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Spenser's sporting muse : The playful use of imagery in relation to the metamorphsis of the lover in Spenser's Amoretti.

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CHAPTER 4: WEAVING

Although the word "weave" appears only twice in the *Amoretti* (Am. 4 and Am. 23), and "woven" once (Am. 71), weaving is far more prominent in the sonnet sequence than it would at first appear. In fact, weaving can be regarded as one of the major motifs in the *Amoretti,* as this is precisely what Spenser does in the sequence. By cleverly weaving and interweaving an assortment of images and ideas into the sonnets, Spenser draws the reader into his game in which things are never quite as simple as they appear at first glance.

Weaving is evident in the structure of the 1595 volume, *Amoretti and Epithalamion. Written Not Long Since By Edmund Spenser,* where three texts are woven into a single book. Though quite different in terms of genre and reader expectations, the three texts are linked by echoes of lines and words that appear in different contexts and the common thread of love that runs through the entire volume. Thus, right from the outset, the reader is invited to join in a game of unweaving and discovery.

Weaving is also evident in the formal structures of the *Amoretti.* Spenser plays with the tradition of the love sonnet sequence by integrating two distinct, yet inextricably linked "love stories" in his sequence. Throughout the narrative, the two "stories" are seen to share corresponding elements of love, time and the Church calendar.

The first "love story", which appears on the sequence's surface level, depicts the courtship of a "typically" Petrarchan lover and his seemingly unattainable lady. While the inclusion of a number of fictional events in the sequence creates some kind of narrative thread, the developing relationship is not a direct or straightforward progression and the poet/lover's progress is discernible in his method of address, his growing confidence and the increasingly reciprocal nature of their relationship. Hidden beneath the surface is the second "love story", which portrays the penitent Christian working through the season of Lent. By superimposing two playing fields, one on top of the other, Spenser sets aside the old ideas of courtly love and Petrarchan adoration, and replaces them with Christian love. Interwoven into these stories of earthly and Christian love is the poet's struggle with his own artistry. "Heart" and "art", auditorily close homophones, are thus significant, not only as examples of wordplay in the sonnets, but also as prominent themes.

The importance of love in the sequence is hinted at in the title. In naming his sequence *Amoretti,* Spenser not only deviates from tradition, but also "directs readers away

from the subject of the poems and encourages looking elsewhere for the focus, or theme, of the sequence" (Johnson, "Spenser's 'Amoretti' and the Art of the Liturgy" 49). The eighty-nine sonnets that make up the sequence can be seen as "literary acts of loving, textual metaphors of the abstract idea" of love that lies behind and shapes the *Amoretti,* and "each sonnet, each individual text of loving, a site in which love's meaning is expressed" (DeNeef 62–63).

The playing in the *Amoretti* is fairly complex. In addition to the use of wordplay, rhetorical devices, contests, games and masques within the individual sonnets, Spenser also repeats words, images and motifs that he extends and reworks in other sonnets. In some instances, these words, images and motifs transcend the *Amoretti* and are woven into his other works.

Weaving occurs at three levels in the *Amoretti.* The first two levels, namely weaving at the local level, that is, the network of senses of a single word or group of words in a particular sonnet, rhetorical schemes, sound patterns and wordplay, and weaving at the level of imagery, are fairly direct and easy to identify. The third level concerns weaving at the structural level. Throughout the sequence, whole poems, parts of poems and specific image patterns recur in different contexts, creating what A. Leigh DeNeef describes as "identifiable mini-sequences" that are "themselves subjected to three large structural and thematic divisions" (62).

Whilst the order of the sonnets in the sequence is clearly indicated by the numbering of the individual poems, there are also three 'secretly' marked divisions discernible through numerology. The locus of the Petrarchan story is situated in the first section, Am. 1–21. The numerological structure and allusions to the church calendar in Am. 22–68, the Lenten sequence, create the second story. Interlaced with these are many references to the Petrarchan story and as Spenser takes first one strand, then the other, the two stories are gradually woven together and blended in the final section, Am.69–89.

This tripartite structure is echoed in the individual sonnets which have three quatrains linked by his innovative rhyme scheme (abab bcbc cdcd ee), the so-called Spenserian rhyme scheme, in which the last rhyme of each quatrain becomes the first of the next. Michael Spiller explains Spenser's method, in what he terms his "chained quatrains", as follows:

> Spenser's habit is to divide the sonnets at the quatrains, usually beginning a new sentence, or at least a new main clause, at each quatrain, with another to begin the final couplet. His thought moves in very clearly marked stages, with almost no run-on lines from quatrain to quatrain, and with prominent dialectic markers such as 'so', 'yet', 'thus' and 'then'. (144)

Praising Spenser for his "massive control and steadiness", Spiller emphasises the "continuity of the chained rhymes, which flow across and hold together the conceptual breaks" (144).

The rhyming weaving has a close connection with the narrative weaving, as Spenser is a master at placing key words in rhyming positions. This is demonstrated in Am. 23, where, in a playful adaptation of the legend about Penelope and Ulysses, the poet/lover surprises the reader by dividing the role of Penelope between himself and the lady. In the first quatrain, the lady is presented as Penelope whose web "deceive[s]" (line 2) because each night she "unreave[s]". These key words are rhymed with the "subtile craft" (line5) the lady "conceave[s]", establishing negative connotations with her weaving. By the end of the second quatrain it is the poet/lover who is identified with Penelope, the one who does the weaving, while the lady is allocated the role of Penelope, the unraveller. Unlike Penelope, who had no intention of completing her weaving, the poet/lover is intent on weaving his suit and "knit[ting] the knot" (Am. 6) that will ultimately bind them in the *Epithalamion*.

The weaving and unweaving of Am. 23 form part of the network of images concerning the poet's 'art' and in this chapter, I intend to show how the whole sequence can be compared to a woven tapestry with the weaving imagery found in the individual sonnets making a significant contribution to the process of dis-cover-ing the larger picture that emerges as the interconnections between seemingly disparate elements are recognized.

The metaphor of weaving is associated with both the poet/lover and with the lady. As with many of the images in the *Amoretti*, weaving can be positive, as well as negative. The images of weaving are often linked to the notions of deception and captivity, with the poet/lover and his lady equivocally involved in the captivity motif. Initially, the poet/lover accuses the lady of weaving a myriad of webs to entrap him. However, it soon becomes clear that he is involved in a weaving and entrapping process of his own. The ultimate goal

of the lover is to capture the lady as his bride, "to knit the knot, that ever shall remaine" (Am. 6).[1] In his role as poet, his intention is that his "verse [her] vertues rare shall eternize" (Am. 75) and the sonnets are envisaged as an "immortall monument" to his "loves conquest" (Am. 69). There is thus an attempt in the whole sequence to entrap the lady. The counter-weaving process of the poet's composition not only adds a playful dimension to the sequence, but also renders the threat of captivity by the lady, innocuous.

The first explicit reference to weaving occurs in Am. 4 when the lady is gently cautioned "…with divers colord flowre / to decke hir selfe, and her faire mantle weave". This sonnet provides both an outline of the poet/lover's intent in the sequence, as well as some idea of the general pattern that the sequence will follow.

New yeare forth looking out of Janus gate,
Doth seeme to promise hope of new delight:
and bidding th'old Adieu, his passed date
bids all old thoughts to die in dumpish spright.
And calling forth out of sad Winters night,
fresh love, that long hath slept in cheerlesse bower:
wils him awake, and soone about him dight
his wanton wings, and darts of deadly power.
For lusty spring now in his timely howre,
is ready to come forth him to receive:
and warnes the Earth with divers colord flowre,
to decke hir selfe, and her faire mantle weave.
Then you faire flowre, in whom fresh youth doth raine,
prepare your selfe new love to entertaine.
[Am. 4]

The reference to the "New yeare" in the opening line of the sonnet indicates the beginning of the sequence's calendrical structure, which, together with seasonal references, is interwoven with the Lenten theme throughout the sequence.

[1] knit = to weave

As the sonnet moves from the old to the new, from Winter to Spring, there is a strong sense of progression. The poet presents a marked contrast between the coming Spring and its "new delight" and the old, with all its images of death and gloom. This movement from the old/Winter to the new/Spring, correlates with the Lenten part of the sequence (Am. 22–68). Lent/Spring is both a time of action and a time of preparation, a transition period which is essential in reconciling the many contrarieties—old and new, bondage and freedom, life and death—found in the sequence. The sonnets have much to do with bringing Spring out of Winter. In the process, Winter turns out to be Spring.

The idea of progression in the sonnet is also signified by the movement from a statement of historical time in the first quatrain, to the personified seasonal figures in the second quatrain, to the tender warning to the lady in the last line to prepare herself "new love to entertaine".

The mood of the first quatrain is one of hope and anticipation as the poet/lover contemplates the "New yeare'[s]" promise of "new delight". By repeating the adjective "new" in lines 1 and 2 and again in the concluding line in the sonnet, the poet/lover establishes a link between the "New yeare", "new delight" and the "new love" for which the lady is to prepare. The image of Janus, believed to be "the bringer of harmony" (Mclean and Prescott 588), offers further support for a happy ending and reiterates the idea of new beginnings suggested by the "New yeare". Represented with a double-faced head, each looking in opposite directions, Janus looks from the old to the new. Since the "new yeare" is said to be "forth looking out of Janus gate", the emphasis is on the new, rather than the old.

Despite the optimistic tone of the first two lines of the sonnet, however, there is an underlying hint of uncertainty in the poet/lover's use of the word "seeme", suggesting that he is less confident of his success in winning the lady than he would have the reader believe. Nonetheless, the promise of Spring is strong, and in the lines which follow, the poet/lover weaves his story into the pattern of the seasons as he makes his Spring/lover and Earth/lady analogies.

The weaving image in Am. 4 pertains to the lady. The mantle can be both a diversely coloured floral cloak, as well as a covering, something that masks or hides. This idea is reinforced by the use of the word "decke" at the beginning of the line which can mean either to decorate or ornament, or to cover. In Am. 37, the lady allegedly "deckes"

her hair in a net of gold in an attempt to ensnare the poet lover. The metaphor of weaving thus has subtle metaphoric connections with disguise and deception, which in turn are linked to the captivity motif.

Considered in the context of the entire sonnet sequence as a woven tapestry, the metaphor of weaving in Am. 4 can also be applied to the poet lover and lines 12 and 13 can be seen to reveal the poet/lover's intention in the sequence. The reference to the "divers colord flowre" anticipates the flower imagery employed to "decke" the lady in Am. 26 and later in Am. 64. However, the simple "decke" is extended in the same line to the more elaborate "weave" suggesting reciprocal ornamentation. The poet/lover is not merely going to "decke" (decorate or ornament) his poems with the lady. He intends to do something far more complex. By weaving her into his poems, he will be creating an "immortall moniment" that shall "tell [her] prayses to all posterity" (Am. 69). In Am. 29 he declares that as the lady's thrall, he will celebrate her triumph over him in his poetry and make the world ring with her praises:

> Then would I decke her head with glorious bayes,
> and fill the world with her victorious prayse.

In writing the sonnets, the poet/lover is weaving a "faire mantle", a wedding gift for the lady. At first, the *Amoretti*'s presentation of her seems to be equivocal as the poet/lover alternates between praise and criticism of the lady. However, as the sequence progresses and the relationship moves towards resolution and consummation, it becomes increasingly clear that he has indeed created a "faire mantle".

During the course of the sequence, the poet/lover frequently accuses the lady of cunningly trying to entrap him. However, it soon becomes evident that the poet/lover's suffering is caused, not by the hard-heartedness and deceit of the lady as he claims, but by his own entanglement in a net of self-deception. By his own admission, he is "untrainde in lover's trade" (Am. 51) and the lady's seemingly negative responses force him to reappraise the correct form of love and loving (his heart) and the means by which he expresses this love (his art).

Significantly, the courtship is referred to as an entertainment, a kind of game. This notion is developed throughout the sequence as the poet/lover and the lady take turns to

"entertaine" each other—he with his "Playnts, prayers, vowes, ruth, sorrow and dismay" (Am. 14) and she with her seemingly heartless mockery, smiles, laughter and "stage directions" as she "bids [him] play [his] part" (Am. 18). At the same time, Spenser entertains the reader with his own game. Embedded in the individual sonnets are myriad clues in the form of repeated words and images, etymological wordplay and syntactical ambiguities. While these clues do not always provide definite answers, they invite the reader to join in the game of unweaving and discovery. The ambiguity which is so prevalent in the sequence is alluded to in the opening line of the sonnet by the image of Janus who was categorized by George Wither (Emblems 1635) as "the god of mysteries in general" (Wind 230). In the *Amoretti,* Janus' mystery concerns the ambiguity and confusion between reality and appearance or illusion, which is frequently encountered in the sequence.

Distinguishing between reality and illusion is the problem the poet/lover experiences. At the beginning of the courtship, he confuses the real lady with his idealized vision of her. This poeticized concept of the lady distorts his thoughts and results in his inability to "speake her praises dew" or "to write her titles true" (Am. 3). In Am. 4, the need for the poet/lover to "breake forth at length out of the inner part" (Am. 2), is emphasized by the refraining "forth looking", "calling forth out" and "come forth", and can be seen to provide the prolepsis by which Spenser adumbrates a progression in the courtship, which is as much a journey of self-discovery, as of interchange with the lady. Myron Turner, who asserts that "love for Spenser is a mode of self-realization, a form of self-transcendence by means of which the self perfects its identity" (284), stresses the necessity for the poet/lover to move out of the "inner part" into an objective external world.

> Unless he finds the courage to transcend himself, and can in the expression of this thought go beyond his own psychic confinements, he will remain locked within a dangerous self-enclosure where, "with sighes and sorrowes fed," potential victim of the poisonous vipers, he will be cut off from the lady, who is his "soules long lacked food." (284–285)

The process by which the poet/lover "breake[s] forth" is reflected in the increasingly assertive verbs of the refrain. Initially he expressed his desire to "knit the knot" (forth looking). The poet/lover then puts his strategy for wooing and winning the lady into action (calling forth). Finally, he is successful and the lady does "come forth" and is "with her owne goodwill…fyrmely tyde" (Am. 67). Appropriately, the poet/lover initiates this process of breaking forth in the concluding couplet of Am. 4 when, for the first time in the sequence, he addresses her directly.

> Then you faire flowre, in whom fresh youth doth raine,
> Prepare your self new love to entertaine.

The word "entertaine" is open to a number of interpretations. As mentioned earlier, the poet/lover and the lady are seen to entertain each other throughout the sequence. Etymologically linked to the Latin *tenere*, meaning to hold, it also evokes the captivity motif. *The Oxford English Dictionary* lists the following meanings for the word: "to engage, keep occupied the attention, thoughts or time of (a person)" (*OED* entertain, *v*. 9, first citation 1598: the sense "to amuse" (10) is only recorded from 1626), "To receive as a guest" (sense 13), "To admit to consideration (an opinion, argument, request, proposal, etc.)" (sense 14b, recorded from 1614)—all of which are applicable, even though these senses were only emerging at the time. In Am. 1 the poet/lover makes it clear that the purpose of his poems is "her to please alone" (occupy agreeably); In Am. 4 the lady is called upon to "entertaine" (receive) new love and to "accept the poem, sent by [the poet/lover] to her as a sign of mutual love which he hopes will bind them together like the flowers earth in 'her faire mantle weave[s]'" (Bell 157).

Unimpressed by "the carefully woven wreath of words, or put off by the presumption of the imperative" (Bell 157) in this final line of Am. 4, the lady remains aloof, and so, in the sonnets which follow, the poet/lover tries various approaches—"playnts, prayers, vowes, ruth, sorrow and dismay" (Am. 14)—to win her over.

The ensuing pattern in the development of the relationship between the poet/lover and the lady is not, however, as readily predictable as this sequence of repetition suggests and the courtship is characterized by regressions, digressions and circular movements. There are even times when it seems that there is no advancement at all. Nevertheless, by

the end of the *Amoretti*, progress has been made. The fluctuating action of the sequence is mirrored in Am. 23, the second of the three sonnets that have an explicit reference to weaving.

In Am. 23, which can be interpreted as a subtext for the entire sequence, the notion of weaving is employed to comment on both the amatory and the poetic concerns of the poet/lover. The inefficacy of his poetry and his repeated failure to win the lady's affection, are sources of great frustration and contrast strongly with Penelope's competence in achieving her goals. Apparently oblivious to his efforts, the lady is proving to be extremely resolute, as she counters his actions with actions of her own, never giving him the response for which he is hoping. This interaction between the poet/lover and the lady is embodied in the weaving imagery in Am. 23.

The sonnet recalls the classical legend of Penelope, who, in the absence of her husband Ulysses, outwitted her suitors by craftily unweaving at night that which she had woven during the day. The story is then applied to the poet/lover's experiences as he strives to find the kind of love that will be acceptable to the lady:

> Penelope for her Ulisses sake,
> Deviz'd a Web her wooers to deceave:
> in which the worke that she all day did make
> the same at night she did again unreave,
> Such subtile craft my Damzell doth conceave,
> th'importune suit of my desire to shonne:
> for all that I in many dayes doo weave,
> in one short houre I find by her undone.

On reading the first line of the sonnet, the reader assumes that the poet/lover intends to draw a comparison between the lady and Penelope, or between Ulysses and himself. The lady/Penelope analogy, with the emphasis on her deception of her suitors, is clear. However, it soon becomes apparent that the poet/lover is not to be identified with Ulysses, who was proverbially guileful, but rather with one of the suitors, a victim of her deceit.

The lady's cunning is implied in the second line in which Penelope is said to have "devized a Web" in order to "deceave" her admirers and in the reference to her "subtile

craft" in line 5. In addition to implying her cunning, the idea of entrapment or captivity is also suggested in line 2; deceive comes from the Latin word *decipere*, which means both to deceive, as well as to "ensnare, to take unawares by craft or guile" (*OED* deceive, *v*. 1). The "Web", the means by which Penelope / the lady supposedly deceives and entraps, also serves to provide a link between the lady and the spider found in the concluding couplet, the female of which is the predator.

The conflict produced by the challenge of the lady to the poet/lover's art is continued in the second quatrain, in which the adversarial weaving imagery of the first quatrain is transformed into imagery of an artistic process. This transformation is noted by Jacqueline T. Miller who describes the lady's activity in the first quatrain as "clearly an artistic one ("deviz'd a Web") that is both threatening (to the wooers) and supportive (for Ulysses) as well as creative (weaving the web) and destructive (unravelling)" and regards the action presented in the second quatrain as "a conflict between two artists/ lovers" (549–50).

The poet/lover demonstrates his own "subtile craft" by the witty and significant change in direction, which he makes in lines 7 and 8. At the beginning of the sonnet, it is the lady who is identified with Penelope, the deceptive weaver. However, by the end of the second quatrain, the roles have become intermingled as the poet/lover plays the part of the creative Penelope who weaves, while the lady assumes the role of the destructive Penelope, who unweaves. It is no longer her own work that she unweaves, but the work of the poet/lover. The reversal of roles has further implications: since the poet/lover is identified with Penelope, the weaver, the lady can be seen as the suitor. She is, however, not deceived, as it is she, not the poet/lover/Penelope, who does the unweaving in this instance.

The interweaving of the roles is further complicated by the ambiguities found in the sonnet. Both Penelope and the lady weave by "subtile craft". The word "subtile", derived from the Latin word *subtilis*, implies not only "Of craftsmen, etc.: Skilful, clever, expert, dexterous." (*OED* subtle, *a*. 7)," but also "Of persons or animals: Crafty, cunning: treacherously or wickedly cunning, insidiously sly, wily" (*OED* subtle, *a.* 10). In a similar way, the verb "conceave", which can be understood as "to form (a purpose, design, etc.) in the mind, to plan, devise, formulate an idea" (*OED* conceive, *v*. II. 7), suggests both the cleverness and the cunning of the lady. The poet/lover, who has carefully planned the

course of the courtship, appears to have been outsmarted by the lady, who "shonne[s]" and leaves his suit "undonne". The "one short houre" it takes the lady to destroy his efforts is negligible when compared with the "many dayes" he has taken to weave his "lyric tapestry" (Bell 162).

The poet/lover's frustration reaches a climax in the third quatrain as his ceaseless labour is destroyed with one look. The futility of his efforts is emphasized by the reversed order of the words "end" and "begonne" in line 9. Although this is corrected in the following line, the end seems unattainable as the lady succeeds in preventing the poet/lover from completing his art:

> So when I think to *end* that I *begonne*,
> I must *begin* and never bring to *end*: 10
> for with one looke she spils that long I sponne,
> and with one word my whole years work doth rend.
> (italics mine)

The "mutual, reciprocal occupation" (Miller 550) in which the poet/lover and his lady are involved is reflected in the rhyme in this quatrain. Linked by rhyme, "sponne" and "begonne" refer to the poet/lover's artistic endeavours. The lady's ability to destroy his efforts and thus to prevent him from "bring[ing] to end" is summed up in the verb "rend". Her ability to destroy the progress of his suit with the minimum of effort is emphasized by the distortion of time, which occurs in line 12. In line 9, the poet/lover is said to weave for "many dayes"; by line 12 this has extended to a year.

In the context of the sonnet sequence as a woven tapestry, the images of weaving and unweaving can be viewed in a more positive light. Douglas Brooks-Davies draws attention to the fact that Penelope is "the emblem of the chaste and obedient wife" (234). Thus, just as the lady assumes some of Penelope's guilefulness and deceptiveness, so Penelope's faithfulness to the absent Ulysses is a reminder of the lady's most striking characteristics—constancy and loyalty. The unweaving done by Penelope was necessary to preserve her marriage and was, therefore, supportive to Ulysses. Similarly, the lady's unweaving is also noble in intent. The purpose of the "Web" which she weaves is not to entrap, as the poet/lover implies, but to evade.

> The poem makes it clear that the destructive process of process of undoing the artist's work is equally renewing; if artistic endeavours are disrupted, they are disrupted only so that they may be revived and resumed. The relationship between Penelope and Ulysses was preserved by the repetitive creation and destruction of her carefully woven material. The success of her design depended on the dissolution and sacrifice of her art. Similarly, the poet preserves a relationship between himself and his lady by characterizing his art as constantly begun and undone. (Miller 551)

Yet it must be pointed out that the poet/lover and the lady's relationship is not so much one of married constancy (even if it prefigures that) as of playful manoeuvring.

The process of weaving (writing) and unweaving (re-writing) is necessary as each sonnet brings the poet/lover a step closer to refining his love and finally winning the lady. As the sequence is, at this point, incomplete the poet/lover is compelled to continue; the end of one sonnet marks the beginning of the next. The poet/lover's efforts to "end" are implicit in the whole sequence, yet, even when he gets to the end (Am. 89), the cycle is incomplete, as he expresses the loneliness felt by the absence of the lady. While Am. 89 signifies the end of the courtship/the *Amoretti*, it looks to a new beginning—the marriage/the *Epithalamion*. Despite the sadness suggested by the Winter setting of Am. 89, the reader shares with poet the assurance that Summer will follow and the poet/lover and his lady will "knit the knot, that ever shall remaine" (Am. 6).

Similarly, when the lady's "oppositional response unravels the poet/lover's persuasion, the conceit of Penelope's web collapses" (Bell 162), forcing him to abandon the simile and turn to a new one:

> Such labour like the Spyders web I fynd,
> whose fruitlesse worke is broken with least wynd.
> [Am. 23]

Although the simile used in the couplet is very tenuously connected to the story of Penelope's weaving, the spider has been alluded to in the first quatrain by the reference to "web" in line 2 and "sponne" in line 11.

The image of the spider anticipates its playful reappearance in Am. 71 when the conflicts are over, the "capture" of the two artists/lovers is complete and they are looking forward to their marriage:

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

According to Ilona Bell, the image of the spider has its origins in

> the myth of Arachne, another mortal, but mythic female weaver who challenges Athena to a weaving contest. Arachne's tapestry depicts the Gods raping their mortal, female victims which makes Athena so furious that she destroys Arachne's work. Devastated, Arachne kills herself. In pity, Athena transforms Arachne into a spider who continues to weave and catch insects in her web, but who never attains the immortality of art because her web is constantly "broken with least wynd." (162)

As the poet/lover adapted the story of Penelope to suit his purposes in the sonnet, so he manipulates details in the myth of Arachne. Consequently, more than one interpretation of line 13 is possible, as it is not clear whether "such labour" describes the poet/lover's suit or the lady's weaving and unweaving. Regardless of how the line is interpreted, the ambiguity comes to the poet/lover's aid, or, at the very least, offers him comfort. If "such labour" refers to the poet/lover's labour of wooing and his endless spinning, then the implication is that despite the great amount of energy he has expended, his arachnidan efforts are fruitless, as the lady destroys his progress with "least wynd". If line 13 refers to the lady's labour of shunning and rending, then the more humorous implication is that the poet/lover realizes that he will be successful in devising the web with which he will capture his lady.

While Jacqueline T. Miller sees the ambiguity contained in this line as a deliberate ploy by means of which the poet/lover "carefully avoids the creation of a position that explicitly either asserts his artistic superiority over his lady or succumbs to her control over him and his art" (551), Bell interprets these final lines of the sonnet as "the crucial moment of reassessment, [when] Spenser's poet/lover seems to fully understand that his female reader, like the wind that tears Arachne's web apart, is not to be confined by his tropes or defined by his art" (162). The two critics are also divided on Spenser's achievement in the sonnet. In her analysis, Bell emphasizes the conflict between the poet/lover who, "has been trying to catch [the lady] in the web of his words", and the lady, who "more like Penelope or Athena than a trapped fly, continues to elude his 'fruitlesse' efforts, rejecting one trope after another, forcing him to start over and over again" (163). In contrast, Miller merges the lady and the poet/lover and is of the opinion that he successfully

> devises a method for admitting his lady's control and skill, at the some time that he asserts and presents the prowess of his own art—at once conceding the futility of his artistic endeavours and overwhelming the lady's challenging art, granting her resistance and distance while ensnaring her (in his poem) into a position which integrates their actions. (552)

A third view, cited by Bell, is offered by Donna Gibbs who asserts "that the trope of the spider places the Lover/Persona in the 'bewildered victim role', making him look ridiculous, and that the metaphor of the spider cinches the humor" (225). While fully in agreement with Gibbs that there is an element of humour in the sonnet, I am more inclined to support Bell's contention that Am. 23 "offers a more serious and probing analysis of the relation between the poet/lover and lyric audience, and that the final allusion to Arachne emphasizes the poignancy of his failure to find a convincing rhetorical strategy" (224). In all three instances, the result is the same. The lady's actions prevent the poet/lover from achieving the closure he seeks in his courtship, and consequently, he continues to write sonnets, expressing "Th'importune suit of [his] desire" in the hope that he will be able to convince the Lady "that he, like the returning Ulysses, deserves to be welcomed into the marital bed" (Bell 163).

The conflict of Am. 23 “breaks into full-scale battle in sonnet 28” (Bell 163), the first in a two-part exchange between the poet/lover and the lady. In these paired sonnets, Am. 28 and 29, the weaving is metaphorical: the symbolic meaning of the laurel undergoes a series of transformations as each of the lovers turns the argument of the other, inside out, as a thread weaves in and out, now showing this colour, now that.

The interweaving of the two sonnets is complex. Described by Bell as “one of the most enigmatic and devious poems in the sequence” (163), Am. 28 deals with the poet/lover’s ongoing concern for his poetry and its effects on the lady. The sonnet continues the situation initiated in Am. 23, where the poet/lover and the lady were both acknowledged as artists, and where the poet/lover’s weaving was counteracted by the lady’s unweaving of his endeavours.

In the opening quatrain of Am. 28 the laurel appears to belong to the poet/lover as well as to the lady:

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

At this point, the laurel leaf worn by the lady is decorative. However, since it is also the “badg” which the lover, as poet bears, he incorrectly interprets her wearing it as a sign of favour, and is encouraged by what he perceives to be her “relenting mynd”.

In contrast to Am. 23, the situation presented in the first quatrain of this sonnet seems to be non-conflictual. This idea is reinforced in the opening lines of the second quatrain where the “offer of shared ‘powre’ sounds like a happy solution to [the poet/lover and the lady’s] previous power struggle” (Bell 164). While in Am. 23 the poet/lover neither openly asserted his artistic superiority over the lady, nor yielded to her control over him, he claims, in Am. 28, that the “powre” of the poetic laurel is his. He then expresses the hope that the lady, too, will become infused with inspiration from the poet’s laurel and that it will “put [her] in mind” of proud Daphne and the fate that befell her when she fled from Phoebus, the god of poetry:

The powre thereof, which ofte in me I find,
let it lykewise your gentle brest inspire
with sweet infusion, and put you in mind
of that proud mayd, whom now those leaves attyre:
Proud Daphne scorning Phæbus lovely fyre,
on the Thessalian shore from him did flie:
for which the gods in theyr revengefull yre
did her transform into a laurell tree.

However, "the sense of harmony" suggested in the opening quatrain is "somewhat qualified" in the second and third quatrains by "the laurel's symbolic connection with pride" (Miller 552) and by "Spenser's version of Apollo and Daphne" (Bell 164). Complaints against the lady's pride are a recurring theme in the earlier sonnets in the sequence.

It is at this point in the poem that "the shift from a picture of reciprocal, mutually encouraging behaviour to one of a threatening and dangerous struggle" (Miller 553) occurs. The poet/lover deliberately brings in a note of tension as he, once again, cleverly adapts the classical tale to suit his own purposes: the laurel leaf worn by the lady is linked to her pride, while the laurel worn by the poet/lover is associated with Phoebus. Ilona Bell comments on the ambiguity of lines 9 to 12:

> Spenser's retelling of the Ovidean tale makes one wonder who is being blamed for "which act": … Knowing the myth, one would naturally assume that the Gods are angry at Phæbus Apollo; however, Spenser's diction implies that the Gods are angry instead with "proud Daphne" who is somehow to blame for "scorning Phæbus lovely fyre." (165)

The closing lines of the sonnet make "Spenser's identification with Apollo all too clear" (Bell 165):

Then fly no more fayre love from Phebus chace,
but in your brest his leafe and love embrace.
[Am. 28]

Using Daphne's fleeing in line 10 to encourage the lady not to fly from the "chace", the game in which the poet/lover and his lady are engaged, he concludes with the tender appeal that she "his leafe and love embrace", which will allow "her pursuer triumph in both love and art" (Maclean and Prescott 598).

Unimpressed by the poet/lover's wit in Am. 28, the lady challenges his interpretation of her wearing the laurel as an indication of her favour in Am. 29:

See how the stubborne damzell doth deprave
my simple meaning with disdaynfull scorne:
and by the bay which I unto her gave,
accoumpts my selfe her captive quite forlorne.

By "deprav[ing]" his "simple meaning with disdaynfull scorne", the lady is creating an identical situation to the one in Am. 23, where she "unreave[d]" the poet/lover's work, and thus proved destructive to him as an artist.

In Am. 28, the poet/lover claims superiority in the relationship and tenders a moral lesson about the laurel leaf, which he hopes will alter her attitude towards him. In Am. 29, the lady outwits him as she deliberately misconstrues his "simple meaning" and presents an entirely different interpretation based on the assumption that the laurel leaf is the trophy given to the victorious who then adorn the heads of poets so that they may extol the victors' accomplishments. In so doing, the lady humorously refutes the poet/lover's claims and asserts her own superiority in the relationship; "she says she is wearing the laurel leaf not as a sign of her subjection to his poetic authority, …but as a sign of her power to vanquish her opponents" (Bell 166). At the same time, she acknowledges her acceptance of him as the poet who will "fill the world with her victorious prayse".

The laurel leaf, the basis of the poet/lover's allusion to Daphne and Phoebus, is thus cleverly transformed from a symbol of his poetic superiority to the lady's superiority. In Am. 28, the lady wore the leaf, in Am. 29 the poet/lover admits that it was he who yielded

it to her. In Am. 28 the poet/lover implied that he was in the position to inspire her and bestow skills upon her; the lady responds by asserting that such bestowing is done only by the conquered to the conquerors. In support of his complaints against the lady, the poet/lover quotes her own words:

> The bay…is of the victours borne,
> yielded them by the vanquisht as theyr meeds.

Despite the poet/lover's complaints against the lady, the tone of these opening lines is not negative. Louis Martz describes it as

> intimate, smiling, affectionate, respectful, reproachful, and courtly all at once; it strikes exactly the tone that an older man, of experience and wisdom (some-one a bit like Emma's Mr Knightley) might adopt towards a bright and willful young lady for whom he feels not awe, but deep admiration and affection. It is an attitude that also implies considerable hope and confidence that his suit will in time be rewarded. (154)

The game-playing continues in the third quatrain as the poet/lover takes up the lady's challenge and wittily turns it back against her. Continuing with the notion of himself as the captive and the lady as the captor, the poet/lover casts himself in the role of the "faithfull thrall". As her thrall, the poet/lover can celebrate her "conquest" in his poetry. However, while the poet/lover acknowledges the lady's victory, his choice of words—

> But sith she will the conquest challeng needs,
> let her accept me as her faithfull thrall,

—suggests that he accepts a subordinate position so long as it implies her favour rather than her disdain. S. K. Heninger, Jr. is of the opinion that the poet/lover

> assents to the lady's interpretation of the laurel, knowing that such subjection is the sure sign of triumph. [His] poems are what he has to offer his bride…

> and he gladly applies this poetical talent in the service of the lady. His gift of *Amoretti* was a real-life counterpart to his gift of Petrarch's laurel leaf in the fiction, and [the lady's] response to the poem was in keeping with that charade. ("Sequences, Systems, Models" 86)

At this point it is evident that the poet/lover's meaning is not quite as simple as he claimed in the opening quatrain. This is revealed by the ambiguity found in lines 11 and 12, which allows the interpretations of both the poet/lover and the lady simultaneously:

> that her great triumph which my skill exceeds,
> I may in trump of fame blaze over all.

The threads of both weavers (the poet/lover and the lady) are visible together in these lines. Line 11 can be read as the lady's "great triumph" which exceeds the skill of the poet/lover, or, alternatively, it can be seen as the poet's skill that exceeds the lady's triumph. Similarly, the "trump of fame" in line 12 could sound either as a proclamation of the lady's "great triumph" or for the poet/lover's "great triumph" as he sings her praises in his poems.

In the couplet, the bay is once again offered to the lady whose power to transform the poet/lover's art is demonstrated by the description of this gesture:

> Then would I decke her head with glorious bayes,
> and fill the world with her victorious prayse.
> [Am. 29]

The ornate "then would I decke her head with glorious bayes" contrasts strongly with the plainness of "the bay which I unto her gave" in line 3. The original "laurell leafe" in the opening line of Am. 28 has also been transformed into a metaphorical bay. Once again, the poet/lover expresses himself in such a way that more than one interpretation of these lines is possible. Jacqueline T. Miller offers the following explanation:

> The poet may be re-offering a poetic bay, or he may be assuming his possession of the conquerer's bay; in addition, the reciprocity suggested

> in lines 7–8 implies that even by relinquishing the bays to his lady, the poet, by the lady's own admission and conditions, can expect to have the bays given back to him. The final line deftly claims victory for both the poet and the lady: "her victorious lady, the poet's victorious praise of his lady (ie. the victory of his art) and the lady's praise of the poet. (556)

The game created by the interweaving of the two sonnets concludes happily as the poet/lover agrees to accept the lady's re-interpretation of his actions while "subtly maintain[ing] and assert[ing] the power and possibility of his own artistic achievements" (Miller 556). By successfully meeting the challenge of the lady, the poet/lover not only demonstrates the ability of his art to transform, but also affirms the ability of the lady to influence and refashion his art.

In Am. 71 the poet/lover uses the context of the lady's "drawen work" to pull together some of the threads that have been woven through the sequence. The sonnet, in which the lady is depicted as a bee, and the poet/lover as a spider that has caught her in its web, represents an amusing inversion of the poet/lover's complaints in Am. 23:

> This is the sonnet where the lady, in witty reversal of the poet's complaints, has woven into her embroidery a fable of the Bee and the Spyder; the poet picks up the imagery with joy and develops it with a deeply affectionate humour. (Martz 154)

Although this sonnet attributes to the lady "a poet's qualities of creator, artificer, artist" (Johnson, "Gender Fashioning" 517), there is no evidence of the tension which was detected in the earlier weaving sonnets. In Am. 28, the poet/lover complained about the lady's reinterpretation of "the bay which [he] unto her gave". In Am. 71,

> even as, and just as, she creates her artful text of spiders and bees, gardens and flowers, so he interprets, and reinterprets (as she had done earlier) in such a way to bring his art and hers, his love and hers, to a mutual "peace" ("Gender Fashioning" 517).

In Am. 23 both the poet/lover and the lady were depicted as the spider weaving webs to catch its prey, and their purpose and effort in so doing were described as “fruitlesse worke…broken with least wynd”. In Am. 71 the roles are clearly defined; the lady is the bee and the poet/lover is the spider.

While the coupling of the spider and the bee is not uncommon in the literature of the period, Spenser’s treatment of the theme is innovative and more playful and light-hearted than is usual. Maclean and Prescott cite D. Cheney’s suggestion that “‘bee’ and ‘spider’ allude to Boyle and Spenser” (616). The depiction of the poet/lover in the role of the predator contrasts comically with his protests in the earlier sonnets in which he portrayed the lady as the predator and himself as her helpless victim (in Am. 20 she is compared to a lion, in Am. 53, a panther and in Am. 56 a tiger).

Whereas in Am. 23 it was the craft and cunning of the lady which was emphasized, in Am. 71 the slyness employed by the poet/lover to capture the lady is suggested by the verb “lurke” in line 3 and the words “in close awayt” in line 4:

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

The second quatrain is an intensification of the comparison made in the first, as the poet/lover claims that the spider has not only succeeded in capturing the lady, but she is also thralled to his love:

> Right so your selfe were caught in cunning snare
> of a deare foe, and thralled to his love:
> in whose streight bands ye now captived are
> so firmely, that ye never may remove.

In Am. 65 the poet/lover assured the lady of love’s sweet bands; in Am. 67 she was “fyrmely tyde”. In Am. 71, these images are connected in the “streight bands”, the betrothal.

Arlene N. Okerlund, who describes Am. 71 as “perhaps the saddest sonnet” in the sequence, claims that the numerous allusions to entrapment and captivity (“lurke”, “caught”, “captive’d”, “thralled”, “cunning snare”, “streight bands”) found in the poem depict an adversary relationship whose resolution is final, irrevocable, and physically terrifying: “that you never may remove”(68). Ilona Bell, on the other hand, perceives the captivity imagery to be an indication of the poet/lover’s entrapment in his own rhetoric:

> As the poem unfolds, Spenser’s poet/lover becomes so caught up in his own rhetoric that he begins to reproduce the poetry of entrapment which caused her to rend his “whole years work” and forced him to “begin and neuer bring to end” (23:12, 10). In attempting to impose meaning on her art, the image of captivity comes dangerously close to repeating the affronts of Apollo’s chase or the birdcage [of Am. 65], although the exaggerated self-irony suggests that the poet/lover realizes he is in danger of being “caught in the cunning snare” of his own rhetoric. (177)

I am of the opinion that these images of bondage and captivity cannot be taken too seriously. As the capture of the lady has already occurred in Am. 67, and Christ has brought away “captivity thence captive us to win” (Am. 65), the familiar metaphor of the spider capturing its prey can be used in a more ludic context. The poet/lover refers to himself as a “deare foe”, suggesting that the apparently hostile relationship is simply part of the game in which they are both willingly involved. This view is further supported by the fact that the lady’s presentation of herself as a bee in the emblematic account of their relationship suggests her playful response to the poet/lover’s rendering of how he won her in the game of love.

Throughout the sequence, the roles of the captor and the captive have alternated between the poet/lover and the lady. In Am. 71, the two lovers are shown to be playing both these roles simultaneously. “If the lady correctly depicts her own capture in the spider and the bee, she also represents her capturing of her lover by weaving the story into her "work’” (Bernard 175). The poet/lover, in turn, weaves her “drawen work” into his sonnet sequence, transforming it into an “immortall moniment” (Am. 69) to the “eternall peace” between the “Spyder and the gentle Bee”, the poet/lover and his lady.

Anticipating the lady's objections, the "fruitlesse worke" of Am. 23 is transformed into a garden of natural "delights" in the third quatrain. The notion of captivity is reiterated in the flowers chosen; in addition to being emblems of love, "woodbynd" and "eglantine" are "emblems of pleasing entanglement" (Maclean and Prescott 616). In this garden, the "Spyder and the gentle Bee" will both prosper through the "mutuall good will" mentioned in Am. 65. In the same way as the caged bird will continue to sing and feed its fill (Am. 71), so the lady will find her captivity a fulfilling experience and her prison will prove to be "sweet". Just as the lady has captured him in her "drawen work" so he has captured her in his poetry. John D. Bernard points out that "traditionally the spider and the bee are not so much actors in a predatory struggle, as types (normally antithetical) of the artist. And it is as such, collaborating in the fashioning of a paradise of harmless delights, that Spenser leaves them" (175):

> And all thensforth eternall peace shall see
> between the Spyder and the gentle Bee.
>
> [Am. 71]