." Just as the first sonnet ends with an admonition to "look in thy heart and write" after worrying about the accomplishments of others, sonnet 15 consciously separates the empty copying of Petrarchan stereotypes common to late sixteenth-century England and the writing of love poetry.

Sidney distinguishes between crude imitation and creative emulation of Petrarch. In sonnet 71, he uses Rime 248 from Petrarch wherein Petrarch lauds Laura's beauty and virtue as the perfection of nature and heaven. Sidney also celebrates Stella's beauty and virtue. However, Sidney's unexpected ending diverges from the Petrarchan model: "So while thy beauty draws the heart to love, / As fast as thy Virtue bends that love to good: / 'But ah,' Desire still cries, 'give me some food'" (12-15). By drawing upon what Richard Strier calls the "sustained insistence on the importance and value of the bodily"[13] in Petrarch and adding a spin uniquely Sidneyan, this ending demonstrates a poet interrogating a great model (Petrarch) to emulate that which he admires while injecting his own creativity. In this way, Sidney recuperates Petrarchanism from the empty stereotypes. Just as Petrarch struggles with attraction to Laura and

12   Sir Phillip Sidney, "Astrophil and Stella," in *Sir Philip Sidney: Selected Writings*, ed. Richard Dutton (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1987). All Sidney citations from this text.

13   Richard Strier, "The Refusal to be Judged in Petrarch and Shakespeare," in *A Companion to Shakespeare's Sonnets*, ed. Michael Schoenfeldt (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 73. I am indebted debt to Strier's reformulation of Petrarch and clarification of Petrarchanism. Without Strier's work on Petrarch, I would have read Petrarch and, therefore, Petrarchanism in Sidney and Spenser, with the same stereotypical bias that equates Petrarch with distilled tropes and positions woth little in common with what Petrarch actually wrote.

awareness of the transgressive element of his attraction to a married woman, Sidney explores this same psychological ambivalence in regard to his desire, concluding "Then Love is sin, and let me sinful be" (14.14). Petrarch explores the tension between his desire and his admission of the sinfulness of desire, and Sidney is most purely Petrarchan when he presents the potentially transgressive component of the relationship between Astrophil and Stella. Therefore, Sidney revises the courtly love genre by both critiquing the hollowing out of Petrarch's poetry through inaccurate copying and directly engaging with the emotional valences of Petrarch.

The dimensions of desire in *Astrophil and Stella* are further marked by the intersection of desire for Stella (and Stella for Astrophil) with politics. Maureen Quilligan claims that "it is the author's total control over Stella as a (silent) character in his plot which enacts his masculine, social mastery."[14] She sees the repeated references to Sidney's political career as allowing him to complain about career frustrations and posture for preferment through using a falsely professed love for Stella. For example, she reads sonnet 30's references to "the Turkish new-moone," "Poles' right kind means," "Muscovy," and other locations of his political service as unnecessarily distracting the reader from Stella in order to prioritize Sidney's political career. However, all of these sonnets about political frustrations and activities also profess a willingness to suffer greater political disadvantage for Stella. Indeed, they frame the political ambition as coming not from Sidney/Astrophil, but "Others [. . .] think that I think state errors to redress" (23.7-8). On closer examination, there is little evidence for the criticism of Sidney's careerist ambitions. Instead, there is an acute awareness of the political consequences of this love and (most of the time) a willingness to suffer those consequences: "I see my course to lose myself doth bend: / I see and yet no greater sorrow take, / Than that I lose no more for Stella's sake" (18.12-14). In placing desire for Stella against self-ruin and social pressure, Sidney revises not only the courtly love tradition but also undermines its supposed purpose of prescribing

14   Quoted in Phillipy, 157.

behavior for the aristocracy. Friends advise him "that to my birth I owe / Nobler desires, least else that friendly foe, / Great expectation, wear a train of shame" (21.6-8). The weight of the aristocratic order opposes the transgressive relationship desired in the sequence, and by recognizing the cost of shame, Sidney's poetry ceases to support that aristocratic order and begins to challenge it. Politics certainly texture Sidney's poetry, but not in the way Quilligan assumes. Sidney's political experience makes his willingness to defy the advice of friends and accept the political consequences more striking, because he knows what could happen.

Further, Stella's own resistance is actually the product of a worried woman aware of social expectations. She echoes the advice of his friends. and resists her desire in the face of social pressure:

> I joyed, but straight thus wat'red was my wine,
>
> That love she did, but loved a Love not blind,
>
> Which would not let me, whom she loved, decline
>
> From nobler course, fit for my birth and mind (62.5-8).

The mutual awareness of political pressure and expectations of class reverse the conclusion that the sonnet sequence works to advance Sidney's political career; rather, the sequence testifies to moments wherein he willingly chooses to stymie it. These moments not only revise but undermine the courtly love tradition in such a way that the emotional struggle accompanying desire between two people takes center stage.

Related to the sophisticated political valences in the sequence, the presentation of Stella as a speaking, desiring, reasoning lady most directly challenges the courtly love tradition. As we will see, however, the frustration and fragmentation of the sequence's ending relates to the pragmatic difficulties accompanying the proposed relationship. The intrusion of practicality largely depends upon the identity of Stella as the married Lady Rich, which Sid-

ney repeatedly references but especially notes in sonnet 35 when he puns on the word "rich" and follows it with "naming my Stella's name" (10).[15] Critics have attacked Stella's voicedness "as part of Astrophil's project of valorizing the voice of the male poet by manipulating and silencing Stella's voice"[16] or as merely participating in a social order that allows women to speak only in relation to men. However, the actual sequence does not support these arguments.

Sonnet 57 describes Stella's empathy and a point of change in which she begins to reciprocate Astrophil's desire. He hopes to catch her unguarded so that his moans and complaints will induce her momentary sympathy. Instead, she internalizes his pain and shares in his expression:

> She heard my plaints, and did not only hear,
>
> But them (so sweet is she) most sweetly sing,
>
> With that fair breast making woe's darkness clear:
>
> A pretty case—I hoped her to bring
>
> To feel my griefs, and she with face and voice
>
> So sweets my pains, that my pains me rejoice (9-14).

In this moment of emotional exchange, Astrophil and Stella are united in experiencing and projecting feelings. Theresa Brennan would call this the "transmission of affect," by which she means "that the emotions or affects of one person, and the enhancing or depressing energies these affects entail, can enter into another."[17] Brennan explores how the transmission of affect influences the development of relationships. When affect leads to a synchronization

15   Walter Friedrich, "The Stella of Astrophil," *ELH* 3, no 2 (Jan 1936): 114, argues that Stella has been misinterpreted as Lady Rich. His evidence for this claim is the dedication of the "Doleful Lay of Clorinda" to Sidney's widow. However, since 1936, his position has been disproved and the identity of Lady Rich as Stella solidified. Sidney had earlier (1570s) courted Penelope Devereux before her marriage to Lord Rich.

16   Phillipy, 158.

17   Theresa Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2004), 3.

of feelings and emotions, the reciprocity of that exchange creates a strong emotional bond. Using Brennan, I argue that the exchange of affect in Sidney's sequence marks a mutual relationship that transcends the criticism of both the courtly love genre from Lacan and also the specific criticism of Sidney as careerist, misogynist, or manipulative. In addition to the example of sonnet 57, there are multiple references to Stella's expressions and the emotions signified.[18] Careful attention to the lady's emotional state and the perception of that state by the lover (and vice versa) personalizes both the lady and the relationship.

In spite of these innovations, the intrusion of transgressive desire mitigates Sidney's revision by reinforcing the dominant view of aristocratic marriage. With both Sidney and Lady Rich as married aristocrats, adultery not only challenges their social order, especially from Lady Rich, but also places paradoxical limits on the relationship. Broken marriage bonds on the part of the woman violated the marriage contract, a largely economical property arrangement. The emotional reciprocity of the sonnet sequence looks forward to the kind of relationship Emma Lipton calls "sacramental marriage," which I will argue is quite similar to companionate marriage,[19] but given that Astrophil and Stella experience this reciprocity in a relationship without the potential outcome of marriage, that reciprocity ultimately prefigures their undoing. The transgressive desire

18   See sonnet 66 where "Stella's eyes sent to me the beams of bliss" (11) and also sonnet 86 where her "change of looks" (1) is lamented because that transmission of affect (dissatisfaction) signifies pain and uncertainty for the relationship. Multiple other examples exist to support this point.

19   Emma Lipton, *Affections of the Mind: The Politics of Sacramental Marriage in Late Medieval English Literature* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 2007), 3. Lipton defines sacramental marriage as "based in love and mutual consent" (3). This model of marriage closely parallels what I refer to as companionate marriage. Her formulation of sacramental marriage as responsive to the aristocracy's hierarchical model of marriage tightly bound to economic concerns supports my later argument that the rise of companionate marriage reformulated social views concerning marriage and the women involved in those marriages. Indeed, sacramental and companionate marriage undermine dominant models and require mutuality. In so doing, these models aid in the revision of accepted views of women in those marriages. While neither sacramental nor companionate marriage creates a state of gender equality, both, I will argue, are essential steps toward the demands for equality later.

that drives the sequence also collapses the relationship as the implications of that transgressive desire intrude in the form of anxiety, alienation, and shame.

The sonnets most interested in naming Lady Rich as Stella are also most invested in the potential adultery and lover's jealousy. In sonnet 24, Sidney indirectly speaks of his opposition, Lady Rich's husband:

> But that rich fool, who by blind Fortune's lot
>
> The richest gem of love and life enjoys,
>
> And can with foul abuse such beauties blot;
>
> Let him, deprived of sweet but unfelt joys,
>
> (Exil'd for aye from those high treasures, which
>
> He knows not) grow in only folly rich (9-14).

A dichotomy is implied between the rich fool and wise lover who appreciates the lady's real riches when the fool cannot in spite of possessing her. This sentiment is echoed at the end of sonnet 37 where the lady "Rich in all beauties" is celebrated for all things except that "Rich she is" (6,14). Ironically, the lady's label of Rich by virtue of her husband's name makes her most un-wealthy in that her desire is bounded by the contract of marriage.

In the three songs in which Stella's actual voice is quoted, there is an underlying concern with shame and illicit desire as defined in relation to marriage. In the fourth song, Astrophil argues that "Jealousy itself doth sleep" (10) and "Fear not else, none can us spy" (22) to convince Stella to "Take me to thee, and thee to me" (5). Who else would jealousy be then the same "rich fool" of sonnet 24? The insidious presence of the lady's husband as limiting the desire of both Astrophil and Stella corrodes the progression of the relationship. As Stella ends each stanza with negation—"No, no, no, no, my dear, let be"—she mediates between the transgressive desire of the

lovers and the intruding limits of her marriage. Even in the eighth song when Astrophil and Stella "Did for mutual comfort meet," (6) her oppression is that "Her fair neck a foul yoke bare" (10). A yoke and marriage are commonly associated in the Bible as well as in early modern sermons and literature. Hence, the oppressive presence of Stella's marriage both drives the transgressive desire she and Astrophil share and places limits on it. In this song she again refuses Astrophil's advances, urges him to stop loving her, and then leaves him at the song's end. As the sequence progresses to the end, Stella continues to profess love but refuse to exceed the boundaries of her 'yoke.' As the two become both psychologically and physically alienated from each other, the transgressive nature of their desire sabotages the tenuous relationship the two had built. With this fragmentation, Sidney's sequence ends in a very similar place to other courtly love poetry, which is why many of the aforementioned critics include Sidney when identifying ambitious masculinity and misogyny in courtly love poetry.

The courtly love tradition contains virtually no viable relationship options, which is a *prima facie* characteristic of the genre. Sidney significantly revises the tradition in regard to Petrarchanism, politics, and the personalization of Stella, but Stella really has to choose between adultery or remaining the cruel, resistant stereotype. Without pragmatic options, Sidney's sequence participates in the courtly love paradigm. However, Sidney's innovations figure the possibility of an alternative poetic approach that centers the lyric form on the emotional experience of mutual love without the component of transgressive desire. Spenser's depiction of relationships in Book 3 of the *Faerie Queene* takes up where Sidney left off by exploring the inherent contradictions of the courtly love tradition and positing other options.

Companionate Marriage and Book III of the *Faerie Queene*

Both courtly love and the challenges to it found in Spenser's writing depend upon transformations. These transformations lead either to a traditional courtly love outcome or a concord of mutuality similar

to companionate marriage. In Spenser's inventive fashion,[20] the language of love shows the failure of courtly love and directs attention toward an alternative transformative process involving both the lady and lover. This transformation juxtaposes the futile ends of courtly love and the pragmatic possibility of companionate marriage. In Book III of the *Faerie Queene*, the world of Fairyland both critiques the courtly love tradition and presents a companionate alternative.[21]

Companionate marriage in early modern society challenges the norm by presenting a more horizontal version of love as opposed to older hierarchical models. Lawrence Stone provides the most complete definition of the term companionate marriage and also a theory for why companionate marriage spread and replaced the more economic model of arranged marriages. Stone focuses on the rise of affective individualism as the cause behind the shift from economic models of marital exchange to companionate marriage.[22] However, his representation of companionate marriage depends upon material from the aristocracy and upper classes, which would support a conclusion that companionate marriage flourished only among these upper classes. Yet, he also claims that "the ideal companionate marriage first developed as a norm among the more pious, often nonconformist, middle-class families of the late seventeenth century."[23] This inconsistency has sparked numerous responses, and as Elizabeth Heale points out, the emphasis upon free choice and mutual obligation threatened the aristocratic system in the middle

20 Spenser's reputation for rejecting the traditional forms, uses, and meanings of language derives from his unique vocabulary and derivation of a unique sonnet form. Rebeca Helfer, "The Death of the 'New Poete': Virgillian Ruin and Ciceronian Recollection in Spenser's 'The Shepheardes Calender,'" *Renaissance Quarterly* 56, no 3 (Autumn 2003): 737, explores Spenser's role as a "literary architect." She deals primarily with his rhetorical inventiveness and fusion of Cicero and Virgil. However, the point about Spenser's linguistic inventiveness connects to the invention of an alternative to courtly love as adoration for another person depending upon mutuality.

21 Gareth Roberts, "Women and Magic in Love Poetry," in *Representing Women in Renaissance England,* ed. Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth (Columbia: UofMissouri Press, 1997), 73, argues, as I do, that "Spenser's book of chastity becomes even more surprising as a critique of love poetry." His essay informs my argument about the critique levied in Book III, but he does not examine the alternative portrayal of marriage that comprises a central component of my argument.

22 Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 153.

23 Stone, 234.

to late sixteenth century.[24]   Some attack Stone's methodology and conclusions while many feminists attack the idea of companionate marriage as desirable.[25]   All, however, recognize that ideas concerning marriage in the late medieval and early modern periods began the transformation into accepting and proliferating companionate marriage.

I urge that we use this agreement as a point of departure to first ask why companionate marriage became the dominant paradigm. A number of scholars have attempted to answer this question, and Martha Howell points out that there is not a clear explanation of why companionate marriage succeeded. She posits that companionate marriage better fits into a changing economic system where movable property replaced immovable ties to land and family estates.[26]   While her essay provides a significant answer, it is still only a partial answer. Including the influence of the Protestant Reformation provides another piece of the puzzle. Christine Peters writes about the "distinctively Protestant emphasis on companionate marriage."[27]   While all of these components participate in the rise of companionate marriage, I argue that they leave out something that Stone's initial argument implied: the focus on the language of love, the portrayal of marriage as "a prime source of personal pleasure, both emotional and sexual,"[28] and the central role of literature and popular culture.

24   Elizabeth Heale, "Women and the Courtly Love Lyric: The Devonshire MS (BL Additional 17492)," *The Modern Language Review* 90, no 2. (Apr 1995): 305.

25   See John Gillis, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 10 (1979): 121-128, for a discussion of Stone's neglect of the poor in his study, and see also Georges Duby, *Medieval Marriage: Two Models from Twelfth-Century France* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1978). For a feminist critique of companionate marriage, see Lois Schwoerer, "Seventeenth-Century English Women Engraved in Stone?" *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 16, no 4 (Winter 1984): 389-403. I will more directly address the issue of whether companionate marriage was an improvement in the status of women in section three.

26   See specifically the section "Property and Marriage" beginning on page 30.

27   Christine Peters, "Gender, Sacrament and Ritual: The Making and Meaning of Marriage in Late Medieval and Early Modern England," *Past and Present* 169 (2000): 63.

28   Stone, 165.

Indeed, the portrayal of prototypical companionate marriage in popular entertainment allows us to realize a largely unrecognized role played by poets like Spenser and Sidney. With the confluence of the rising Protestant view of marriage and the literary revision of more economic or misogynistic models, the foundations were laid for change. Just as Sidney's revisions to the courtly love genre significantly impact our understanding of the role and power of the lady, Spenser interacts with courtly love to support mutual love and attachment as integral components of a relationship. In cooperation with the economic, social, and religious trends, the confrontation with and critique of older models of marriage and courtship paved the way for the transformation of marriage away from the more economic, male-dominated systems to companionate marriage. While companionate marriage certainly is not a purely egalitarian model, it does emphasize leveling out the hierarchy, which engenders a greater focus on female agency through prioritizing mutual love. Spenser's interaction with love in Fairyland occurs most clearly in Book III of the *Faerie Queene*, and this book simultaneously undermines courtly love and supports an alternative emphasizing mutuality and emotional commitment.

Fairyland reflects the practical consequences of the courtly love tradition while also exemplifying what Spenser sees as the beneficial transformation in the language of love, which allows for the more equal concord of mutual love in companionate marriage.[29] By combining expression and emotion as Spenser does, feelings function to emphasize similarity. Rei Terada analyzes the place of emotion in a postmodern world, but no matter the time period, she argues that "it is the special mission of feelings to identify correspondences, phenomenalizing the unity between subjects and objects."[30] Terada's connection of feelings with unity between subjects and objects

29   Pamela Joseph Benson, *The Invention of the Renaissance Woman: The Challenge of Female Independence in the Literature and Thought of Italy and England* (University Park: Penn State UP, 1992), 251, claims that the *Faerie Queene* includes "the most extensive and eloquent defense and encomium of the feminine [. . .] in the Renaissance."

30   Rei Terada, *Feeling in Theory: Emotion after the "Death of the Subject"* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2001), 12.

is important in linking Sidney's innovations with the paradigm of love developed by Spenser. In Sidney's text, Stella and Astrophil's exchange of affects emphasizes their similarity. In much the same way, Spenser's appropriation of Sidney and inscription of this type of love emphasizes likeness; this makes attempts to define women as radically other more difficult. To flesh out Spenser's view of love and marriage, we must begin by exploring the seeming dichotomy between Fairyland as reflecting surface and exemplar. The transformation enacted *upon* Florimell in contrast to the transformations enacted *by* Amoret and Britomart show the failure of the "reflecting surface" of courtly love and the "exemplar" in the alternative of companionate marriage.

For Spenser, erotic desire and love occur simultaneously, and his view of love includes sexuality while separating transgressive from healthy desire. Stan Hinton points out that "Along with the positive power of love to provoke virtue, there is even in the virtuous, the inevitable smart and the thin line between love and lust."[31] By exploring the transformations connected to transgressive desire and love, a polemic of courtly love and actual love emerges. While the story of Florimell has been interpreted in a variety of ways, her character exemplifies the effect of the perverse transformation of transgressive desire. Just as the courtly love tradition often transforms a woman into merely an object to substitute for lack, Florimell is transformed into an embodiment of transgressive desire itself. Florimell constantly flees with "her eye she backward threw, / As fearing euill, that pursewd her fast," and even the good knights Arthur and Guyon chase her (3.1.16.1-2).[32] These usually good knights join the pursuit "full of great enuie and fell gealosy" (3.1.18.2). While some critics have read this incident as a struggle

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31   Stan Hinton, "The Poet and his Narrator: Spenser's Epic Voice," *ELH* 41, no 2 (Summer 1974): 169.

32   Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. Thomas P. Roche (London: Penguin, 1978). All quotations from *The Faerie Queene* come from this edition.

only between lust and love,[33] envy and jealousy are emotional states more closely aligned with the transgressive desire that sabotages the relationship between Astrophil and Stella. The lover's jealousy of the husband and envy of his possession of the lady derives from the transgressive nature of their desire as exceeding the boundaries of socially approved behavior, and these motivations mark that desire as necessarily transgressive. Similarly, Spenser's use of these terms registers inappropriately directed desire.

In Sidney's sequence, he recuperates both Petrarch and the lady from the dominant courtly love tradition in order to explore a possible relationship. In his depiction of transgressive desire, Spenser also highlights the inadequacy of empty Petrarchan stereotypes and iconic women. William Alan Oram explains that a female witch creates an impersonator, Snowy Florimell, "out of the materials used for traditional comparison in Petrarchan love poetry—eyes like lamps, hair like golden wire, skin white as snow. The False Florimell behaves like a sonnet lady too, remaining beautiful but unattainable."[34] Snowy Florimell essentially displaces the real Florimell. In fact, Snowy Florimell imitates Florimell so well that "fairer than her selfe" she seems (3.8.9.5). In transforming Florimell into her sonnet-lady form, the identity of the real character disappears. By parodying the confusion of Snowy Florimell and Florimell, Spenser critiques any kind of desire that does not focus upon the character of a person. As David Miller states, "But for Spenser the internalized image of the beloved is not less 'real' than her physical presence but more so."[35] In the character Florimell, the flaws of a courtly depiction emerge when transgressive desire drives attraction.

33   David Miller, "Spenser's Vocation, Spenser's Career," *ELH* 50, no 2 (Summer 1983): 199, explains the struggle experienced by Arthur and Guyon in this instance: "But men also shape themselves as moral creatures, a meditative process analogous to gestation but more complex, in which 'love' (the impulse to form) struggles with 'lust' (the impulse to matter), seeking to fashion the inner man as it did aboriginal chaos."

34   William Alan Oram, *Edmund Spenser: Twayne's English Author Series*, ed. Arthur Kinney (New York: Twayne Publishing, 1997), 120.

35   Miller, 230. In using *An Hymne in Honour of Beautie*, Miller articulates that for Spenser "Beauty, after all, is not the 'outward shew of things' (191). Mere 'proportion of the outward part' never moves 'affection of the inward mind'" (203). This clear position reiterates the point made above concerning the failure of valuing outward beauty alone while pointing toward a necessary appreciation of all aspects of a beloved, which only love can do.

In the Florimell story, Spenser problematizes the courtly love tradition that employs stereotypical Petrarchan tropes, empty ideals of women, and desire that values appearance above character.[36] Sidney's struggle to revise this tradition both makes Spenser's critique possible and infuses it with more meaning and effectiveness. Indeed, "the suspect nature of beauty as a motivating principle"[37] derives from the separation of beauty from personalization. In Book 3, a model of love increases the disconnect between men and women if it is based only on external beauty, dismissal of female uniqueness, and transgressive desire. The transformation enacted upon Florimell precludes any possibility of a real relationship. Spenser follows this critique embedded in the allegory of Fairyland by presenting an exemplar.

That alternative also includes transformation, but the transformations experienced by Amoret and Britomart simultaneously reinforce the critique of courtly love and adumbrate a companionate marriage model. As such, Fairyland in this case serves as the exemplar for society, rather than the reflection. Amoret begins "pure and vnspotted from all loathly crime" (3.6.3.4), the expression of "goodly womanhead" (3.6.51.9). Initially, Amoret's experiences echo Florimell's when she is abducted by Scudamore and then later by Busirane. The capture and torture of Amoret has been read as pornographic,[38] but Susanne Lindgren Wofford argues that "Spenser looks at Busirane's art from the point of view of a woman and condemns it."[39] I would argue that the scene is both pornographic and condemnatory. The pornographic elements both enhance the commentary and inscribe transgressive desire into a threatening scene

36 Transformation on the basis of lust fails, and the effect of that transformation is stasis, and "Stasis, here as elsewhere in Spenser, is degrading" (Oram, 119). Hence, transformation and stasis in the courtly love tradition are both problematic.

37 Hinton, 177.

38 See Sheila Cavanaugh who reads this as torture and Spenser as writing sadistic pornography. A variety of approaches on this topic exist.

39 Susanne Lindgren Wofford, "The Bold Reader in the House of Busyrane," in *Edmund Spenser's Poetry*, ed. Hugh Maclean and Anne Lake Prescott, 3rd ed. (New York: Norton, 1993), 748.

wherein Amoret (and Britomart) can either go the way of Florimell or choose a view of love as shared desire developing in a mutual relationship.

By personalizing and describing the female perspective, Spenser revises the courtly love traditions much as Sidney does by inhabiting the role of Stella. Spenser specifically has Scudamore use the verb "pend" to quantify Amoret's torture (3.11.11.1). As her lover, he likely has intimate awareness of the ways penning can be used against a woman, and the term as a pun references both written attacks and the penis.[40] Just as the traditional courtly love poet uses his pen to create an idealized female figure to play against, Busirane uses his pen to try to transform Amoret into a lady responsive to his attempts at reconfiguration. Yet, in this torture, Amoret resists his transformative efforts, though her chest and bowels are riven apart and a dart pierces her heart. She resists "All for she Scudamore will not denay" (3.11.11.5). Just as Sidney's poetry inhabits Stella's role and voicedness, Spenser creates a strong female who refuses to be idealized into a courtly love construct. Spenser centers the reader's attention on Amoret's perspective and suffering by describing Amoret's resistance and connecting her torture to both literary and potentially physical sexual violation. In so doing, he critiques the institution that participates in that form of literary torture. Wofford states that Busirane is "a figure of the male poet who has drawn her into a pornographic love poem (a love poetry that abuses women by literalizing the clichés of Petrarchan sonnets)."[41] While the literalization of stereotypical Petrarchan tropes supports my reading of this event as a critique of courtly love poetry, it is important to look beyond this critique to the reversal of focus.

40 Ian Frederick Moulton, *Before Pornography: Erotic Writing in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000), 49, notes that the pen is associated with the penis. See also Maurice Hunt, "Managing Spenser, Managing Shakespeare in *Comus*," *Neophilologus* 88 (April 2004): 322, who notes this connection, but he points out that it is a rare pun: "Less common, quite rare in fact, is the similar (and more biologically precise) metaphor of the male poet's pen as a phallus, creating new life on the virginal whiteness of paper." However, in spite of this rarity, he directly connects the phallic use of the word pen to the torture of Amoret by Busirane (325).

41 Wofford, 749. See also Mark Rose, *Heroic Love: Studies in Sidney and Spenser* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1970), who develops the idea that the tortures in the house of Busirane are literalizations of the conventions of Petrarchan sonnets.

In courtly love poetry, the poet figure and the reader occupy the same space, but in the torture of Amoret, Spenser focuses on the female victim rather than the male torturer. The lurid description of Amoret's wounds blurs the boundary between the exposure of her body and emotions. She stands bound "bleeding forth her fainting spright" (3.12.20.7) from the "wide wound" (3.12.20.5) in her chest, and "At that wide orifice her trembling hart / Was drawne forth, and in siluer basin layd, / Quite through transfixed with a deadly dart" (3.12.21.1-3). Spenser's interest in her transfixed heart echoes a common trope in courtly love poetry wherein the beloved is compared to a hart or deer to be pursued by the lover and fixed with an arrow or dart. In Amoret's case, that pursuit is literalized as well as the violent implications of the conflation of her body and emotions. In spite of Busirane's efforts to "all perforce to make her him to loue," (3.12.31.6) his attempt to incite Amoret's desire depends upon violating force. By intricately describing how Busirane attempts to control Amoret's love and showing both its failure and the horror, Spenser aligns the reader with Amoret, the female perspective, particularly when posing the question "who can loue the worker of her smart?" (3.12.31.7). This rhetorical question not only applies to Amoret as the implied antecedent of "her," but the lack of Amoret's name in the stanza introduces ambiguity that also implicates the reader, as if to say 'Reader, could you love someone who wounds you while professing love?' or even the author, as if to say 'Can you blame me for not loving someone who hurts me to force love?' This reversal of perspective heightens the tension of the moment wherein Busirane wounds Britomart in her "snowie chest, / That little drops empurpled her faire brest" (3.12.33.4-5). His attack of Britomart echoes his assault of Amoret, but unlike Amoret, Britomart's wound not only spurs her resistance but galvanizes her "exceeding wroth" (3.12.33.6). Britomart defeats Busirane and forces him "his charmes backe to reuerse" (3.12.36.2). This compelled reversal undoes the physical torture through verbal means, furthering the earlier pun of "pend" as applying to both writing (as in traditional courtly love poetry) and assault with the male body.

By staging Britomart's rescue of Amoret as dependent upon forcing Busirane to reverse his written spells, Spenser depicts the defeat of courtly love and points to an opposing view of relationships.[42] Thomas Roche, Jr., sees a commentary on marriage in this scene that participates in this opposing view:

> He (Busirane) is an abuse of marriage because the mind he possesses cannot distinguish between the act of marriage and adulterous love. He is an abuse of marriage because the falsity of his view of love can lead only to lust or death [. . .] He becomes the denial of the unity of body and soul in true love.[43]

In the rejection of courtly love, Spenser identifies an alternative: the celebration of mutual love as the cement of a companionate marriage and expressed through healthy sexual interaction. By texturing this alternative into the story, Spenser uses allegory simultaneously to critique courtly love, as Sidney does, and then to go beyond merely criticizing that paradigm to present an alternative.

Beyond the rescue scene Roche focuses on, the reunion of Amoret and Scudamore further solidifies the view of marriage in Book III. As soon as Amoret is rescued and able to reunite with Scudamore, her tested love motivates her to embrace him as her husband and sexual partner, which she could not do initially. Their union depends upon reciprocal desire:

> Lightly he clipt her twixt his armes twaine,
>
> And straightly did embrace her body bright,
>
> Her body, late the prison of sad paine,
>
> Now the sweet lodge of loue and deare delight:
>
> But she faire Lady ouercommen quight
>
> Of huge affections, did in pleasure melt,

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42 John Rooks, *Love's Courtly Ethic in The Faerie Queene: From Garden to Wilderness*, ed. David M. Bergeron (New York: Peter Lang Publishers, 1992), 85, observes that "The Amoret-Busirane episode is littered with the trappings of a courtly affair." He presents Busirane in another light and blames Amoret for being the "victim of her own desire" (85). While I disagree with his conclusions, the treatment of the Busirane episode as an allegory of a courtly love affair enacted is an important point in support of my own argument.

43 Thomas Roche, Jr., "Love, Lust, and Sexuality," *Edmund Spenser's Poetry*, ed. Hugh Maclean and Anne Lake Prescott, 3rd ed. (New York: Norton, 1993), 142.

And in sweete rauishment pourd our her spright.

No word they spake, nor earthly thing they felt,

But like two senceles stocks in long embracement dwells (3.12.45).

In this 1590 sonnet, Amoret and Scudamore experience the conflu-ence of mutual love, desire, and pleasure, whereas previously only one or the other is described as experiencing desire or love. In ad-dition, the overt sexuality in the pouring out of "spright" alludes to orgasm, and Spenser intentionally uses adjectives with positive connotations like "sweet" and connects their physical "embrace-ment" to a non-earthly or potentially divine union, a common view of certain Neoplatonists.[44] Together, this evidence juxtaposes a type of approved sexual pleasure with the transgressive sexual violence of Busirane.[45] In fact, in the next stanza (46), Spenser changes the mythology of the Hermaphrodite and compares the hermaphrodite of his vision (a blissful picture of sexual and spiritual mutuality) to Amoret and Scudamore.[46] For Spenser, Amoret is the paragon of virtue,[47] especially after her transformation from a victim to a strong, personalized woman, who is an equal partner in a marriage she chooses (at the end if not the beginning).

44   A.J. Smith, "The Metaphysic of Love," *The Review of English Studies* 9 (Nov 1958): 364, looks at different Neoplatonists and shows that many schools accepted certain kinds of physical love as aiding in divine love: "There was general agreement that the chief ef-fect of the higher kinds of human love was the conjoining of the souls of the two lovers to make a per-fect union, or unity. Indeed, love itself was commonly defined as a 'desire to unite oneself with the thing esteemed good', which 'would be the soul of the beloved'. Speroni put it neatly when he said that lovers in a perfect love were joined so completely that they lost their proper semblance and became a strange third species, neither male nor female, resembling a hermaphrodite. But the standard conceit was that such lovers' souls, transformed into each other by a kind of miracle, become 'one soul in two bodies.'"

45   Stephen Greenblatt, "To Fashion a Gentleman: Spenser and the Destruction of the Bower of Bliss," in *Critical Essays on Edmund Spenser*, ed. Mihoko Suzuki (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 100, states that a fine line between excess and acceptable plea-sure exists that depends upon the purpose for justification. If the pleasure serves "some useful purpose, some virtuous end," then it is acceptable. For Spenser, pleasure in mar-riage is part of a useful purpose, the marriage itself, and the virtuous end of reproduction.

46   Donald Cheney, "Spenser's Hermaphrodite and the 1590 Faerie Queene," *PMLA* 87, no 2 (Mar 1972): 193, argues that the idea of the blissful hermaphrodite was recognizable for Spenser's readers, though less common than that of the forced, deforming transforma-tion. Cheney refers to this hermaphrodite as "an emblem of completeness and fulfillment" and connects that emblem to the union of Amoret and Scudamore (193).

47   Maureen Quilligan, 141, explains that for Spenser, "the chastity he truly extols is Amoret's: it is the chastity not of a virgin queen, but of a wedded wife."

The empowering self-transformation of Amoret enables mutuality rather than isolation; similarly, Britomart transforms herself into an errant knight searching for her chosen beloved. At the end of the transformative process, Britomart "is accepted on her own terms as knight and as lady, neither potential destroyer nor potential victim; and, herself an example of concord, she achieves a further concord in her connection with Artegall."[48] This metamorphosis based on love is both beneficial and self-willed, unlike the transformations of lust elaborately described in Ovid. Amoret and Britomart actively participate in transformation, unlike Florimell, and this willing participation distinguishes the critique of literalized courtly love from the presentation of companionate marriage. Britomart's transformation begins because of love of Artegall, "Whose image she had seen in Venus looking glas" (3.1.8.9). She "resolu'd, unweeting to her Sire, / Advuent'rous knighthood on her selfe to don" (3.3.57.5-6). Britomart's actions exceed the patriarchal order of her father, but that does not result in a condemnation of her actions. Rather, this step necessarily precedes her search for mutual love. As she knights herself and prepares to seek out her beloved, she "fashions herself through loving another."[49] Here the aloof, impersonal lady of many sonnet sequences dissolves in the face of a woman confident in her strength, virtue, and ability. This unique person chooses to love another, and she matures through this love. If indeed "love is a kind of friendship, friendship a kind of love,"[50] then love requires the man and woman to share their affect-ion in much the same way as Stella and Astrophil's exchange of affect. This reciprocity undermines the assumed hierarchy of marriage and becomes a central component of companionate marriage. The metamorphoses of Britomart and Amoret function as catalysts for their entrance into a mutual relationship with their lovers.[51]

48   Kathleen Williams, "Venus and Diana: Some Uses of Myth in *The Faerie Queene*," in *Spenser: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Harry Berger, Jr. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1968), 110.

49   Lauren Silberman, "The Hermaphrodite and the Metamorphosis of Spenserian Allegory," in *Critical Essays on Edmund Spenser*, ed. Mihoko Suzuki (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 160.

50   Williams 101.

51   Miller explains, "The lover's internal portraiture transforms the beloved, but it also transforms the lover himself" (204). This position further substantiates the articulated

Friendship depends upon concord, which for the Renaissance person means the unity of likeness and unlikeness. However, *amicitia*, the highest form of friendship, was most often applied to male-male relationships in the early modern period. Spenser's depiction of the friendship in a companionate relationship challenges that approach. Together with other producers of popular culture, this challenge, as Walter Eggers, Jr., concludes, "offers a new social vision."[52] The fusion of friendship with marriage begins to realize the potential for marital equality and support those arguing that "marriage must be a friendship if it is to flourish and endure."[53] While debate about the benefit of companionate marriage for women has occupied critical discussion, the reality is that there were "vast changes in familial organization, marriage, and gender ideology that took place in early modern England."[54] These changes enabled a shift in the status and view of women because mutual love requires what June McCash calls an accompanying "positive attitude toward women."[55] While quantifying what a "positive attitude" means is difficult, I agree with McCash that shifting attitudes about women inherently precipitate shifts in status. In the case of companionate marriage, these shifts invited a realignment of order in romantic relationships such that women were given more choice and control.

Through Spenser's trio of female characters—Florimell, Amoret, and Britomart—he exposes his discomfort with courtly love. Further, his critique depends upon the innovations introduced

position that love is a process of beneficial change in contrast to the destructive transformations of lust or the idealized stasis in Petrarchan conventions.

52   Walter F. Eggers, Jr., "Love and Likeness in *The Merchant of Venice*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 28, no 3 (Summer 1977): 333.

53   Robert Arthur Horton, *The Unity of <u>The Faerie Queene</u>* (Athens: U of Georgia Press, 1978), 106.

54   Wendy Wall, *The Imprint of Gender: Authorship and Publication in the English Renaissance* (Ithaca: CornellUP, 1993), 42.

55   June Hall McCash, "Mutual Love as a Medieval Ideal," in *Courtly Literature and Context* (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing, 1990), 432. Her essay focuses on the development of mutual love in the late medieval period as paving the foundation for changing ideas about love in the Renaissance. While her focus is different from my own, we both agree that attitudes and feelings about love cause a subsequent change in the view of female worth.

by Sidney, but it importantly presents an alternative, the "exemplar," that requires there to be pragmatic outcomes such as marriage without the complication of a socially transgressive affair. However, the allegory of the characters does not build the case for love and female worth as clearly as a more direct statement, which emerges in Spenser's next project: his own sonnet sequence in which he confronts courtly love and defends companionate marriage.

The Companionate Marriage Experiment

in *Amoretti* and *Epithalamion*

*I*n contrast to *Astrophil and Stella*, Spenser's sequence of *Amoretti* and *Epithalamion* cannot be undone by the implications of shame and rejection accompanying socially transgressive desire and adultery. As such, the integral presence of a pragmatic relationship outcome marks Spenser's sequence as unique and the natural realization of Sidney's innovations. Spenser's *Amoretti* and *Epithalamion* celebrate a real woman, Elizabeth Boyle, whom Spenser loved and married on June 11, 1594.[56] Marotti points out, "Unlike the other sonnet sequences of the 1590s, the *Amoretti* celebrates a relationship of amorous mutuality. . . Spenser created a sphere of reciprocity

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56   J.B. Fletcher, "Mr. Sidney Lee and Spenser's *Amoretti*," *Modern Language Notes* 18, no 4 (April 1903): 111-113, concludes the debate about a subject that was pertinent in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Though earlier scholars had argued that Spenser was merely writing about an "Idea," Fletcher and most scholars since have found direct connection between the personal nature of Spenser's lady and the actual Elizabeth Boyle. Alexander Judson, *The Life of Edmund Spenser, The Works of Edmund Spenser, A Variorum Edition*, ed. Edwin Greenlaw, Charles Grosvenor Osgood, and Frederick Morgan Padelford, Vol. 9 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1945), states that "the sequence as it stands was intended by the poet to celebrate his courtship of Elizabeth Boyle and to suggest, at least in a broad general way, the course of this affair" (171). See also G.K. Hunter, Spenser's *Amoretti* and the English Sonnet Tradition." *A Theatre for Spenserians*, ed. Judith M. Kennedy and James A. Reither, Papers of the International Spenser Colloquium, 1969 (Toronto: UToronto Press, 1973), who argues that the sequence is "arranged as a history of a courtship leading up to marriage, or the expectation of marriage—and this again is not the natural or inevitable end to a sonnet sequence" (124). This quotation is important for two reasons: first, the biographical basis of the sequence is noted, and second, the unique emphasis on a pragmatic relationship option (companionate marriage) separates this sequence from others of the time. Corroborating these scholars, Waldo McNeir, "An Apology for Spenser's *Amoretti*," in *Essential Articles for the study of Edmund Spenser,* ed. A. C. Hamilton (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1972), argues that Spenser "intended" the sonnet sequence "as a record of his courtship of Elizabeth Boyle" (526).

in which love could be fulfilled."[57] In other words, Spenser defends love as a state of reciprocity that requires both the inherent recognition of the female beloved's value and the pragmatic outcome of a companionate marriage.

By choosing to use a sonnet sequence to explore a relationship based upon love and "sustained personal commitment"[58] from both parties, Spenser articulates the foundation for a companionate marriage. Though critics like Gregory Chaplin[59] read Spenser's texts as presenting a choice between marriage and *amicitia*, the poetic texts offer a third alternative: the fusion of marriage and *amicitia*. Spenser's poetry helps build a model for marital concord that includes a space for marital equality to eventually occupy.

Like Sidney, Spenser's personalized subject in *Amoretti* directly challenges the desirability of courtly love. Spenser's lady, like Stella, is also the addressed audience of the sonnet. While the consequences of transgressive desire—shame, political rejection, etc.—mediate Stella's centrality, Spenser's lady is "the only woman about whom he cares."[60] Her personalization includes an emphasis upon the lady's mind as connected to her beauty and virtue. In sonnet 15, Spenser addresses "ye tradefull Merchants" and compares various jewels and precious metals to his lady's features, but the conclusion and highest praise is not the lady's golden hair or ivory skin, but instead "that which fairest is, but few behold, / Her mind adorned with

57   Marotti, 416.

58   Harry Berger, Jr., "Orpheus, Pan, and the Poetics of Misogyny: Spenser's Critique of Pastoral Love and Art," *ELH* 50, no 1 (Spring 1983): 49.

59   Gregory Chaplin, " 'One Flesh, One Hear, One Soul': Renaissance Friendship and Miltonic Marriage," *Modern Philology* 99, no 2 (Nov 2001): 266-292, has heavily informed this paper, particularly in regard to the Miltonic view of marriage as finding some of its origins in Spenser. See pg. 268 for his discussion of the choice he states Spenser provides.

60   Ilona Bell, *Elizabethan Women and the Poetry of Courtship (*Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998), 153. Donna Gibbs, *Spenser's Amoretti: A Critical Study* (Brookfield: Gower, 1990), also recognizes that the lady is the reader and that the poems were composed to her to read, but she sees the lady as a figure who eventually plays a conventional role. Both Bell and I disagree with Gibbs' conclusion about the lady's role, but the recognition of the lady as being addressed as a reader is essential.

vertues manifold" (1,13,14).[61] The appreciation of the lady's virtue results from the lover's regard for the actual lady herself, rather than an idea of a woman. The sonnet contrasts the merchants who value the jewels and other material riches and the lover who values the lady's mind and virtues most. These merchants participate in a system of exchange dependent upon the commodification of the various jewels and gold. Since these commodified objects—the lady's 'ivory' skin and 'golden' hair—also mimic traditional courtly love praises of the lady, Spenser equates trading merchants and traditional courtly love poets. Both search for objects of value but exchange those objects or possess them for their commodity or trade value. While this system works for exchange of jewels and gold, the sonnet separates Spenser's lady from the commodification of other ladies in traditional courtly love sequences. By bracketing the lady's highest qualities as outside the system of exchange, the lady exceeds the courtly love system.

Similar to Sidney, Spenser criticizes the stereotypical use of Petrarchanism. However, unlike Sidney, for whom Petrarch's psychological ambivalence resonated given the transgressive nature of desire in *Astrophil and Stella*, Spenser rejects both the hollowing out of Petrarch and the emotional state of both Petrarch and Sidney's sequences. In sonnet 59, Spenser reverses the familiar trope of the lost bark. In contrast to the lost, unguided bark commonly used to describe the emotional state of the poet, the lady here is "like a steady ship [. . .] and keepes her course aright" (5,6). The lady's "stedfast might" also steadies the lover who is not tossed about by uncertainty, regret, or shame; instead, Spenser says "he most happy who such one loves best" (11,14). Ilona Bell notes that the reversal in status from woman as the weaker vessel to "steady ship" supports "the poet/lover's newly discovered capacity to love the female reader *for* her strength and self-assurance."[62] What Bell does not connect

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61   Edmund Spenser, "Amoretti," in *Edmund Spenser's Poetry*, ed. Hugh Maclean and Anne Lake Prescott, 3rd ed. (New York: Norton, 1993). All "Amoretti" quotations come from this edition.

62   Bell, 173.

is that the sense of surety in this sonnet depends upon the progression of a relationship in a direction with a pragmatic outcome of companionate marriage. By removing the consequences of socially transgressive desire, the capacity for love in Spenser's sequence is less susceptible to anxiety. The direct contrast between the lady here and the traditional poet figure in a courtly love sequence further entrenches the critique of the courtly love tradition.

In addition to valuing the lady's strength, entering into a companionate relationship requires gaining respect for the lady's intelligence. Spenser's lady possesses dazzling intelligence. Sonnet 43 speaks of the lady's "deep wit" and sonnet 81 "her words so wise." Yet, in the paired sonnets 28 and 29, a scenario occurs that showcases the lady. She wears a laurel leaf, the symbol of poets, which the lover says "Gives me great hope of your relenting mynd" (28.2). Here, as in the previously cited sonnet 15, Spenser connects virtue with the lady's mind. Spenser repeatedly references one of the things he values most as the lady's mind, the seat of her virtue, wit, wise words, and will, which determines whether she will relent. In this convergence of traits, the lady is not only ascribed with a sense of agency but also as an intelligent person whose mind endows her with the ability to be virtuous, wise, and witty. That connection immediately distinguishes the lady from Daphne in Ovid's story of transformation, the topic of the next reflections in the sonnet. Some scholars read this as a threat to the lady, but Louis Martz says, "I do not see how this interchange can be taken as anything but smiling and good-humored, yes, even humorous, in our sense of the word."[63] While Martz does not discuss the unique strength of the lady as a result of her intelligence and the poet's value of that intelligence, these personal characteristics make the transformation non-threatening.

Spenser traditionally subsumes Ovidian transformation myths and shapes them for his own purposes (as he did with the Hermaphrodite myth), removing the destructive connotation of trans-

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63 Louis Martz, "Amoretti," in *Edmund Spenser's Poetry*, ed. Hugh Maclean and Anne Lake Prescott, 3rd ed. (New York: Norton, 1993), 805.

formation. Spenser conceives of transformation based upon love as necessary. As with Amoret, transformation is essential for the union of marriage, which depends upon mutuality and compromise. At the same time, the lover undergoes a transformation and comes to depend upon the lady.[64] Through their interactions, "Spenser makes a point of telling us that he has learned the art of courtship, not from earlier poets, but from the experience of communicating to and with a particular Elizabethan woman."[65] Particularly in the exchange in sonnets 28 and 29, Spenser's poet figure learns he cannot control the courtship. The lady turns the tables in the next sonnet and the lover admits defeat:

> See how the stubborn damzell doth deprave
>
> My simple meaning with disdaynfull scorne:
>
> And by the bay which I unto her gave,
>
> Accoumpts my selfe her captive quite forlorn.
>
> "The bay," quoth she, "is of the victours borne,
>
> Yielded them by the vanquisht as theyr meeds,
>
> And they therewith doe poetes heads adorne,
>
> To sing the glory of their famous deedes (29.1-8).

The lady's retort is unique in these sonnet sequences; the fact that the retort is an intelligent argument that vanquishes the poet is truly revolutionary. The give and take in this exchange "accommodates both sides of the battle; the victorious poetic and creative source is both himself and his lady."[66] Just as Spenser presents a view of mar-

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64   Miller writes about the transformative process essential for lovers. His analysis of the *Amoretti* and *Faerie Queene* validate the argument distinguishing between the negative transformative process of lust and the beneficial transformation of love.

65   Bell, 161. Martz in particular reads Spenser as the experienced male figure educating the witty but fickle lady. However, Bell reads the lady as teaching the poet figure how to proceed in courtship. I agree with her interpretation and use her argument to support my own that Spenser's sonnet project undermines the courtly love tradition, which would more closely subscribe to the male educator theory, to pose a model requiring mutual equality leading to companionate marriage.

66   Miller, 547.

riage that depends on mutuality, the successful courtship depends upon a certain edginess that requires two equal combatants. While she may be "stubborn," that very quality enables her retort and on-going participation in the verbal debate and play staged throughout the sequence. The lady's attributes of virtue, wit, and intelligence make her a match for the poet, who in her finds a companion suited to him.

While Spenser's portrayal of the lady deviates from tradition and depends upon Sidney's revisions, Spenser goes further to parody the conventions as well. Oram explains that Spenser "shows the deficiencies of the Petrarchan tradition [. . .] by playing the Petrarchan lover."[67] While Oram confuses stereotyped conventions with what Petrarch actually does in his poetry, it is important to note that Spenser intentionally parodies accepted conventions. In the act of parody, Spenser both accentuates his lady's personality and points out the inadequacy of convention in forming reciprocal relationships. Sonnets 16 and 18 demonstrate this overt parody. In sonnet 16, the lady saves the poet, a reversal of traditional roles:

> One of those archers closely I did spy,
>
> Ayming his arrow at my very hart:
>
> When suddenly with twincle of her eye,
>
> The Damzell broke his misinteded dart.
>
> Had she not so doon, sure I had bene slayne,
>
> Yet as it was, I hardly scap't with paine (9-14).

The reference to the archer alludes to Cupid who usually initiates love in these sonnet sequences, yet the plural "archers" belittles the belief in and use of an irresistible external source unrelated to the people involved as the cause of love. These archers' darts, like Cupid's, are aimed at the heart of the victim they intend to force to love. Instead, the lady's eye saves the poet, the same eye that inspired his love earlier. By delineating between the archers and the

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67   Oram, 182.

lady—and placing the lady's power as greater through her ability to break their darts—the poet also delineates between different kinds of desire. This distinction points out the failure of the conventions while showing both the lady and lover playing with them.

The appropriation of courtly love terms into a game played by both participants emphasizes the importance of mutuality. In sonnet 18, the poet describes the lady's awareness of the game as they have decided to play it. These two equal participants know their roles and gleefully distort them by seeming to follow them:

> But when I pleade, she bids me play my part,
>
> And when I weep, she sayes teares are but water:
>
> And when I sigh, she sayes I know the art (9-11).

Venturing into the hyperactive awareness of many of Shakespeare's characters concerning the relation between playing and reality, the lady and poet play out the conventions while undermining them through the comparison to "art" and show. This cooperative game of courtship adumbrates the later reality of a cooperative marriage.

By taking the topic of courtship and infusing traditional tropes, such as the pursuit of deer in a hunt, with new interpretations, Spenser's poetry undermines the status quo to present an exemplary alternative. In courtly love, the hunting of the deer signifies only pursuit, but for mutual love, this trope becomes an opportunity to reflect on will and the boundaries of love. James Martel points out that "the question of love becomes one of boundaries."[68] This observation leads him to ask, "If love always relates us to ourselves and to one another on the basis of that which cannot be seen, how much is love our own?"[69] Martel focuses on how the dominant theory of love reinscribes boundaries mapped out by difference between lovers and groups that enable power structures. However,

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68   James Martel, *Love is a Sweet Chain: Desire, Autonomy, and Friendship in Liberal Political Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 3.

69   Martel, 3.

he also outlines a subversive theory of love that he identifies with Aristophanes' story in the *Symposium*. He argues that "this love is more democratic. It reinforces rather than disenfranchises human beings."[70] Martel differentiates between the dominant and minority views of love while also noting that concern with boundaries and the self necessarily occurs with either theory. However, his association of the more democratic view of love with the hermaphrodite image intersects with Spenser's ongoing interest in that image as a blissful emblem of marital union. Martel's point about subversive love creates a space for the mutual love of a prototypical companionate marriage in the necessary boundedness and hierarchy of any love relationship in Spenser's time.

Spenser's sonnet 67 uses the pursued deer trope to explore the intersection of boundaries with the more democratic view of love he proposes.

> Lyke as a huntsman after weary chace,
>
> Seeking the game from him escapt away,
>
> Sits downe to rest him in some shady place,
>
> With panting hounds beguiled of their pray:
>
> So after long pursuit and vaine assay,
>
> When I all weary had the chace forsooke,
>
> The gentle deare returnd the self-same way,
>
> Thinking to quench her thirst at the next brooke.
>
> There she beholding me with mylder looke,
>
> Sought not to fly, but fearelesse still did bide:
>
> Till I in hand her yet halfe trembling tooke,
>
> And with her owne goodwill hir fyrmely tyde.
>
> Strange thing me seemd to see a beast so wyld,
>
> So goodly wonne with her owne will beguyld.

70   Martel, 5.

Even upon cursory inspection, the tenderness and wonder of the poet and the agency of the beloved emerge. While the poet as hunter has failed in his pursuit—a common enough outcome in courtly love poems—the deer's return deviates from the traditional story. When the poet ceases to be the hunter, the beloved "deare," with a pun on deer and the expression of affection, chooses to transform from "beast so wyld" to female partner. The state of pursuit reflects the dominant view of love as depending upon hierarchy. However, by ending the pursuit, the poet recognizes the lady's agency and moves closer toward the more democratic view of love.

Anne Lake Prescott finds Marguerite de Navarre's sixth lyric in the *Chansons Spirituelle* a fitting reference for sonnet 67's end of pursuit. In this song, a young hunter asks an old woman in the forest why he fails in hunting his deer. She explains that he must rest by a spring and "spread the net of a humble heart" for "the deer will turn back and let itself be caught by love."[71] While the Christlike quality of the deer is an important feature here, so too is the will of the deer and the transformation of the hunter. He ceases to be the dominant pursuer and becomes the humble, open seeker dependent upon the deer/lady's approval. Mary Villeponteaux says that the lady is "flawed by a desire for maisterie" that she must learn to overcome. [72] By presenting the lady in this power dynamic, Villeponteaux supports Martz' reading that Spenser the patient educator must tame the lady. This reading fits into the dominant theory of love described by Martel. However, I argue that Villeponteaux's recognition of the lady's will touches upon a precondition of the more democratic kind of love in which the poet's admission of the lady's will is a necessary precondition to a companionate marriage. Though Villeponteaux reads the lady's will negatively, the evidence for the lady's will and the poet's reaction to it places Spenser on an equal playing field with the lady rather than as her teacher.

71 Anne Lake Prescott, "Allegorical Deer and *Amoretti* 67," in *Edmund Spenser's Poetry*, ed. Hugh Maclean and Anne Lake Prescott, 3rd ed. (New York: Norton, 1993), 810.

72   Mary Villeponteaux, "'With her own will beguyld': The Captive Lady in Spenser's *Amoretti*," *Explorations in Renaissance Culture* 14 (1988): 30.

However, Spenser's awareness of the gender inequalities of his society creates wonder at the lady's acceptance of him, as seen in his comment on the "strange thing." The argument for "married liberty" depends upon embracing the lady as a companion and revising the views of early modern society that marriage was "a contract giving the husband legal powers over his wife."[73] While the legal status slowly changed, as Stone notes when tracing the development of companionate marriage, there had to be an attitudinal shift in actual relationships and in popular culture artifacts like Spenser's poetry and Shakespeare's comedies. The combination of love and will creates an "exemplar" for society, an allegory of what marriage and relationships between men and women can become when based upon mutuality and reciprocity.

As the *Amoretti* develops the alternative to courtly love, the *Epithalmion* demonstrates the viability of the alternative: a companionate marriage based on love and mutual commitment that uses sexuality as a means of expressing those feelings. Spenser does not address the public sphere in the celebration of his wedding: "So I unto my selfe alone will sing, / The woods shall to me answer and my Eccho ring" (17,18).[74] By privatizing the celebration, Spenser personalizes the marriage relationship as he did the courtship.

Linguistic shifts in the poetry signify the movement from isolation to unity made possible by the mutual transformation of love. As Spenser imagines the day progressing to the wedding and then to the nuptials and consummation, he speaks of "the safety of our joy" in the marriage bed (325). With this movement to mutual pleasure, the language shifts from first person singular to first person plural. No longer does the poet speak only of himself or sing just to the woods: "The woods no more shal answere, nor your echo ring" (314). He welcomes night as a time for them to revel in each other's company, and from the end of his song to the woods, he uses only

73   Oram, 187.

74   Edmund Spenser, "Epithalamion," in *Edmund Spenser's Poetry*, ed. Hugh Maclean and Anne Lake Prescott, 3rd ed. (New York: Norton, 1993). All quotations from this text.

"us," "we," and "our." Characteristic of Spenser's earlier points defending the transformation of love as necessary and good, this transformation of language makes apparent an important realization: "the poet's self has discovered that it was never really alone in the radical, singular meaning of the term."[75] Isolation ends with love and companionate marriage, but this discovery of unity occurs with the rejection of the language of love as it has been perverted.

Spenser the poet offers his poem, his best wish and gift, to his beloved. For the poet, this is his greatest possession, and he gives it only to the woman whom he values above all others:

> Song made in lieu of many ornaments,
>
> With which my love should duly have bene dect,
>
> Which cutting off through hasty accidents,
>
> Ye would not stay your dew time to expect,
>
> But promist both to recompense,
>
> Be unto her a goodly ornament,
>
> And for short time an endlesse moniment (427-433).

Aware that the day of the wedding is "short" and that the progression of time will change things from the way they are during courtship, Spenser creates a "moniment" to his beloved Elizabeth. His confrontation of mutability with poetry is part of the early modern quest to eternize through verse, but his dedication of his poetic work to his wife is inimitable for his time.[76] Spenser's poetry defines a companionate relationship and foreshadows a similarly companionate marriage.

75   Richard Neuse, "The Triumph Over Hasty Accidents: A Note of the Symbolic Mode of the *Epithalamion*," in *Spenser: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Harry Berger, Jr. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1968), 61.

76   Oram states, "But this facing of mutability with an offering of love is a gesture as affirmative as any in Spenser's poetry" (212). The discussion of mutability is apropos but not germane to the argument I am making. Oram's position is important to address; it contributes to the position of Spenser portraying a different form of marital union.

By borrowing Sidney's revisions and extending them, Spenser's sonnet sequence shows the problematic lack of futurity in courtly love relationships and supports a courtship leading to companionate marriage. This revision necessarily requires the early modern audience to rethink female worth if a successful model of marriage depends on mutual transformation and recognition of female will and intelligence. As Ilona Bell points out, "From the magisterial imposition of male authority to the acceptance of gender equality is not an instantaneous Ovidean metamorphosis, but a slow, painstaking process of social change."[77] Bell argues for a reading of courtly love poetry and sonnet sequences as courtship in order to rethink gender relations and issues of the female voice and equality. I argue that we must further connect her argument to the development of companionate marriage as it relates to female worth and increasing female equality. We must consider the popularity of Spenser's *Amoretti* and *Epithalamion*[78] combined with the wider audiences reached by Shakespeare's comedies and religious sermons[79] urging more reciprocal relationships. Together, these influences support the movement to companionate marriage. Without Sidney and Spenser's search for "mutual comfort," the tradition of courtly love poetry would have continued unchallenged, leaving the beloved and the lover only the option of the dominant theory of love as lack without the alternative of a more democratic view of love enabling companionship and greater equality.

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77   Bell, 175.

78   Bell, 184.

79   See Rudiger Schnell's article translated by Andrew Shields "The Discourse on Marriage in the Middle Ages" in the July 1998 *Speculum*. It includes a number of sermons highlighting the growing emphasis on love, unity, and cooperation in marriage.

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Sir Philip Sidney (unknown artist)

National Portrait Gallery, London