

Flower Power
Political Discontents in Spenser's Flowerbeds

The poetry of Edmund Spenser is coming to be seen as feisty and, for many critics, increasingly distant from the sycophantic affair described by political philosophers such as Karl Marx, who did not like Spenser, and cultural critics such as Stephen Greenblatt, who both did and did not. Marx saw nothing in Spenser but an “arse-kissing poet,” while Greenblatt famously argued that the poetry’s lush beauty is directly linked to its most violent engagements with colonialism.¹ Spenser has long been seen as an appreciative consumer and purveyor of pat moral precepts and, what is more, a near prisoner of a belief in encomia and flattery as the means to elevate his and his poems’ prospects in the colonial and imperial milieu of Elizabethan England.² He has been known to offer bouquets of rhetorical flowers to people in high places and, as the notoriously high number of dedicatory sonnets appended to the “back matter” of the 1590 *Faerie Queene* suggests, even he could be embarrassed by the bounty of prospective dedicatees.³ But this is only part of the story of Spenser in his fierce negotiations with political authorities over the ownership of the poetic word. Literary critics do not go to political philosophers to understand the radical potential of poetic flowers or to reflect on the lives of flowers and floral emblems in ancient myth and verse. They do not do so because, as Elizabeth Fowler has pointed out, the boundaries among the disciplines of knowledge are harder to cross today than in Renaissance England.⁴

This chapter takes the counterintuitive position that Spenser is in fact deeply political when he invites his readers to wallow and get lost in lush flowerbeds of poetry.⁵ Spenser seeded his poetic projects with whole stanzas and more extended passages, which abound with flowers and have little in the way of an objective correlative in the worlds of politics and moral philosophy. He did it to test the idea that poetry is dependent on external modes of reference for its mimetic power and, what is more, to protest the interpretive codes that presume to control the production of political as well as poetic meaning. If poetry offers no resistance to the claims of

temporal power over its interpretive norms, it loses its political vitality along with its aesthetic energy. There is a palliative, if not a full cure, for the withering effects of absolutist power on *parrhesia*, the liberty of speech, which, in Spenser's hands, gains a demonstrable relationship to poetic license. It derives from a type of writing and reading that is itself a political experience and not a translation of one. It is not idle, wanton, and in need of reform, as Spenser's representations of sensual experience are sometimes said to be. Spenser is not the moral equivalent of Guyon in the Bower of Bliss or Talus in Ireland.⁶ To the contrary, he plants his flowerbeds in the morally positive terrain of the liberty of speech and poetic license. They make up the ingredients of what I call poetic aromatherapy, the sensual immersion in rhetorical flowers for therapeutic purposes.

In poems from the *Shepherd's Calendar* to *The Faerie Queene* and *Complaints*, flowers of rhetoric mound up without any identifiable purpose in political encomia or moral prescription. The abundant bouquets and flowerbeds produce a striking note of dissidence within the humanist practice of placing eloquence at the service of princes and aristocrats. If the poet refuses to bestow his floral gatherings on a patron, the poem itself becomes less like bouquets tossed in a pastoral tribute to a prince's divine power than rocks, boulders, or even mountains, such as those heaped up by the earth-born giants of myth in their rebellious effort to storm the heavens. It is bold to suggest that Spenser developed a sense of "flower power" commensurate with that of the poets and protesters in the free-speech movement begun in 1960s Berkeley, California. But if there is a meaningful way in which Edmund Spenser and Allen Ginsberg come face-to-face, it is with a polemical flower focused on the liberty of speech in poetry and polity.

Spenser's poetry has long been noted for its ambiguous mixture of hedonism and zealous moralizing. For the purposes of this study, the poet's ambivalence about the dangerous attractions of beauty is less important than his persistence in recreating the relationship between aesthetic pleasure and moral use. Spenser habitually complicates the ancient, Horatian injunction that poetry must both instruct and delight. It is entirely possible that Spenser never met a moral he did not like. Yet he also seems never to have encountered a rhetorical figure or poetic form that he did not want to imitate in myriad ways. Throughout his career, he placed his own verse at the extreme ends of pleasure and use and, crucially, continued to test the moving line between the two. For every moral scene that the English poet and zealous Protestant impressed upon the wanton verse of his Italian predecessors – especially Ovid, Petrarch, Boccaccio, and

Ariosto – there are other verses in which sensual pleasures overflow the measure with hardly a scruple to keep them in check. To be clear, Spenser both fulfills and violates Horace's dictum about the aims of poetry. He produces pleasure (*fruor*) and use (*utor*) and simultaneously raises questions about the connecting walls between the two.

The Bower of Bliss, Spenser's most famous experiment in poetic sensuality checked by moral zeal, is designed to be an outlier among other examples of Spenser's hedonism. From the moment Guyon finds himself moved by the sights, music, scents, and touch in the Bower, the reader knows that his responsiveness to the garden's aesthetic beauties will fuel the violent overthrow of aesthetic form. Even if readers are tempted to prolong their own wandering in the sensuality of the bower-as-text, Spenser's narrator is busy reminding us that we are in a morality play set up by the plot. While we engage in the act of reading, Guyon figuratively stands to our left, representing thwarted lust more than justified wrath. To our right is the Palmer, ready with wise sayings and reproaches to direct our attention back to moral imperatives, as if he were a personification of gnomic pointing, aiming to abstract moral use from sensually heightened poetry.

This chapter emphasizes the relationship between two aspects of Spenserian verse. One is the distinctive motif of gathering flowers, in abundance and with abandon, in stanzas and longer passages without surrendering them to allegorical significance. The other is the repeated image of the poet as a narcissist, who flirts with his self-regard only to *redeem* rather than *reject* this figure in the end. These passages have a privileged status as both nonnarrative and nonallegorical: they are suspended just outside of moral obligation to act upon a given image, however sensational. The passages in question are lush, sensuous, and suggestive. They swim in potential significance, and yet they are slow to deliver up the allegorical goods. The best passages appear in the *Shepherd's Calender* (1579) and complaint poems (1591) as well as a single stanza in the Garden of Adonis, devoted to remembering the beautiful, beloved boys of the pastoral genre and destined to be the antitype of the infamous stanza in which Guyon destroys the Bower of Bliss. All of these floral passages relate to the flowerbeds of the Bower of Bliss, which famously dilate the verse and suspend heroic and virtuous action.⁷ But unlike the whole of the Bower, these passages do not fall under the ax of moral censure. They elude the temporality of judgment associated with allegory and epic, namely hesitation, whether a short or a prolonged moment of holding back against the sympathetic passions, followed by abrupt, violent action.⁸

Spenser may in the end donate the flowers of the Bower of Bliss to the projects of Elizabethan morality and colonialism, as critics have variously argued, although there are other available readings of the Bower and Guyon's ruthless actions in it.⁹ But in the *Complaints*, the Garden of Adonis, and the *Shepherd's Calendar*, he refuses to give even one flower to these causes. In signal passages of these poems, he declines to give a single rhetorical flower away to a recipient, deserving or not, of courtly compliment. Instead, he keeps them all for himself. When it comes to his rhetorical flowers, Spenser knows how to praise and knows also when the liberties of subjects, including poets and readers, move him to be tight-fisted.

Spenser's Narcissism

The figure of the poet-as-narcissist appears early in the career of the "new poet" and precisely where no reader would expect him to pay a visit: the "Aprill" eclogue of the *Shepherd's Calendar*, which delivers the eclogues' greatest song of praise to Eliza, Queene of Shepherdes, and, in her guise, Queen Elizabeth I.¹⁰ There are two floral stanzas that frame Colin Clout's praise of "fayre Elisa," "that blessed wight" and "flowre of Virgins," whom the pastoral speaker hopes may "florish long / In princely plight" (46–9). Political authority, as the first of the stanzas presents it, emanates entirely from Eliza, the daughter of Pan and Syrinx and the queen of the pastoral genre:

See, where she sits vpon the grassie greene,
 (O seemely sight)
 Yclad in Scarlot like a mayden Queene,
 And Ermines white.
 Vpon her head a Cremosin coronet,
 With Damaske roses and Daffadillies set:
 Bayleaues betweene,
 And Primroses greene
 Embellish the sweet Violet.

(55–63)

Eliza furnishes the historical icons of royalty in this stanza, from her scarlet robes with "Ermines white" to the red and white roses in her cheeks, which proclaim the Tudor heritage of York and Lancastrian lines of descent. By implication it is the poet's task to provide floral tributes to her naturalized royal authority: the "Damaske roses and Daffadillies" and the "Primroses greene" that "Embellish the sweet Violet," interwoven with the bay leaves due to conquerors.

Following this stanza are yet more stanzas, eight in total, larded with emblems of Eliza's pastoral majesty, protestations of the singer's humble devotion, and a surprising number of questions organized around a central one: "tell me have you seen her?" The object of Colin's praise is "the flowere of Virgins" (47), with an "angelick face" and the "Redde rose melded with the White" (68) in her cheeks, deriving both from petrarchan love poetry and Tudor iconography. Despite being "Like *Phoebe fayre*" in "heauenly haueour" and "princely grace," she cannot ultimately be described by the pastoral and Marian comparisons that make up her image.¹¹ "She is my goddesse plaine, / And I her shepherds swayne, / Albee forswonk and forswatt I am" (97–9), Colin avers. One reason that Colin is undefinably "forswonk and forswatt" – two words to be found in Chaucer but not in E. K.'s glosses or the *OED* – is that he has so many questions about this maiden. "Have you seen her?" turns into "Have you seen the like of her?" Even Cynthia, pagan goddess of the moon, twin sister of Apollo, and a mainstay of Elizabeth I's iconography, receives an interrogation: "When shee the beames of her beauty displayes, / O how art thou dasht?" (84–5). At every turn in every stanza, Colin broaches a new question about the classical materials of Elizabeth's iconography or, more to the point, implicitly asks if they make meaningful contact with the queen's person. When Calliope and the other muses rush to see Eliza in the flesh, Colin wonders if those are "Bay branches, which they doe bear" (104). Even this begets more questions, since the branches of the bay laurel, according to Ovid's story of Daphne and Apollo in *Metamorphoses* 1, came to be tributes paid to both poets and military commanders in an act of erotic appropriation marked by violence. Having failed in his attempt to rape or marry Daphne, Apollo asserts the power of defining her new form, the bay laurel, in terms of his own mixed motives of conquest and persuasion: '*Arbor eris certe*' dixit '*mea*'! (1.558), "Assuredly from this time forth thou shalt be my tree" (1.684):

tu ducibus Latiis aderis, cum laeta Triumphum
vox canet et visent longas Capitolia pompas;
postibus Augustis eadem fidissima custos.

(*Met.* 1.560–62)

In Golding's translation,

Thou shalt adorne the valiant knight and royal Emperours:
When for their noble feates of armes like mightie conquerours,
Triumphantly with stately pomp up to the Capitoll
They shall ascende with solemne traine that doe their deedes extoll.
Before *Augustus* Pallace doore full duely shalt thou warde

(687–91)

The triumphal note should be enough, but Colin, on a roll, goes on to ask in the following stanza if the three Graces can even perform without "A fourth grace to make the daunce even?" (112).

Metacritical questions arise from the series of five questions in eight stanzas. Are they rhetorical or grammatical? Do they affirm or challenge the language of political encomium? Is this, in the end, best described as praise or a deflection of it? If Colin's questions were placed in a love lyric, they would express erotic longing for the physical presence of an absent beloved. In a pastoral poem, however, even one presented in its "ARGUMENT" as "purposely intended to the honor and prayse of our most gracious soueraigne, Queene Elizabeth," the poetic undersong veers toward anger about the absence of a zealous queen and the scarcity of benefits, which should flow from the Crown to more rural environments. The pastoral genre specializes in complaint and has done so since its mythic origins in the tale of Pan and Syrinx, narrated soon after the tale of Daphne and Apollo in *Metamorphoses* 1 and repurposed in Spenser's eclogue, where they appear as the parents of Eliza, queen of shepherds. Pastoral gained its fundamentally ambiguous, plaintive voice, according to Ovid's tale, when Pan over-eagerly attempted to seize the resisting Syrinx's body, only to find he has in her place a handful of reeds. The story, told by the god Mercury disguised as a shepherd, ends with Syrinx's transformation into reeds, which Pan then transforms into the Pan-pipes. In Golding's translation, Mercury describes

when Pan between his armes, to catch y Nymph besought:
In steade of hir he caught the Reedes newe growne upon the brooke,
And as he sighed, with his breath the Reedes he softly shooke,
Which made a still and mourning noyse, with straungness of the which
And sweetenesse of the feeble sounde the God delighted mich,
Said certesse *Syrinx* for thy sake it is my full intent
To make my comfort of these Reedes wherein thou doest lament.

(1.879–85)

Golding in fact removes some of the ambiguity of Ovid's Latin, which suggests in the original that Pan never understood that the complaints of the Pan-pipe originate not with him but with Syrinx, who eternally mourns at least three offenses: her victimization by his attempted rape; her transformation to reeds; and his appropriation of her metamorphosed body. The Latin makes clear that the strange new sound is Syrinx's voice, issuing a slender sound similar to a complainant's, *sonum tenuem similem-que querenti* (1.708), which in turn inspires Pan to seek an endless dialogue

or *colloquium* (709) with her voice, using her body as the instrument of his countercomplaint.¹²

At the end of Spenser's eight stanzas – a stream of complaint-laced praise – the poet offers a second floral stanza, a parting tribute to match the welcoming gift to the queen, as if she had come by Kilcolmon on a royal passage. This one, however, is so overstuffed with flowers that there is scarcely room for praise or any other mode of external reference:

Bring hether the Pincke and purple Cullambine,
 With Gelliflowres:
 Bring Coronations, and Sops in wine,
 worne of Paramoures.
 Strowe me the ground with Daffadowndillies,
 And Cowslips, and Kingcups, and loued Lillies:
 The pretie Pawnce,
 And the Cheuisaunce,
 Shall match with the fayre flowre Delice.

(136–44)

This is a showier display of poetic skill: not content with creating a handful of flowers, the singer proffers them by the armload and pastoral cartload. Some flowers seem fit for a royal bouquet, such as the Coronations and Kingcups, but it is equally possible to say that these royal-sounding flowers are placed socially in a bouquet that levels them with the Pinke, Cullambine, Gelliflowres, Sops in wine, Cowslips, Lilies, Pawnce, and inalienably Spenserian Daffadowndillies.¹³ In fact, “Cheuisaunce” and fleur-de-lice are more useful as flowers without allegory, since their figurative meanings speak more to French influence than Tudor sovereignty.¹⁴ In any event, the poet never relaxes his tight hold on any of the flowers he gathers together in the stanza. Within this space, the flowers flow in the direction of Colin. The devious suggestion is that the poem has always been more of a tribute to the poet than the prince, who inspires eloquence in her subjects in complicated ways. Even Eliza, Queen of Shepherds, achieves only an elusive presence in the poem because she is represented by the poet's rhetorical flowers. “Strowe me the ground with Daffadowndillies”: there is a double meaning in that central line, where the ethical dative piously struggles with a saucy imperative of the heroically narcissistic poet, who refuses to submit his own fertile imagination to royal authority.

The larger frame of the “Aprill” eclogue supports the case for the poem's considerable interest in the self-love and self-care of poets and their circles. It is not even Colin Clout, Spenser's pastoral representative, who is

singing the song about Eliza. It is Hobbinol, who has been carrying the torch for his beloved Colin since he broke his pipe in the January eclogue (the very first of the poems) and went into retreat like some sulking Achilles, begrudging the titular honor and forced service required by a new Agamemnon. Hobbinol, who expresses no personal feeling for Eliza, is singing in loving memory of Colin, the most gifted of all poet-shepherds. Four months have done nothing to alter Colin's pique, bring him out of retirement, or deliver him again to the circle of shepherds who value him. As sung by Hobbinol, the "Aprill" eclogue duly remembers the queen, Elizabeth I, in the golden age of her rule. But the singer is not concerned with the celebration of the queen of political pastoral: she is effectively his instrument for mourning the silence of his dearest friend and his community's greatest poet. This is a love poem from Hobbinol to Colin. He says it with flowers, which he lavishes not on Eliza but on Colin.

Readers who turn from the "Aprill" eclogue at the outset of Spenser's career to the *Complaints* encounter yet more floral passages, all flagrantly irrelevant to moral use or political encomium. These poems share with the *Shepherd's Calender* an anxiety about the diminution of the poetic word to the instrumental uses of others, especially the Crown and the court. In the later poems, however, Spenser's attention curiously shifts from the question of political instrumentality – namely the production of pastoral verse in relation to the Crown – to a larger question of moral reference in poetry per se. According to most critical accounts, Spenser ranks in the last tier of poets who might raise an objection to the moral seriousness of poetry. In the late poems, however, there are long catalogues that endeavor to *collect* flowers and *recall* moral catalogues – inventories and compilations of moral emblems, *sententiae*, and maxims – without fully delivering on the exhortation to poets to delight and instruct and, what is more, without producing a single moral comment, much less a courtly compliment.

Ambivalence about moral prescription, especially as it threatens the autonomy of the poet's personal vision and voice, is especially intense in the sensual inventories that feature the sweetest of all flowers, the narcissus. This flower appears in the climactic position of some of Spenser's most lavish descriptions of floral monuments. By the same token, the exquisite Ovidian boy who fell in love with his own beauties only to lose them at the moment of self-recognition features in key moments of Spenser's ambivalent self-description. The figure of Narcissus prominently appears in the complaint poems, such as *Virgils Gnat* and *Muioptomos, Or, the Fate of the Butterflie*, as well as in *The Faerie Queen's Garden of Adonis*, and in the *Shepherd's Calender*, where he is the subject of the motto and notes to the eclogue sung by

Hobbinol and Diggon Davie. The complaint poems inject bitterness into floral arrangements. *Muiopotmos* ends with the death of a heroic butterfly, Clarion, in a spiderweb spun from courtly intrigue, while the earlier poem closes with the burial of another heroic insect, an anonymous gnat, swatted to death by an annoyed shepherd roused from an afternoon nap.

The circumstances of writing and publishing *Virgils Gnat* could hardly be more personal to Spenser. The poem is on the one hand a translation of the *Culex*, a poem ascribed to Vergil in the Renaissance. Yet Spenser does not so much translate as personalize a poem associated with Vergil in his youth (Suetonius wrote that Vergil composed the complaint poem at age sixteen). Almost every aspect of this verse complaint is a paradox, as Richard Danson Brown points out in a study that elevates the *Complaints* to a place of prominence in Spenser's career.¹⁵ The paradoxes begin with Spenser's bitter verse dedication of *Virgils Gnat*: "To the most noble and excellent Lord, the Earle of Leicester, late deceased." The choice to describe an original sonnet and a poetic translation as "Long since dedicated" to a man "late deceased" is curious, as are the opening lines of the sonnet, which assert that the sole dedicatee is also the only "causer" of the poet's complaint:

Wrong'd, yet not daring to expresse my paine,
To you (great Lord) the causer of my care
In cloudie teares my case I thus complaine
Vnto your selfe, that onely priuie are.

(1–4)

Spenser's rhetorical ploy in the first quatrain – as in the "Aprill" eclogue – is to serve up the language of love lyric, a capacious genre for casting blame while claiming to praise, to underscore the frustrations of a nonerotic but intimate relationship. The terms of betrayal cannot be put into words because the socially precarious party has been wronged by a superior, who thus transforms a confidential relationship into one of silencing and self-censorship:

But if that any Oedipus unware
Shall chauce, through power of some diuining spright,
To reade the secrete of this riddle rare,
And know the purporte of my euill plight
Let him rest pleased with his owne insight,
Ne further seeke to glose upon the text:
For grieffe enough it is to greiued wight
To feel his fault, and not be further uest.

But what so by my selfe may not be showen,
May by this Gnatts complaint be easily knowen.

(5–14)

It does not take an Oedipus to decipher the “secrete of [a] riddle rare” that may be “easily” known by reading *Virgils Gnat*. The specific causes of Spenser’s grief and complaint are destined to be minor mysteries because only two people ever knew them. One is dead, while the other is muzzled by social circumstances that do not die with the “causer” of his “care.” Yet the social context of *Virgils Gnat* is hardly an enigma.

Spenser and the Vergilian gnat face a universal problem in poetry and moral philosophy, which is that no humble speakers, however authoritative in their own domains (in Spenser’s case, the realm of words), can safely put the whole of their minds into words of warning or complaint about social abuse from on high. Arachne, the one mythic artist who attempted this *alto concetto*, was transformed into a spider by an angry, envious goddess. What the general reader may “easily” see is that a poet like Spenser – certainly among the most overqualified sizars of his university days – may fantasize about parrhesiastic complaints against his patrons and have no better recourse than to translate an ancient poem with applications to the present day. Yet a greater puzzle for the widely read Spenserian reader is why anything done “easily” can be a good thing. “Easy” actions, in Spenser’s verse, typically ensue from unguarded moments of temptation. In this case, the “ease” of action has to do with allowances for dissident interpretation. The ease with which readers understand the cause of the poet’s care is a measure of how well they also know, or sympathize with, the genre of complaint. The sonnet’s theme is the problem of *parrhesia*, yet we cannot name it without putting ourselves at risk. The reader consequently shares the position of the speaker.

Even the allusive register of *Virgils Gnat* is paradoxical. While the poem counts as a translation of a “juvenile” poem by Vergil, Spenser treats it as an Ovidian complaint written in that poet’s older age. It may as well be titled *Virgils Ovidian Gnat*, but to do so would give away the polemical game. When Spenser speaks in the first line of the dedicatory verse of being wronged “yet not daring to expresse his pain,” he is not citing any line in the Vergilian corpus, actual or ascribed. He is instead citing the major trope of Ovid’s entire career. In *Metamorphoses* 1, to take the prime example, the Ovidian narrator says that “if audacity were to be put into words,” he “would scarcely fear” to make a topical identification between the heavenly court and the Palatine, Augustus and Jove – at a genocidal moment that contains no visible compliment. Jove/Augustus has summoned the senate and people to ratify his last-minute demand for the eradication of the entire human race due to the insult of one man (Lycaon). The senatorial gods roar out approval, clap, or nod, all the while wondering

how they retain their own supremacy if there is no one left to worship them. Ovid puts on a heightened pose of fear and trembling in the face of the terrible displeasure of an absolutist king over any negative identifications with his own divine imagery.

At the end of his poetic career, Ovid repeats and expands the motif of technical silence on a subject of grievance. In his exilic poetry, he emphasizes that he has seen something damning in the emperor's court that he cannot name. He effectively leaves readers with two options. In one scenario, there is a historical secret whose discovery would solve the mystery of the exile and exonerate the poet in the tribunal of history if not in Rome under the emperors. In another scenario, it is obvious what Ovid saw – that Augustus, by assuming the paradoxical figure of the divine prince (first citizen), teeters on the brink of tyranny, threatening Roman citizens with the disenfranchisement of that hallmark of republicanism, liberty of speech. In an empire, every citizen's word is measured in relation to the absolute power of the prince. This is the back story to Spenser's pose of fear in his dedicatory invective, to call it by its proper name.

At the beginning of his poetic career, Spenser used the same device of recalling the exiled Ovid in what is ostensibly a translation or adaptation of the pastoral Vergil. At the outset of the *Shepherd's Calendar*, Spenser pens an address "To His Book," which echoes Ovid as well as Chaucer. The verse provocatively alludes to Ovid, *Tristia* 1.1, in which the exiled poet addresses his book as his child, heading from Tomis on the Black Sea for its first visit to Rome. Spenser, too, tells his poem to expect no welcome but rather surveillance and great precarity upon its arrival in London, where it will find multiple forms of "Enuie [to] bark at thee" because of its "parent."¹⁶ Spenser deliberately splices the pastoral situation of Vergil, a "shepherds swaine" who sang "as his straying flocke he fedde" (10–11), onto the elegies of exiled Ovid, who lived in a very cold pastoral (even the wine froze in winter). Only in this guise, the poet says, may he "Craue pardon for [his] hardyhedde" (12), audacity, or daring. The poem's last stanza, drawing on *Tristia* 1.1, is all Ovid:

But if that any aske thy name,
Say thou wert base begot with blame:
For thy thereof though takest shame.
And when thou art past iopardee,
Come tell me, what was sayd of mee:
And I will send more after thee.

(13–18)

Spenser hints that there may be no accommodation for a new Vergil in Elizabethan London, only the hostile audience that greeted the exile poems of Vergil's greatest successor. The exile that Vergil treats as one of two possible fates of his pastoral poets in his first eclogue becomes inescapable in light of Ovid's career.

The first stanza of Spenser's translation in *Virgils Gnat*, moreover, offers a large serving of the poetic vocabulary Ovid used in his exile to defend the playful verse of his youth. Readers are told to expect a "small poem" (5) and even a "jest" (6) and piece of "sport" (7). This vocabulary nudges the pseudo-Vergilian poem as a whole toward the poetic career of Ovid, who specialized in jests, jokes, sports, and games in his earlier career and described them as such mainly in his exilic elegies and epistles. Even a poetic "jest," however, can be the object of "enuie" and "abuse" (6), as Spenser puts it, recalling yet another poem of Ovid's exile, the *Ibis*, which inveighed against an envious and disloyal friend who "poured lies into the emperor's ear" about Ovid.¹⁷ To call one's own poem a jest or toy is to highlight its *fragility* more than its supposed negligibility (its status as *nequitia*). In fact, a poem only becomes a toy when it has become an object of detraction and threat to the writer. The poet's recourse, in this situation, may be a parrhesiastic insult to the invidious reader: 'But who such sports and sweet delights doth blame, / Shall lighter seeme than this Gnats idle name' (7–8). The identity of this light reader is wide open to supposition. It might be topical and thus include the Earl of Leicester or someone in his social circle. Or it might be general and thus refer to anyone who reads for no better purpose than to "damn the author," as Ben Jonson put it.¹⁸

Most of *Virgils Gnat* is devoted to the complaint of a gnat who poured warnings of grave danger into the ear of a "sleepie" (283) and absentminded shepherd, in immediate danger of death by the poisonous fang of a serpent. Unluckily for the gnat, the shepherd awoke to what he perceived as whining, slapped down the heroic insect without further thought, and left him for dead. All might have been well, if the gnat had not felt so aggrieved that his ghost came back from the dead to continue his complaint in the more public forum of a poem. Although so tiny as to be imperceptible, the gnat comes back as a tragic remnant and an epic curse: when the insect returns from the dead, the shepherd experiences a scene of self-recognition that ultimately leads to his earnest but insufficient efforts to atone for his hasty act. A poetic gnat may be swatted down in an instant, Spenser implies, but poets find ways to come back and haunt abusers of power.

Virgils Gnat culminates in a sumptuous florilegium. Because Leicester is dead, it is all the more momentous that the final stanzas pay tribute to the

gnat alone, making no room in the memorial for the poem's dedicatee, who largely disappears from the poem's self-conscious scene of poetic memorialization. The ghostly gnat, who is part Socratic gadfly, comes back from the dead to get a fair hearing. For his pains, he earns a lavish memorial at the poem's very end. Filled with regret, the shepherd, who has discarded his original association with Leicester (swatted away from the poem as an annoyance), buries the gnat and commemorates his grave with flowers. He builds a tomb,

And round about he taught sweete flowres to growe,
 The Rose engrained in pure scarlet die,
 The Lilly fresh, and Violet belowe,
 The Marigolde, and cherefull Rosemarie,
 The *Spartan* Mirtle, whence sweet gumb does flowe,
 The purple Hyacinthe, and fresh Costmarie,
 And Saffron sought for in *Cilician* soyle,
 And Lawrell th'ornament of *Phoebus* toyle.
 Fresh *Rhododaphne*, and the *Sabine* flowre
 Matching the wealth of th'auncient Frankincence.
 And pallid Yuie building his owne bowre,
 And Box yet mindfull of his olde offence,
 Red *Amaranthus*, lucklesse Paramour,
 Oxeye still greene, and bitter Patience;
 Ne wants there pale *Narcisse*, that in a well
 Seeing his beautie, in loue with it fell

(665–80)

Over the course of the passage, Spenser's shepherd metamorphoses from a noble patron to an emblem of grassroots (or floral-roots) poetic authority. He gathers poetic flowers in tribute to poets. In Spenser's Elizabethan translation, the indignant gnat was always the Ovidian Spenser.

Spenser's translation of the gnat's memorial is predictably longer than the original – twenty lines instead of thirteen – and filled out by descriptive adjectives. The poet seems discontent with simply listing the name of a flower when its qualities and local history matter more than its taxonomy. The lily is fresh, the hyacinth purple, the Costmarie fresh: the rhetorical amplifications momentarily bring the flowers into a sensual vision of the here-and-now encounter with flowers. The most striking feature of the passage, however, is its zeal to escape the literal sense of “flower” and shift the poet-reader's thoughts to figurative levels of meaning.¹⁹ It is as if the literal level of interpretation placed an unbearable sense of limitation on the figure of the poet-reader, a variable composite of

the poet and any given reader. The poet-reader then spends the next fifteen lines escaping the paradoxical blankness and specificity of eighteen flowers or, more properly, their names, stripped of figurative meaning. The passage starts by emphasizing the vibrant colors and textures of the various flowers before turning abruptly to their countries of origin and desirability as commodities; then, halfway through the catalogue, it wholly rejects the idea of a mail-order form. The plants are not just personifications but have fully become persons, each with histories of sad experience in love and loss.

By the end of the passage, the flowers have lost their original status as emblems-and-allegories-in-the-making and have become, instead, narratives in the history of emotions. The floral passage culminates in a series of reverse metamorphoses. The "pale *Narcisse*, that in a well / Seeing his beauty, in loue with it fell" is the boy himself, struggling to preserve his story from its floral translation and endless moralizing. The "Red *Amaranthus*, luckless Paramour" is scarcely a flower, much less the flower used to decorate the tomb of Achilles: "This still-green *Amaranthus* doth imply / How that great *Heroes* fame shall never dy" (in George Sandys's gloss).²⁰ These pastoral and Ovidian boys inspire the readers to shift their eyes upward from the bottom of the passage to its beginning, which subtly inaugurated the process of unmetamorphosing the flowers, such as the "purple *Hyacinthe*," named for the beautiful boy loved by Apollo in *Metamorphoses* 10. In the rhetorical flow of the floral tribute to a gnat, these flowers have reversed their course and returned to their status as the storied youths of ancient, pagan, fables. By the end of the passage, the objects of mourning have grown: an angry gnat makes way for an angry poet, who mourns the impoverishment of the rhetorical figures on which he lavishes his attention. All of these in turn yield to a discontented reader, who mourns the loss of *parrhesia*, which is commuted from bold and open speech in the forum to the silent act of interpretation.²¹

The floral conclusion to *Virgils Gnat* is a tour-de-force complaint, but its apposite verse in the Garden of Adonis of *The Faerie Queene* III.vi is more haunting. It compresses the sensual exuberance of *Virgils Gnat* into a single stanza of intense sadness and sweetness. I refer to the stanza that names the flowers that were once lovely and beloved youths. In the 1609 edition of the poem:

And all about grew euery sort of flowre,
To which sad louers were transformd of yore;
Fresh *Hyacinthus*, *Phoebus* paramoure,

And dearest loue,
 Foolish *Narcisse*, that likes the watrie shore,
 Sad *Amaranthus*, made a flowre of late.
 Sad *Amaranthus*, in whose purple gore,
 Me seemes I see *Amintas* wretched fate,
 To whom sweet Poets verse hath giuen endlesse date.
 (FQ III.vi.45)²²

This is a much-beloved passage of *The Faerie Queene*, despite (or because of) the fact that there is so little here for the moralist to latch onto. The central line contains the stanza's one gesture toward rebuke: it starts promisingly with a reference to "Foolish *Narcisse*" only to disappoint the moral reader even before the line, much less the stanza, has come to the end. No self-respecting moralist knocks Narcissus for "lik[ing]" his "waterie shore." It is as if the poet toyed with the idea of moral bullying only to have a change of heart before the line draws to a close. Instead of dunking Narcissus in the cold waters of moral reproof, he rescues him from both death and censure and leaves him to his ardent, solitary pleasures on the banks of his pool, forever a suspended instrument of rhapsodic engagement with beauty.

What is true of Narcissus is also true of other Ovidian and pastoral figures in the stanza, which unfolds in close relation to the moral inventories that it also eschews. The stanza produces a list of figures, takes them to the border of moral translation or equivalency, and then declines to push them over that line and thus out of the suspended realm of sensual poetry. It instead preserves the lovely youths and their Ovidian and pastoral genres in an eternal present shared by Narcissus, Hyacinthus, Adonis, Amintas, Daphnis, Gallus, and Lycidas. Its temporality is distinct from that of commonplace books and rhetorical handbooks, which collect rhetorical beauties for use in immanent or future times. The flowers of rhetoric in handbooks are not intended for immediate use. They are carefully prepared and stored for future use as moral prophylaxis or restoratives: "take heed," one catalogue implicitly suggests, while another recommends a bitter pill if you have already crossed a transgressing line from use to pleasure, accompanied by the prescription "take this."

Collections of fancies, by contrast, hedonistically attend to the here and now. They are meant for immediate consumption and paradoxically seek to prolong the deictic moment by casting into oblivion the duties that come with a providential and linear sense of time. Such poetic bouquets take up the stories of love and loss associated with Hyacinthus, Amaranthus, and Narcissus and distill them into a perfumed essence with "endless date." One whiff – and a stanza is one whiff – revives the experience of elegiac longing as

it stands at the threshold between having and losing, erotic promise and submission to the moral disciplines that require mythic, pagan lovers and even common, Protestant readers to rewrite their experience as a lesson learned. In rhetorical terms, the catalogue of fancies throws objectivity itself into suspicion and places the reader of Spenserian poetry at the zero degree of elegiac epiphonesis.²³ This is the “ai, ai,” inscribed on Ovid’s Hyacinthus (*Met.* 10.212–16), or the “A!” uttered by Chaucer’s Arcite at his first glimpse of Emelye in *The Knight’s Tale*.

If any of Spenser’s readers, contemporary or present-day, are looking for moral edification, the sensuous passages containing inventories of flowers turn out to be splendidly useless. They have deep significance, however, if we attend to their ceremonial and even funereal character. The flowers in *Virgils Gnat* are piled high on the tomb of a fragile creature, whose very existence is considered a nuisance, and flowers are again piled high in the stanza in the Garden of Adonis that enacts Narcissus’s tragic loss of speech in the midst of rhetorical plenty. At the supposed apex of the entire canto’s confidence in the frank powers of nature, generativity, and speech, Spenser’s narrator falters in his encomium and begins to mourn and memorialize the boys who have become flowers and emblems. *Inopem me fecit copia* – “my plenty makes me poor” – is the cry uttered by Narcissus when he recognizes the image he adores as his own and sees, further, that his very beauties and eloquence impoverish him. This stanza, as all Spenserians know, is hauntingly incomplete in the 1609 edition.²⁴ Its intensity is increased by the half-line representing a loss of words in response to the thought of Hyacinthus, “*Phoebus paramoure.*” The empty half-line reads metrically and metaphysically as a gasp or deep breath drawn by the poet and reader before they move on to the next in the long line of beautiful, dead youths in pastoral and Ovidian verse.

It is sometimes said of Spenser that he begins with inspiration and even a clear plan for composition and then discovers alternatives along the way that bring his narratives to an impasse and to what Jonathan Goldberg aptly called “endless worke.”²⁵ And yet there are occasions when Spenser manifestly starts with the ending – a violent death, the loss of voice, or the loss of aesthetic beauty – and then works his way backward to create something quite different from a justification of violence. To the contrary, Spenser creates a sumptuous body for his poems and, in so doing, a sense of beauty whose loss his readers may regret and even resent. His response to anticipated scenes of silence and silencing is often to pile on eloquence, dish up hedonistic idylls, and drive away the clouds and shadows of moral reproof in a way that is both momentary and lasting. The question is why.

Why would the sage and serious Spenser ever place distance between himself and his moral projects and, simultaneously, between his readers and these projects?

The problem that Spenser wishes to bring into view is that the poet's eloquence is also the sign of his alienation and impoverishment. This is the condition of Narcissus, whose plenty made him poor. That Spenser attached *political* significance to Narcissus's moment of reckoning with his own eloquence and image comes early in his work, with the September eclogue of the *Shepherdes Calendr*, where *inopem me fecit copia* serves as the emblem of Diggon Davie, the young shepherd who met with disappointment when he tried to serve in foreign lands under the tyrannical authority of the pope. The ever-helpful E. K. notes,

This is the saying of Narcissus in Ouid. For vvhen the foolishhe boye by beholding his face in the brooke, fell in loue vvith his ovne likeness: and not hable to content him selfe vvith much looking thereon, he cryed out, that plenty made him poor, meaning that much gazing had bereft him of sence.

E. K. goes on to say that Diggon Davie uses the emblem and motto "to other purpose, as vvho that by tryall of many vvayes had found the vvorst, and through greate plenty vvvas fallen into great penurie." He adds a final, intriguing remark, based on the authority of unverifiable, personal experience: "This poesie I knovve, to haue bene much vsed of the author, and to such like effect, as first Narcissus spake it." There is no gap between Narcissus's first utterance, E. K. suggests, and Spenser's use of it.

The emblem suggests that Spenser and Diggon Davie feel very much alike about the disappointments of service to tyrannical authorities, whether they rule in foreign, Catholic lands or the Protestant ones closer to home. For Spenser, the failure of poetry to earn a living wage is a disappointment, and yet there are worse consequences. These are the impoverishing changes to the poetic word and the poet's voice brought on by service to tyrannical or simply thoughtless authorities. In such circumstances, the poet's utterance, especially at his most eloquent, is also the moment of his utter, but knowing, alienation from himself. Poetic narcissism is an expression of defiance directed outwardly as well as disappointment inwardly directed. If Spenser's eloquence made him poor, this is because he was expected to waste it on unworthy or ungrateful objects in the Queen's court and even on her Privy Council. By the same token, his defiance made him eloquent.

The Fate of the Butterfly

Spenser marks the midpoint of his miniature epic *Muiopotmos* with two antiphonal questions: “What more felicitie can fall to creature, / Than to enioy delight with libertie?” he asks, and then, “But what on earth can long abide in state” since “least mishap the most blisse alter may?” (209–10, 217, 220). It is prudent to want little. Failing that, it is best never to be seen to have wants in “excess” of a norm that somehow never needs a positive definition. *Muiopotmos* puts a good deal of work into contesting the sense that a measured appetite for liberty is self-evident. By the same token, Spenser opens up to interrogation the meanings of “excess” and “riot,” whose negativity is also supposedly obvious to all. Clarion, the heroic and ill-fated butterfly of the poem, responds to the “riotous excesse” (168) of nature’s flowers and herbs with a combination of greed and the tenderest respect. Modern critics find no innocent meanings in either of the quoted words, but readers of Spenser’s day were able to pick through the negative and accentuate the positive. To “riotize” might mean to “take great delight or pleasure in something” or to “feast,” while “excess” might mean “overstepping of the limits of moderation” and gravitating toward “superabundance” as a model of living beyond bare subsistence. And so we can see from the rapturous but ill-fated delight that Clarion takes in the garden’s beauties how the poem may ultimately come down to a competition between a peasant-weaver, Arachne, and a goddess: the one is possessed of a riotous and excessive talent, and the other is possessed by a passion to suppress the mortal woman’s claims.²⁶

The “riotous excess” (168) of *Muiopotmos*’s flowerbeds and the “riotous suffisaunce” (207) of its most devoted consumer, Clarion, both recall and relate to the lavish poetic *copia* in Spenser’s floral verses. The abundant eloquence at the command of the humanist poet is conventionally viewed as “good” so long as it is restrained by the bounds of encomium, itself tilted toward praise and away from blame and other forms of free speech. If the interpretive bars imposed by convention are lifted, then the poet’s learning and eloquence may come flowing forth in the genre of poetic complaints and political engagement. Spenser’s flowerbeds are lovely and luxurious, sweet to the senses, and ripe for conversion to poetic compliment. But they are, finally, *complaints*, which are generally concerned with the limits placed on the poet’s freedom to speak his mind and dare any representations that please him. Beautiful as these passages are, they are fully meant as “riotous excess” in language, as “flower power.” For Spenser, the problem of poetry and for poetry is the way in which it is read: the default moralizations of the

poetic language are too often supplied by the court and the Crown, which maintain too strong a hold over the interpretation of the poetic word.

Even more than the floral tribute to the gnat of *Virgils Gnat*, the flowerbeds of *Muiopotmos* enjoin us to get lost in the act of reading and forget the duty to moralize. In *Muiopotmos*, the heroic butterfly Clarion dons his splendid wings and sets out on something like a royal progress through the “gay gardens” (161) where “lauhish Nature, in her best attire, / Powres forth sweete odors, and alluring sights” (163–4). He is as delightful to behold as the garden due to his “shinie wings as siluer bright, / Painted with thousand colours, passing farre / All Painters skill” (89–92), in number greater than the colors of Iris’s rainbow or Juno’s peacock. His floral wings, passed down to him by his mother, Astery, are badges of pride wrested from a mythic scene of shaming and injustice. Astery, the most “nimble ioynted” and “industrious” (121–2) of Venus’s nymphs, so far exceeded her peers in gathering flowers to adorn the goddess’s brow that her peers told Venus lies: how Cupid “Did lend her secret aide, in gathering / Into her lap the children of the spring” (127–8). Spurred by memories of Cupid’s marriage to Psyche, and by the sexual double entendres deployed by the envious nymphs, Venus punished Astery by transforming her into a butterfly, whose status nonetheless remains open to question. No Ovidian goddess transforms a mortal enemy into a thing of beauty and grace. Venus may have intended to create a fly, as the title, with its reference to the Greek word for “fly,” suggests. The agency for the resulting insect, far more splendid than most, may be due to Astery’s continued resolve:

And all those flowres, with which so plenteouslie
Her lap she filled had, that bred her spight,
She placed in her wings, for memorie
Of her pretended crime, though crime none were.
(140–3)

The flowers do not recall Astery’s sexual shame: they are resplendent emblems of her art and ingenuity. The nymph herself seems to take the flowers she had gathered in her lap and place them on her wings as an act of uninterrupted defiance and creativity. It is certainly the woman who passes them on to her son, Clarion, whose wings are judged to be more beautiful than Cupid’s.

Carried along by these wings and his own “unstead desire” – i.e., Clarion may be unsteady on his pins, but he is never stolid or dull – he flies to the “gay gardens” to “refresh his sprights” (161–2) in his passage over “fields in his franke lustinesse” (148). In his imagination, he possesses “all the

country wide”: “Feeding vpon their pleasures [so] bounteouslie, / That none gainsaid, nor none did him enuie” (150–2), the butterfly takes and gives in equally bounteous measure. Like Milton’s Eden, the gardens are “Wild above rule or art; enormous bliss” (*PL* 5.297):

There Lauish Nature in her best attire,
Powres forth sweete odors, and alluring sights;
And Arte with her contending, doth aspire
T’excell the natural, with made delights:
And all that faire or pleasant may be found,
In riotous excesse doth there abound.

(163–8)

When Clarion arrives at this earthly paradise, he breathes in the scent of “euerie flowre and herb” (172), and at this point Spenser provides a catalogue of flowers that busy readers, pressed for time, aiming for use over immediate gratification, might be tempted to speed-read. The temptation is a mistake:

The wholesome Saulge, and Lauender still gray,
Ranke smelling Rue, and Cummin good for eyes,
The Roses rainging in the pride of May,
Sharpe Isope, good for greene wounds remedies,
Faire Marigoldes, and Bees alluring Thime,
Sweete Marioram, and Daysies decking prime.

Coole Violets, and Orpine growing still,
Embathed Balme, and chearfull Galingale,
Fresh Costmarie, and breathfull Camomill,
Dull Poppie, and drink-quickning Setuale,
Veyne-healing Veruen, and hed-purging Dill,
Sound Sauorie, and Bazill hartie-hale,
Fat Colworts, and comforting Perseline,
Colde Lettuce, and refreshing Rosmarine.

(187–200)

If we follow Clarion’s lead in our own perusal of the garden, we observe and gather up a great many things of use, beginning with a list of plants that comes very close to reading like a medicinal recipe. Yet it stops short of the organizational techniques that would direct the list of herbs and flowers to a useful and healthful purpose. Clarion finally gathers their virtues without thought to whether they are “good or ill” (201). When he first arrives at the garden, he takes a “suruey” of “euerie flowre and herbe” with his “curious busie eye” (171–2) and “tasteth [them] tenderly” and not

“rudely” (173–4). After perusing the flowers for two full stanzas, he greedily devours them for their sensual pleasures without turning his mind to their natural secrets. “[T]urn[ing] to his play” in earnest, his full intent is “To spoil the pleasures of that Paradise” (185–6). He takes the sensual good – the one neutral sense of “spoil” in the *OED* among a long list of negative senses – from “euery one” and tastes them “at will / And on their pleasures greedily doth pray” (203–4), in an impossible mingle-mangle of predation and prayer.

The act of reading exemplified in Clarion’s flight through the garden bears a distinct if curious relation to the humanist activity of gathering rhetorical flowers and maxims for storage in commonplace books. The humanist is famously like a bee, as the commonplace derived from Seneca the Younger goes: he both samples and devours classical books for the honey of good counsel and reputation.²⁷ He cultivates his image as an industrious and learned man, his mind well stocked with wise sayings and examples. He is goal-oriented and reads chiefly for use, as Peter Beale reminds us, and he “wants advancement,” as András Kiséry points out about that great delayer, Hamlet.²⁸ By contrast, Clarion reads for pleasure, confident that his appetite for natural beauty is also moral. Glutting himself with the delights of the garden, he lives wholly in the here and now – like the Biblical lilies of the valley – and stocks up nothing for the future. Spenser’s heroic and hedonistic butterfly, as every reader of *Muiopotmos* knows, is headed for disaster. He is about to fly directly into a web crafted by the envious spider Aragnoll and to die by a wound to the heart.²⁹ The poem comes to an end when Clarion is caught in Aragnoll’s web, where the hapless butterfly “strugled long, / Himself to free thereout” until “in the ende he breathless did remain” (425–6, 430). Already spent, he dies when the “greisly tyrant” (433) stabs him in the heart, sending his “deepe groning spright” into the “aire” (438–9).

Spenser’s Clarion is overconfident of his charms and blind to the darker passions of the court and the Crown, namely envy. The Crown of the 1590s is increasingly invested in limiting the liberties of subjects, and the court is filled with detraction and its older moral vice, envy – as Spenser again suggests at the end of *The Faerie Queene* V.³⁰ Tyrants have long ears and a long reach, as the old commonplace goes.³¹ They are never done with scanning and searching into the minds of citizens and despoiling them of the liberties if they come at the cost of the king’s own absolute prerogative. But there is no moralizing line to be drawn between Clarion’s death and the hedonism and narcissism of his reading habits. Whether he is modestly tasting or greedily devouring their goods, he is arguably a very good reader

of flowers. He dies anyway. Envy is hard on good courtiers, poets beholden to the court, and possibly their readers. The ancient Greek authority on this topic is Callimachus, while Ovid, a victim of detraction in the court of Augustus, is the classical authority of imperial Rome. In closing remarks to his exile poetry, Ovid speaks directly to the personification of envy. After writing five books of elegies in the *Tristia* and four further books in the *Epistulae Ex Ponto* – all of them hoping to book his return trip to Rome, as Stephen Hinds trenchantly observes – Ovid finally throws in the towel, admitting that envy, the enemy of poetry, has defeated and silenced him. He has been stabbed through so many times that he feels he is all one wound: “What pleasure to thee to drive the steel into limbs already dead?” Ovid asks in the final iambic pentameter of his career. “There is no space in me now for a new wound” (*quid iuvat extinctos ferrum demittere in artus? / non habet in nobis iam nova plaga locum*, 4.16.51–2), he said, and wrote no more.

Spenser’s readers also feel moved to note that it is the fate of the butterfly to die in a web of allusions as well as courtly intrigue: the poem’s sense of literary and political history come together in the end.³² One set, organized around the epic genre, invokes the end of Vergil’s *Aeneid*, recalling the moment when Aeneas stabs Turnus and sends his soul groaning to the underworld.³³ Another set, arising from elegy, emphasizes Aragnoll’s assault on Clarion’s breath and, by extension, the divine substance of poetic inspiration, also evoked by the status of the butterfly as an emblem of the human soul. These allusions draw on the end of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and his exilic elegies, in which the poet reflects on what it has meant for him to come into violent contact with a wrathful prince possessed of godlike powers. In the exile poems, Ovid dwells on the loss of breath (a knife at the throat), the power of speech (falling into silence), and his own mortality.³⁴ These elegies, with their pained focus on bodily vulnerability, stand in sharp contrast to the poetic immortality he claimed for himself at the end of *Amores* 1.15 and the end of the *Metamorphoses*.

It is too easy to undercut Spenser’s Vergilian allusions by reading Clarion’s death as mock epic. If his death is tragic, as it is, it is unlikely to focus on the literal fate of a lone butterfly, although Spenser’s keen sense of the relationship between things great and small might in fact lead a reader to take the idea of fragile life forms quite seriously. The poem is clearly concerned with poetic endings: what does a great poet choose to say at the end of his career, why does he say it, and why is it so frequently tragic? Neither Vergil nor Ovid ended on a high note. The last lines of both

poets, in the *Aeneid* and the *Epistulae Ex Ponto*, deal with death, loss, and lasting resentment. They contain an implicit question about the effect of absolute power on the rhetoric of encomium and, what is more, the dangerous limits on poetic freedom imposed by power. In the case of Spenser's major Roman sources, the issue is this: with the constitutional shift to an empire, in which republicanism survives as a moral virtue but not a political right, the conditions for composing and reading poetry change, even metamorphose, as if a human being had been changed to a beast, bird, stone, or star. If the prince and not the poet or any other reader has ultimate power over the interpretation the poetic word, the legacy of poetry, no matter how "high and light" it may seem to be at first view, is tragic.³⁵

Getting a Word in Edgewise

It has been said that Spenser focuses on the project of *Muiopotmos* so hazily that he forgets the formulaic contents of the very first stanza. D. C. Allen, a very good reader of Spenser, made this remark in 1956, and it has been repeated and varied ever since, generally to reinforce the idea that expanding the poem's heroic greatness can only come with forgetting that it is in the end about a butterfly and a spider.³⁶ The great opponents are routinely but wrongly thought to be Clarion, Spenser's gorgeous butterfly, and Aragnoll, the toxic spider and son of Ovid's Arachne, who shows up in a radically altered form at the poem's end. It is true that the opening stanza prepares for an epic battle apparently between two epic heroes of equal resources:

I sing of deadly dolorous debate,
 Stir'd vp through wrathfull *Nemesis* despight,
 Betwixt two mightie ones of great estate,
 Drawne into armes, and prooffe of mortal fight,
 Through prowde ambition, and hartswelling hate,
 Whilest neither could the others greater might
 And sdeignfull scorne endure: that from small iarre
 Their wraths at length broke into open war.

(1–8)

The scenario, in which insects are pinned to mock-epic, anticipates more levity than gravitas. And when it at last materializes that Clarion and Aragnoll have not given much thought to their enmity, the failure generally falls on Spenser, who is imagined not to remember his first stanza when he delivers the final one, which is both epic and tragic. But the "deadly

dolorous debate” that Envy stirs up between “mightie ones of great estate” was never meant to take place between two aristocratic opponents or even two insects. It was always meant to take place between two women, each coming from radically different stations and both lauded for their divine talent. One is a goddess, Pallas, venerated as the inventor of weaving, and the other is Arachne, a peasant-weaver, who garners grassroots support from other women for the divinity of her art, comes to the attention of the goddess. Arachne elects to compete with Pallas rather than capitulate.

The whole of *Muiopotmos* leads up to a volatile and important competition between disparate social stations, followed by a murder. The competition takes place between Pallas and Arachne, into which Spenser interweaves the past sources, intertexts, and commentaries involving the myth in his curiously heavy revision of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. The murder, carried out by Aragnoll on Clarion, is the aftershock of the seismic change that Spenser makes to his primary source in Ovid. It is important to be clear: Spenser never means for his version to *replace* Ovid’s story or its vast history of editions, commentaries, allusions, and imitations. His altered version is a continuing commentary on the importance of Ovid’s tale and its astonishing history of transmission. At the conclusion to *Muiopotmos*, Spenser freely adapts Ovid’s story of the weaving competition between the goddess Pallas and the peasant Arachne, the most daring of artists in the *Metamorphoses* and the one most closely resembling Ovid himself in her art. In Ovid’s version, the goddess weaves the old story of her competition with Neptune over the possession of Athens. What is at stake is more than a name: it is the form of governance to be associated with the most illustrious city of ancient Greece. In Pallas’s account, Jupiter presides while the twelve Olympian gods act as jury to the rival claims of the contending deities. As E. K. puts it in a gloss on the olive in the “Aprill” eclogue, it is “finely feigned, that when Neptune and Minerua stroue for the naming of the citie of Athens, Neptune striking the ground with his mace, caused a horse to come forth, that importeth warre, but at Mineruaes stroke sprong out an Oliue, to note that it should be a nurse of learning, and such peaceable studies” (300–305).³⁷ The victory goes to Pallas, who uses her force marvelously to win – behold, a wonder! – its apparent opposites, peace and prosperity. Whereas Neptune staked his claim on military conquest, Pallas chose the diminutive olive, a symbol of peace and the seed of Athens’s economic and military sway over Attica. Pallas’s tapestry confidently invokes Athens’s glorious origins, but as the commentaries reveal it also suggests the terms in which her democracy failed. While peace is the ornament of Pallas’s tapestry, its argument is victory (*operis*

Victoria fnis, 6.82). The goals of conquest and peace form an uneasy alliance in the tapestry as well as in history.

Ovid's Arachne famously rejects the implicit argument of Pallas's tapestry, which is that the benefits accruing to civil subjects through empire and absolutist government compensate for any incidental loss of liberties.³⁸ Her contrary position is entirely consistent with her gendered, social, and geopolitical situation. She is a denizen of Hypaepa, a tiny hamlet of the Lydian empire. She is also a peasant, a social fact that Ovid emphasizes when he presents her as the daughter of a dyer and wife of a low-born man. Yet Arachne is introduced to the *Metamorphoses* with a description of her skill so vivid that Ovid's commentators classify it as an act of acclamation and lasting fame (*nomen memorabile*, 6.12) granted not by the gods but by the local nymphs and women who abandon their vineyards, waters, and homes in Lydia to admire her craft (6.15–16). Arachne represents a grassroots model of authority that at least tacitly opposes the centralized and hierarchical power of the gods along with their earthly and imperial counterparts. In her experience as a multiply subordinate subject, it is sheer lust for dominance that sustains the gods' relations with mortals. What motivates humans to extend their native talent is a passion to resist this kind of dominance and find inventive forms in which to put one's mind into words.³⁹

Arachne famously represents the rapes of eighteen women by five gods in mostly bestial forms. Jupiter retains a position of priority in her tapestry but topples, in the peasant-weaver's art, from the perch of "august" majesty he enjoys in Pallas's tapestry (*Met.* 6.73) because he is caught in the web of his serial rapes. His prodigious lust for dominating (*libido dominandi*) begins with Europa and Asterie and carries on in an insatiable heat to Leda, Antiope, Alcmena, Danae, Aegina, Mnemosyne, and Prosperina (his daughter). In Golding's translation,

The Lydian maiden in hir web did portray to the full
 How *Europe* was by royall *Jove* beguiled in shape of Bull.
 A swimming Bull, a swelling sea, so *lively* had she wrought
 That Bull and Sea *in very deede you might them well have thought*.
 The Ladie *seemed* looking back to landwarde and to crie
 Upon hir women, and to fear the water sprinkling hie,
 And shrinking up her fearfull feet. She portrayd also there
Asteriee struggling with an *Erne* which did away hir bear.
 And over *Leda* she had made a Swan his wings to splay.
 Shee added also how by *Jove* in shape of *Satyr* gaye
 The faire *Antiope* with a paire of children was besped:

And how he tooke *Amphitrios* shape when in *Alcmenas* bed
 He gate the worthie *Hercules*: and how he also came
 To *Danae* like a shoure of gold, to *Aegine* like a flame,
 A sheepeherd to *Mnemosyne*, and like a Serpent sly
 To *Proserpine*.

(126–41; emphasis added)

Arachne's representational style, even more than the scenes of rape that she puts on view, incites both keen anxiety and deft imitation in Ovid's Renaissance commentators and poetic followers. She represents the mythic scenes so vividly that the rapes, we are consistently told from one edition or imitation to another, appear to be taking place before the viewers' eyes. In her skillful hands, artistic *energeia* and verisimilitude outperform the perfect tense in which the narration is told. They function instead like the past imperfect, which represents repeated and continuous actions. What is more, the vividness of the rape scenes begins to drop away with the pure repetition as Jove presses on through nine assaults, each less artful or supposedly inviting than the last. The history of the gods' dominion loses the benevolence attributed to it by Pallas and emerges instead as continuous abuse stretching from the past to the present moment.⁴⁰ With each scene of rape, Ovid's Arachne offers less, not more, detail about the rapacious god's endeavors to attract attention from the women he victimizes, until in the final three lines he has raped four women and delivered himself into the hands of his own bestial compulsions. By the end of this resume as a rapist, it is clear that the king and father of the gods changes shape to amuse himself. To act "like" a beast, in Ovid's poetry and Arachne's tapestry, is a greater crime than to be turned into one or merely to be one.

Arachne's web, and Ovid's *Metamorphoses* more generally, riled some Renaissance thinkers, including the poem's great editor, Jacobus Pontanus. In his edition of 1610, Pontanus presents only the opening lines that describe Arachne's tapestry, which stress the weaver's vivid and verisimilar art and relate it to the artful disguise that Jove assumes in order to make a conquest of Europa, to whom he came as a bull. At this point, in disgust at Ovid's and Arachne's licentious representations of the gods, Pontanus cuts all of the rapes and, in what can be no accident, returns to Ovid's text at the very moment that Pallas, as judge and censor, destroys her rival's depiction of these "celestial crimes." Pontanus, then, is prepared to comment on what makes the art moving and dangerous – its verisimilitude and *energeia* – but is unwilling to publish the text itself. Raphael Regius, by

contrast, documents each rape and copiously narrates the subsequent histories of the ravished women and their families.

What led Pontanus to censor led others to imitate. On the self-gratifying and therefore negative side, there is Busirane and the whole room of tapestries based on Ovidian rapes as well as the Lord in the induction to *The Taming of the Shrew*, who relishes his “wanton pictures,” each featuring Ovidian scenes of divine rape. One is Adonis,

painted by a running brook
And Cytherea all in sedges hid,
Which *seem* to move and wanton with her breath
Even as the waving sedges play with wind.

And another is

Io as she was a maid,
And how she was beguiled and surprised,
As *lively* painted as the deed was done.

And the third is

Daphne roaming through a thorny wood,
Scratching her legs that *one shall swear* she bleeds,
And at that sight shall sad Apollo weep,
So *workmanly* the blood and tears are drawn.

(Induction 2.47–58)

His tears, her blood: this is the simultaneously dystopic and morally urgent vision of erotic art that flows from Ovid and his Arachne. The reader is torn between two positions, one related to pleasures taken by the rapacious gods and the other to the victims, who stand in need of the immediate help of intervention. The trouble for readers lies in verisimilitude, which summons disparate, even opposed ways of viewing a mythical scene of rape.

Arachne’s art is disturbing not because it neatly reverses the god’s-eye view of mythic rapes but instead because it solicits a complex and divided set of responses from viewers. It insists on the recognition of a sensual response to morally reprehensible scenes of rape, and it courts a dangerous analogy between the allure that the mortal love objects hold for the rapacious gods and the seductive effects of art. Some Ovidian readers, from Spenser’s Busirane to some modern translators, have seen the rapes of the *Metamorphoses* entirely from the perspective of the gods: they are “amours,” coercive acts that finesse the question of consent even as the aesthetic representations pictorialize the victims’ fear.⁴¹ But there is more to it. As early modern writers knew, the sensual and lubricious representation of rape contains an open secret about the abuse of

power, which is the voluptuous appetite of those who have it for the liberties of those citizens and persons imagined to be subordinates on a moral as well as political scale. The most arresting political insight presented in Arachne's web is that there is no common ground between absolute powers and their subjects. Their experiences are wholly incommensurate and in no way a mutual exchange. Read in this light, the rape scenes are paradigms of the double sense of the "license" that earned Ovid banishment by Augustus Caesar. They are morally licentious and, at the same time, boldly take up expressive liberties in order to critique abuses of power.

Although Spenser draws heavily on Ovid's account of Pallas and Arachne's competition, he takes such great liberties with its narrative structure that he seems initially to reverse the republican directions of the politics that Ovid seeds in both tapestries and especially Arachne's. Readers of *Muiopotmos* will remember the most striking changes that Spenser rings on Ovid's tale. First, he reverses the sequence of challenge, which in Ovid's text comes from Pallas before Arachne; and second, he reverses the order of the rhetorical descriptions of the two tapestries. Ovid places the description of Pallas's tapestry first, with the result that Arachne's tapestry stands as a powerful rebuttal of the artistic principles and political assumptions of the goddess's work and, more importantly, a vision of an alternative that lies entirely beyond the goddess's ken.

Ovid's Arachne implicitly retells the myth of the naming of Athens. In her hands, the goddess's tale of civic flourishing emerges as a failed charter myth. There is a backstory, drawn from Varro and told by St. Augustine in *The City of God*, to the naming of Athens after the goddess, and it is a political tale about the historical disenfranchisement of Athenian women. In all accounts, Neptune and Minerva compete for the right to impose their names upon the city. As Micyllus (Jacob Moltzer) narrates the tale, the men and women of Athens – not the gods – voted to determine the god after whom their city would be named, and they did so along strictly gendered lines. The women won the day by a single vote and so gave the city to Pallas. In anger Neptune flooded all of Attica until he was appeased by the punishment of the offending women, who had rejected his sway in favor of the large civic benefits associated with Pallas's olive. Their punishment, as George Sandys records it in his commentary, was "that they should have no voices in publique decrees, that their children should not carry their names, nor themselves be called *Athenians*."⁴²

Spenser takes an alternate route to a commensurate end. First, he compresses Arachne's multiple stories of rape into the single, vividly rendered rape of Europa by Jove in the shape of a bull:

Arachne figur'd how *Ioue* did abuse
Europa like a Bull, and on his backe
 Her through the sea did beare; so liuely seene,
 That it true Sea, and true Bull ye would weene.

She seem'd still backe vnto the land to looke,
 And her play-fellowes aide to call, and feare
 The dashing of the waues, that vp she tooke
 Her daintie feete, and garments gathered neare:
 But (Lord) how she in euerie member shooke,
 When as the land she saw no more appeare,
 But a wilde wildernes of waters deepe:
 Then gan she greatly to lament and weepe.

Before the Bull she pictur'd winged Loue,
 With his yong brother Sport, light fluttering
 Vpon the waues, as each had been a Doue;
 The one his bowe and shafts, the other Spring
 A burning Teade about his head did moue,
 As in their Syres new loue both triumphing:
 And manie Nymphes about them flocking round,
 And many *Tritons*, which their hornes did sound.

(277–96)

An intoxicating mood of sport and triumph surrounds the lust-struck god and contrasts strikingly with the trembling fear of the maiden. Jove is at the center of a scene of revelry, attended by putti, who jubilantly wave burning torches and Cupid's trademark bow and arrows, while nymphs and tritons swell the numbers of his entourage. By contrast, Europa "greatly . . . lament[s] and weepe[s]" (288) at the god's "abuse" (277) of his shape, of his position, and of her. Spenser follows Ovid again in asserting the persuasiveness of Arachne's art and opinion: neither Pallas nor "Enuie pale, / That al good things with venemous tooth devowres" could "accuse" Arachne (301–3) of failure or slander.

Second, Spenser steals Arachne's thunder and bestows it on the goddess when he reverses the order in which Ovid presents the two tapestries. By going second, the goddess assumes the important position of commentator. It is she and not the rebel artist who responds to a failure of vision in her rival and who weaves a masterful defense – not of mortals, as in Ovid's tale, but of the gods. In addition, Spenser decisively reforms the pagan goddess, who in Ovid's account seizes a boxwood shuttle and beats Arachne in a vindictive rage before transforming her victim into a spider. In Spenser's poem, quite unlike Ovid's, Arachne undergoes a spontaneous metamorphosis as a result

of her own grotesque envy of Pallas's wondrous art. Consumed with anger and "griefe of follie late repented" (348), Arachne finds

her white streight legs were altered
To crooked crawling shankes, of marrowe emptied,
And her faire face to fowle and loathsome hewe
And her fine corpes to a bag of venim grewe.

(349–52)

This repulsive metamorphosis, like that of Ovid's Envy in the second book of the *Metamorphoses* and unlike that of his Arachne, illustrates the self-punishing effects of humoral and political imbalance.

The total of these changes to Ovid's story makes a strong case for conservatism in the Elizabethan poet, who apparently validates the orthodox political thought that the "license" with which Ovid famously handles moral, rhetorical, and political themes is, finally, licentious abuse deserving of punishment. Political rebels and audacious poets alike, it seems, are destined to repent their folly too late, as did Ovid in his poems of exile, the *Tristia* and *Epistulae Ex Ponto*. Such an attitude appears to align Spenser with the enemies of poetry, such as Stephen Gosson, who singles out Ovid for having "roaued long on the Seas of wantonnesse" and, in the end, having "printed a carde of euerie daunger" that might threaten his poetic successors and readers.⁴³ Poetic complaints – the very genre in which Spenser is writing – seem to be represented as so many poisonous humors. As a final touch, Spenser grants Pallas the victory denied her in Ovid's account. There is at least a moment when Spenser seems to be altering Ovid systematically in order to encourage poets to bind their tongues before they are officially required to do so.

Yet there are problems with the hypothesis of a conservative Spenser, bent on reversing the mandate for speech and the complaint that Ovid weaves into the tapestry of his rebellious artist. It is not Spenser, after all, who "yeelds" the "victory" to the goddess but his Arachne, who accepts her own subjection when she gazes upon Pallas's artwork. She concedes nothing, moreover, to Pallas's "storie of the olde debate" (305) over the name and political significance of Athens. She admits defeat, but only when moved to rapture over an element in the goddess's tapestry that is entirely Spenser's invention. Arachne is not "mastered" (338) by the pagan goddess but by an extra-illustrated and supremely Ovidian butterfly, which Spenser has Pallas

add as a finishing touch to the olive-leaf border of her tapestry.⁴⁴ This splendid creature flutters

among the Oliues wantonly,
That seem'd to liue, so like it was in sight:
The veluet nap which on his wings doth lie,
The silken downe with which his backe is dight,
His broad outstretched hornes, his hayrie thies,
His glorious colours, and his glistering eies.

(331–6)

Arachne only has eyes for the butterfly, which supplements Ovid's tale in the sense of fulfillment and excess.⁴⁵ This butterfly embodies and enacts the liberty of poetic wit, fancy, and expression. Representing the expressive freedom anciently due to poets – and forged at the dawn of social contract – it is coordinate with the political liberty most cherished in ancient Athens: the privilege of *parrhesia* or *licentia*.

Spenser, in short, yields Pallas the victory she craves in Ovid's tale on a strict condition: she must accept and foster the expressive liberties that the “presumptuous” Arachne “rashly dar'd” (269) to claim in her art. If Pallas grants poets the license to dare whatever representations they please, even if it is to rebuke their superiors for abuse, then Arachne loses her very grounds for complaint. Read in this light, Spenser's image of the pampered butterfly ranging freely in its gorgeous silks and velvet suggests that its prerogative is not best characterized as a gift bestowed by patrician privilege. It is instead *conceded* by aristocrats, who must acknowledge a limited form of republican liberties due to poets: the freedom of the butterfly is an inalienable gift of the gods rather than the property of courtly patrons. Read in this light, the butterfly also masters Arachne, “the most fine-fingred workwoman on ground” (260), by fulfilling her artistic mandate rather than silencing her ingenuity. The butterfly does not revoke her perspective on art and politics but takes it to a new and more persuasive level: she can rebut or gainsay (399) her superiors in her complaint, but the butterfly stands a chance of reforming them. Spenser rewrites the constitutional ideal of Athens proposed by Ovid's Pallas to suggest that it rests on the liberties of subjects and especially the freedom of speech.⁴⁶ This is what it takes to redeem the language of encomium in Spenser's day: the grace of reciprocity and the principles of republicanism.

The vision of the butterfly is an ideal of imaginative and expressive freedoms that Spenser treats, in the final stanzas of his poem, as a gorgeous but doomed fantasy. As an idea of the political liberty of speech, the butterfly is as vulnerable as it is beautiful. Spenser's last poetic act in the poem is to send Clarion, the

nominal hero and chief butterfly, into a web of intrigue woven by Arachne's political crafty son, Aragnoll.⁴⁷ Clarion dies when the "greisly tyrant" (433) Aragnoll stabs him in the heart, sending his "deepe groning spright . . . into the aire" (438–9). Like Turnus's body at the end of the *Aeneid*, Clarion's carcass remains on the tragic stage of the reader's imagination as "the spectacle of care" (338–440) while his spirit flies groaning into the "aire" (439).

Equally striking is the emphasis Spenser places on Clarion's breath, the animating principle of poetic inspiration and substance of the poet's immortality (the butterfly or psyche in classical philosophy is immortal). It is Aragnoll's assault on Clarion's breath – the divine and deeply Ovidian spirit of poetry itself – that looms large in the death scene, where the hapless butterfly "strugled long, / Himself to free thereout," until "in the ende he breatheless did remain" (430). The poignancy of the assault on the mock-heroic Clarion's breath is doubled by the tragic Vergilian mode of the poem's ending and above all by the poem's focus of attention on the liberties of speech borne on the breath of poets to future readers.

Notes

1. Greenblatt's brilliant yet damning chapter on Spenser in *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* set the tone and agenda of a good deal of new historicist work on the poet. For discussions of Spenser's reception, including that of Marx, see Andrew Hadfield, "The Death of the Knight with the Scales and the Question of Justice in *The Faerie Queene*" and *Edmund Spenser*.
2. The problem has dogged humanist scholars since Petrarch, who enjoyed the patronage of the vicious Visconti of Milan.
3. For the controversy, see Elisabeth Chaghofi, "Spenser and Book History," in *Spenser in the Moment*, ed. Paul J. Hecht and J. B. Lethbridge.
4. Fowler, "The Failure of Moral Philosophy in the Work of Edmund Spenser."
5. Leah Whittington, "Wallowing and Getting Lost: Reading Spenser with Heather James," has spurred me to underscore the role of readers' affective engagement in Spenser's political project.
6. I discuss Talus as an antipoetic instrument of destruction in "The Problem of Poetry in *The Faerie Queene*, Book V."
7. Patricia Parker, "Suspended Instruments," in *Literary Fat Ladies*.
8. This reading of allegory chimes with that of Gordon Teskey in *Allegory and Violence*.
9. See the excellent discussion of Wendy Beth Hyman, "Seizing Flowers in Spenser's Bower and Garden"; Joseph Campana, "Boy Toys and Liquid Joys"; and David Lee Miller, "Temperance, Interpretation, and 'the bodie of this death.'" See also Harry Berger, Jr., "Wring out the Old," alongside Judith

- H. Anderson, "Acrasian Fantasies." On the loving reign of Cupid in *The Faerie Queene* more generally, see William Junker, "Spenser's Unarmed Cupid."
10. The classic new historicist discussion is Louis Montrose, "Eliza, Queene of Shepherds, and the Pastoral of Power."
 11. E. K. points out the obvious: "By mingling the Redde rose and the White, is meant the vniing of the two principle houses of Lancaster and of Yorke: by whose long discord and deadly debaite, this realm many yeares was sore traueiled, and almost cleane decayed. Til the famous Henry the seuenth, of the line of Lancaster, taking to wife the most virtuous Princesse Elisabeth, daughter to the fourth Edward of the house of Yorke, begat the most royal Henry the eight aforesayde, in whom was the virste vunion of the whyte Rose and the Redde" (244–51).
 12.

Panaque cum prensam sibi iam Syringa putaret,
 Corpore pro numphae calamos tenuisse palustres,
 Dumque ibi suspirat, motos in hirundine ventos
 Effecisse sonum teuem similemque querenti.
 Arte nova vocis deum dulcedine captum
 "hoc mihi colloquium tecum" dixisse "manebit"
 (*Met.* 1.705–10)
 13. For the unexpected social competition of the floral arrangements, see Harry Berger, Jr., *Caterpillarge*.
 14. The *OED* defines "chevisaunce" as financial assistance, provision, and remedy. In his entry on flowers for *The Spenser Encyclopedia*, gen. ed. A. C. Hamilton, Mats Rydén notes that chevisaunce "may be a misprint for *cherisaunce*, a name found in Lyte's *Herball*" (310). He notes on the same page that "Carnations (which have implications of crowns and royalty in Spenser's spelling *coronations*) are identifiable in Elizabeth's dress in the Rainbow portrait (c 1600)."
 15. Brown, *The New Poet*.
 16. For the anticipations of the *Tristia* in the *Shepherdess Calender*, see Richard A. McCabe, "Edmund Spenser, Poet of Exile," and *Spenser's Monstrous Regiment*; Syrithe Pugh's excellent chapter on the *Shepherdess Calender* in *Spenser and Ovid*; and M. L. Stapleton, *Spenser's Ovidian Poetics*.
 17. This is George Sandys's translation of a line from Poliziano.
 18. Jonson, *Poetaster*, prologue, 46.
 19. A subargument of this reading of Spenser's floral passages is that they strikingly narrow, and even attempt to erase, the difference between the poet and reader. In these passages, the poet is (or poses as) first and foremost a reader.
 20. Sandys, "Upon the Twelfth Booke of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*," in *Ovid's Metamorphosis Englished, Mythologiz'd, and Represented in Figures*, p. 568.
 21. The Ovidian women who are subject to metamorphosis and appropriation apparently do not break free from their transformed shape and meaning. The laurel remains "th'ornament of *Phoebus* toyle." If a thought of Myrrha emerges from the reference to frankincense, it, too, does not materialize in

- any clear or resisting shape. The passage is about beautiful, dead boys, loved by powerful men in the *Metamorphoses*.
22. All references are to *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A. C. Hamilton.
 23. Puttenham, *Arte of English Poesie*, p. 212.
 24. The poignant half-line is not there in 1590 or 1596, both of which print an anomalous eight-line stanza. The half-line mysteriously turns up in 1609, which was set from a copy of 1596.
 25. Jonathan Goldberg, *Endlesse Worke*.
 26. My argument runs athwart a long tradition of, first, reading *Muiopotmos* as a jewel-like trifle, interested only in aesthetic patina, and, second, the universally accepted idea that the great combatants in the poem are Clarion and Aragnoll, when they are instead Arachne and Pallas. For an elegant summary of the traditional reading, see Judith Dundas's entry on the poem in *The Spenser Encyclopedia*, gen. ed. A. C. Hamilton.
 27. Seneca the Younger introduced the image that was to echo throughout late antiquity and the Renaissance: "We also, I say, ought to copy the bees, and sift whatever we have gathered from a varied course of reading, for such things are better preserved if they are kept separate; then, by applying the supervising care which our nature has endowed us . . . we could so blend those several flavors into one delicious compound that, even though it betrays its origin, yet it nevertheless is clearly a different thing from that whence it came" (84.3–10). *Ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales*, trans. Richard M. Gummere, 279.
 28. For the rage to make reading genuinely useful – the antitype to Spenser's project in his floral passages – see especially Peter Beale, "Notions in Garrison: The Seventeenth-Century Commonplace Book," in *New Ways of Looking at Old Texts*, pp. 131–47. On the "goal-oriented reading" practices of professional scholars, see Lisa Jardine and Anthony Grafton, "Studied for Action," and Mary Thomas Crane, *Framing Authority*.
 29. Edwin Greenlaw associates Aragnoll with Lord Burleigh, who is likely to be a court "enemy" outside of Spenser's sphere. Don Cameron Allen, by contrast, rebuts the idea of topicality in the poem in "On Spenser's *Muiopotmos*." On the butterfly's significance, see Judith Dundas, "*Muiopotmos*: a World of Art." See also Andrew D. Weiner, "Spenser's *Muiopotmos* and the Fates of Butterflies and Men."
 30. On the poem as allegory for Ireland, see the spirited discussion of Thomas Herron, "Plucking the Perrot: *Muiopotmos* and Irish Politics." Where I differ from Herron is in his division of the poem itself between two modern critical camps, one devoted to "Renaissance aesthetics and artistic imitation" and the other to "political interpretation" (82).
 31. The commonplace is drawn from Ovid, *Heroides* 17.166: "an nescis longas regibus esse manus?"
 32. See Robert A. Brinkley, "Spenser's *Muiopotmos* and the Politics of Metamorphosis," for an account of the interplay of the Vergilian and Ovidian allusions, and Eric C. Brown, "The Allegory of Small Things: Insect Eschatology in Spenser's *Muiopotmos*." For the Chaucerian connections, see especially Judith

- H. Anderson, *Reading the Allegorical Intertext*. Ayesha Ramachandran, "Clarion in the Bower of Bliss," prioritizes the intertextual relations between the minor epic and *The Faerie Queene*.
33. Leah Whittington, *Renaissance Suppliants*.
 34. See especially *Tristia* 1.9.
 35. Herron cites W. L. Renfrew, "Plucking the Perrot," p. 82.
 36. Allen, "On Spenser's *Muiopotmos*."
 37. There is a textual crux concerning the sign of Neptune's power: in some editions it is a geyser, while in others, including the one Spenser consulted, it was a warhorse.
 38. For an alternate, highly detailed account of the benefits of alliance with Rome, see Clifford Ando, *Imperial Ideology and Provincial Loyalty in the Roman Empire*.
 39. On the concepts of native and dative, see Richard McCoy, *The Rites of Knighthood*.
 40. On the insistent linking of rape and verisimilitude, see Lorna Hutson, *The Usurer's Daughter*.
 41. For an uncompromising perspective on Ovid's complicity with his divine and human rapists, see Amy Richlin, "Reading Ovid's Rapes."
 42. Sandys, *Ovid's Metamorphosis Englished, Mythologiz'd, and Represented in Figures*, p. 188.
 43. See Gosson, *The Schoole of Abuse* (1579).
 44. See Richard Danson Brown's perceptive comments on this passage in "*The New Poet*": *Novelty and Tradition in Spenser's Complaints*.
 45. For the idea of the supplement, see Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* as well as my "Shakespeare's Heroines in Ovid's Schoolroom" and "Time, Verisimilitude, and the Counter-Classical Ovid."
 46. If it is the case that Spenser locates the strength of Athens in its civil arts and not its military prowess, he substantially agrees with Sandys, who remarks that Athens, like any other city, "is not to be so much renowned for riches and empire, purchased by naval victories; as by civill arts and a peaceable government," in *Ovid's Metamorphosis*, p. 188.
 47. See the *Variorum Spenser*.