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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.

Wirth, Amanda

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CHAPTER 2: THE DISCIPLINE OF THE EYES

Introduction

One of the key image groups in the *Amoretti* has to do with eyes and the notion of looks and looking. While there are isolated sonnets concerning the eyes of the poet/lover, the majority centre on the eyes of the lady. The fascination of the lady's eyes is demonstrated by the fact that more than half the sonnets in the first section of the sequence (Am.1–21) are either devoted entirely to, or deal partially with, this particular aspect of the lady. Significantly, the poet/lover's preoccupation with the lady's eyes diminishes as the sequence progresses. Although it is the lady's eyes and her looks/gaze which appear to be the focal point of the sonnets, the poet/lover's concern with his own vision is also in evidence.

During the course of the sequence, there is recurrent play on the idea of looks and looking, the gaze and the gazer, as the poet/lover, caught in a semantic trap, struggles to "devize colours" (Am. 17), that is, find fitting words and terms for expressing his love for the lady. On some occasions, the gaze is the countenance of the beloved, the lady's looks at which the poet/lover is looking. In Am. 3 he praises her "soverayne beauty" and notes its effect on him:

> The soverayne beauty which I doo admyre,
> witnesse the world how worthy to be prayzed:
> the light whereof hath kindled heavenly fire,
> in my fraile spirit by her from baseness raysed.
> That being now with her huge brightnesse dazed,
> base things I can no longer endure to view:

Images of light are frequently used in the *Amoretti* to suggest the spiritual nature of the lady, and in this sonnet, the "lamping eyes" of Am. 1 emit light which simultaneously inflames the poet/lover's heart and elevates him to a higher spiritual plane. Unable to find adequate expression for the lady's spiritual nature, the poet/lover seems transfixed in a state of worship:

but looking still on her I stand amazed,
at wondrous sight of so celestiall hew.
So when my toung would speak her praises dew,
it stopped is with thoughts astonishment:
and when my pen would write her titles true,
it ravisht is with fancies wonderment;

The use of the word "still" is ambiguous and can either be seen to support his claim that he is dumbstruck by her radiant beauty, or it can serve as an indication of the poet/lover's continuous gazing at the lady. Similarly, "amazed", which is picked up by "astonishment" in line 10 and "wonderment" in line 12, conveys a sense of his wonder at her divine radiance, as well as the bewilderment, which renders him incapable of expressing his admiration in words. Dazed by her "huge brightnesse", the poet/lover's pen and tongue are allegedly incapacitated, but his heart remains active.

Yet in my heart I then both speak and write
the wonder that my wit cannot indite.

[Am. 3]

Though the very existence of the sonnet challenges the poet/lover's assertion in the concluding couplet that he is unable to put into words the wonder he feels, the convention of being struck dumb is transcended by hints of real spiritual transformation. Contrasting the heart with the practice of writing is conventional. When Sidney writes "looke in thy heart and write", he is acknowledging that the heart perhaps needs to correct, or supplement convention (Astrophil and Stella 1; see Ringler's commentary 458–9). Similarly, in the *Amoretti*, there comes a point where convention has reached the limit, and only the heart, though as yet without a voice, can intuit a way forward.

At this point, the poet/lover's problem is a conflict between the inner, spiritual effect and the conventions to which his outer writing skills are bound. Dependent upon Petrarchan language with its limitations, the poet/lover has created within himself "the glorious ymage" (Am. 22) of "that goodly Idoll" (Am. 27) upon which he feeds his "hungrie fantasy" (*Hymn in Honour of Love* 198). But "lyke Narcissus vaine / whose eyes

him starved" (Am. 35), he is left unsatisfied. William C. Johnson sums up the poet/lover's problem as follows:

> Through his use of metonymy and metaphor, by describing the lady not as a whole being, but as bodily parts, by alluding to centuries of literary topoi which remove her in time as well as space, the poet transforms the woman into a text, the living 'other' into inanimate object. ("Gender Fashioning" 504)

Until he is able to "breake forthe…out of the inner part" (Am. 2), no proper relationship with the lady is possible. It is only when "the logocentric wordsmith-narrator is liberated from the confines of his self-limiting and debilitating poetry" ("Gender Fashioning" 505), that the sonnet lady can be transformed

> from fragmented "lily hands" and "lamping eyes" in Am. 1 to an Angel with whom the poet-lover relates primarily because she is "my soules long lackéd food, my heavens blis", and ultimately to a voiced, named figure who relates mutually with the poet-lover-narrator. ("Gender Fashioning" 504)

Initially, the poet/lover is caught in the bind of writing and cannot escape art's construction. As the sequence progresses and art combines with nature, so real interaction between the poet/lover and the lady becomes possible and the relationship develops into one of mutuality. Eyes and the notion of seeing are of paramount importance in this transformation process, as it is only by looking again and again at the lady, that she can become manifest to the poet/lover, and his poeticized concept of her can be turned into an image of the real lady.

Throughout the sonnet sequence, the poet/lover and the lady are shown to be looking at each other. The gaze thus functions in different directions, creating an interaction of gazers. In Am. 5 he defends her "lofty lookes" in which

> …is close implide,
> scorn of base things, and sdeigne of foule dishonour;

> thretning rash eies which gaze on her so wide,
> that loosely they ne dare to looke upon her.
>
> [Am. 5]

Although the poet/lover is presented as the object of the gaze, and the 'looks' refer to or describe the way in which the lady is looking at the poet/lover, in this instance, it is actually his gaze that is under scrutiny, and he is responding, not so much to her looks, as to his own gaze mirrored in her eyes. At this point, his gaze fails to penetrate beyond a reflection of his own eyes and the project of the sequence is to get out of this solipsistic prison.

Since the lady is denied a voice in the poems however, it is always the poet/lover's perspective of the look or gaze that is given and "we know nothing of her inner emotional state, because we see her only through the lover's eyes, and he, 'lyke Narcissus vaine' (Am. 35), is concerned only with his own" (83). Addressing the lady through what Ilona Bell describes as

> poetic apostrophes, the early poems, spoken to her from afar, reveal almost nothing about her responses because the poet/lover hardly knows her. As the courtship progresses, the sonnets, addressed directly to her, dramatize the poet/lover's side of an increasingly heated conversation. Her responses, though still remaining on the poems' margins, become somewhat easier to detect or infer from the gaps and contradictions—by weighing what one sonnet anticipates or desires or what a subsequent sonnet amends or revises. As the conflicts between them intensify, Elizabeth voices her objections more boldly, and he begins to understand the ideological and gender differences which separate them. The more bluntly she disputes his assumptions, the more clearly her oppositional voice peeks through. (182)

Although Bell is referring to the lady's speech, rather than her looks, the point would also apply to her looks.

“The heart sees better than the tongue can tell”

The first group of sonnets, Am. 1–21, which registers the power and the value of her looks, while simultaneously exposing the inadequacy of convention to deal with it, can be taken as a representation of the process by which the poet/lover learns to transcend the conventional dichotomy between favour and disfavour.

In contrast to the lady, who, by his own admission beholds him “that all the pageants play…with constant eye” (Am. 54), the poet/lover’s interpretation of the lady’s looks varies, and as Bell points out, even when

> her responses [do] leave the margins and enter the text, it is difficult to know whether the poet/lover is unwittingly or deliberately misconstruing her views in the hopes of advancing his own persuasive purpose. (182–83)

At times, the lady’s “blessed looke” (Am. 1), which inspires his poetry, “kindle[s] heavenly fire” (Am. 3) and is said to be his “soules long-lacked food” (Am. 1). At other times, the poet/lover’s interpretation of her looks is negative and her “guilefull eyen” (Am. 12), which make “huge massacres” (Am. 10), are identified as the source of his pain and suffering. Although the lady “maintains a restrained and consistently composed exterior”, the poet/ lover “presents us a lady with two distinct aspects—that of the cruel ‘fayre proud’ and that of the ‘donna angelicata’” (Dunlop 83). While the ‘fayre-proud’ sonnets focus on the lady’s pride, hard-heartedness, cruelty and rebelliousness, the ‘donna angelicata’ sonnets highlight her goodness, beauty and divinity. However, as Dunlop points out,

> these are clearly projections of the lover’s volatile, emotional reactions to the lady’s unchanging obduracy [and] it is the lover who imputes to those ‘smyling lookes’ either guileful cruelty or gracious mercy as his varying moods incline him to proud protest or to humble plea. (83)

It is the lady’s “dichotomous qualities of attraction and intransigence” (Dunlop 41), as perceived by the poet/lover, that cause his perplexity in a number of the earlier sonnets.

This is evinced in Am. 7, one of a trio of 'donna angelicata' sonnets [Am. 7–9], in which the poet/lover, seeking favour, flatters the lady's looks.

First noted in Am. 3, the poet/lover's amazement extends to Am. 7, where the lady's "Fayre eyes" are said to be the "myrrour" of his "mazed hart":

> Fayre eyes, the myrrour of my mazed hart,
> what wondrous vertue is contaynd in you
> the which both lyfe and death forth from you dart
> into the object of your mighty view?

The word "mazed" suggests not only the poet/lover's awe at the paradoxical power of the eyes to send out beams of life and death, and the resulting confusion at the seemingly contradictory signals he receives from the lady, but also alludes to his own entrapment in a labyrinth of stilted Petrarchanisms.

The notion of love entering and wounding the heart through the eyes was a common one. Douglas Brooks-Davies outlines the concept as follows:

> Just as a mirror receives a ray of the sun, and reflecting it, sets a piece of wool on fire, so that part of the lover's soul called memory receives through the eyes an image of beauty and makes another image from it, a reflection of the first, by which desire is kindled. (221)

The idea is adapted in Am. 7, where the seeds are sown for the important Narcissus image that first appears in Am. 35 and again in Am. 83. While serving as a mirror, the lady's "lamping eyes" (Am. 1) simultaneously give light which is then mirrored back to the poet/lover, the "object of [her] mighty view". However, when the poet/lover looks upon the lady, "the object or reflection of his desire" (Bell 158), he sees in her eyes the image of her that he has fashioned within himself. Caught in a semantic trap, the poet/lover "merely elaborates the Petrarchan contrariety: when the lady smiles, he is 'inspired'; when she frowns he is 'fyred'" (DeNeef 67).

The “wondrous vertue” of the lady’s eyes, which are able to control the poet/lover while stubbornly eluding control by him, is demonstrated in the second quatrain of Am. 7 as the poet/lover is witnessed moving backwards and forwards between life and death.

> For when ye mildly looke with lovely hew,
> then is my soule with life and love inspired:
> but when ye lowre, or looke on me askew,
> then doe I die, as one with lightning fyred.

Impeded by the helplessness of his own “weak eyes” against the lady’s “bright beams”, the poet/lover appeals to her to stop frowning and to “looke ever lovely” so that she may kindle his desire.

> But since that lyfe is more than death desyred,
> looke ever lovely, as becomes you best,
> that your bright beams of my weak eies admyred,
> may kindle living fire within my brest.

The poet/lover then concludes his poem by drawing together all the images of the first twelve lines.

> Such life should be the honor of your light,
> such death the sad ensample of your might.
> [Am. 7]

In terms of the sequence as a whole, “honor” and “ensample” are key words. While the former serves as a reminder that one of the functions of the *Amoretti* is to pay tribute to the lady, “ensample” can be linked to ‘teaching’, ‘lessons’ and ‘learning’, all of which become increasingly important motifs as the sequence progresses and the poet/lover proceeds through a pedagogical process, which leads ultimately to the transformation of both the poet’s poetry and the lover’s loving. By trying to persuade her to look ‘kindly’ on him, it is

as if an “ensample of her might” is a lesson that no longer needs to be learnt and that pattern can now be left behind.

The lady’s role in this tranformative process is highlighted in Am. 8 as the poet/lover extends and adapts some of the ideas introduced in Am. 7. In the opening lines of Am. 8, the “fayre eyes” of the previous sonnet are attributed celestial qualities and become

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

The “living fire”, kindled in the breast of the poet/lover in Am. 7, now fills the lady. A number of transformations occur in the lines that follow: Her “fayre eyes”, which were said to have “wondrous vertue” in Am. 7, are described in this sonnet as

> no eies but joyes, in which al powers conspire,
> that to the world naught else be counted deare.

In the previous sonnet, the lady’s eyes inspired “life and love”. In Am. 8, the power of her eyes is extended as “inspired” is changed to “conspire”, signifying both the lady’s control of the situation, as well as preparing for the later negative association of her eyes with guilefulness.

Having established the lady’s power of authority by her association with the “maker” in line 2, the poet/lover provides further clarification of “al powers” in the second quatrain, where the lady’s power, Cupid’s power and the power of the angels are all seen to be working together for mutual effect.

> Thrugh your bright beams doth not the blinded guest
> shoot out his darts to base affections wound:
> but Angels come to lead fraile mindes to rest
> in chast desires on heavenly beauty bound.

The “bright beams”, which were “admired” by the poet/lover in Am. 7 reappear, but whereas they darted forth “lyfe and death” in the previous sonnet, in Am. 8, the poet/lover, “gazing into them, sees not affection’s dart, but ‘heavenly beauty’” (DeNeef 68). The spiritual dimension of the lady’s power, implied by her association with “the maker” in line 2, is reiterated by the word “Angels”. Similarly, the reference to “fraile mindes” in the same line reinforces the powerlessness of the poet/lover’s “weak eies” (Am. 7) and prepares for the merging of the two in “mens frayle eyes” in Am. 37. Don Ricks notes that “there is a minor motif played all through the sonnets about the ‘frayle eyes’ of men generally, and about the lover’s own ‘wandering in darkness and dismay’ until he is eventually ‘elumind’ by his mistress” (10), whose eyes provide a leading for the troubled poet/lover throughout a large part of the sequence.

The verb “lead”, used in line 7, anticipates the third quatrain in which the poet/lover reveals his awareness of the lady’s function as his guide in love.

> You frame my thoughts and fashion me within,
> you stop my toung, and teach my hart to speake,
> you calme the storm that passion did begin,
> strong thrugh your cause, but by your vertue weak.

In these lines, the poet/lover focuses his attention on the lady. Her importance to him is emphasised, not only by the repetition of the pronouns “you” and “your”, but also by the prominent placement of “You” at the beginning of lines 9, 10 and 11.The verbs in this quatrain, namely “frame”, “fashion”, “stop” and “calme” are particularly informative, as they summarize the lady’s actions during the course of much of the sequence.

Perceived as an “angel” derived from “the sacred brooke /of *Helicon*” (Am. 1), the lady is identified as the source of the poet/lover’s inspiration right from the outset. In addition to inspiring him, however, the lady is also instrumental in ‘reforming’ the poet/lover, so that his poetry and his love may become more than a fixed decorum of expression for winning her affection. In Am. 3, the poet/lover claimed that his tongue was silenced by the lady’s radiant beauty, and in this sonnet, Am. 8, the poet/lover’s efforts to present his praises to the lady are again thwarted as she persists in her attempt to teach his heart to speak. Her firm and unyielding refusal to accept the “stylized and very artificial

kind of love" (Kennedy 209) offered by the poet/lover, causes him to question and to re-examine the object of his love and the means by which he expresses it. In so doing, the lady "fashions" and reforms both the poet's poetry and the lover's love.

The extent of the lady's importance to the poet/lover is conveyed in the concluding couplet where the images of light are extended.

> Dark is the world, where your light shined never:
> well is he borne, that may behold you ever.
>
> [Am. 8]

The lady has a sustaining influence on the poet/lover and the darkness of the world where her light does not shine, forms a strong contrast with the "living fire" and the "bright beames" of the first two quatrains.

Images of light and the theme of inexpressibility continue in Am. 9 as the poet/lover endeavours to find an apt description of the lady's "powrefull eies" which brighten his spirit.

> Long-while I sought to what I might compare
> those powrefull eies, which lighten my dark spright,
> yet find I nought on earth to which I dare
> resemble th'ymage of their goodly light.

In Am. 3 and 8, the poet/lover's rhetorical powers allegedly fail him when he attempts to speak or write about the lady, forcing him to offer his praises silently in his heart. The struggle for suitable expression becomes explicit in Am. 9, as image after image is produced in the hope of finding one that is comparable with "th'ymage of [the eyes'] goodly light":

> Not to the Sun: for they doo shine by night;
> nor to the Moone: for they are changed never;
> nor to the Starres: for they have purer sight;
> nor to the fire:for they consume not ever;

Nor to the lightning: for they still persever;
nor to the Diamond: for they are more tender;
nor unto Christall: for nought may them sever:
nor unto glasse: such basenesse mought offend her.

Having rejected the first eight items listed on grounds that each has a flaw, the poet/lover reverts to the image of light found in the first quatrain and concludes that the only way that he can describe the lady's eyes, is by comparing them to "the Maker selfe".

Then to the Maker selfe they likest be,
whose light doth lighten all that here we see.
[Am. 9]

The comparison of the lady's light to "the Maker selfe" as the Light of the World reinforces both the spiritual dimension of the lady's power and its effect on the poet/lover. Besides its obvious connections with the images of light, however, "light" can also be read as "illuminate" (Maclean and Prescott 590), re-establishing the link to the idea of vision and seeing and pointing to the lady's "positive (if passive) effort to lead [the poet/lover] to enlightenment" (Ricks 14).

In the early part of the sequence, not seeing correctly is precisely the problem experienced by the poet/lover, who is blinded by the distorted image of the lady which he has created within himself and whose beauty he depicts in Petrarchan language.

> He thinks that she rejects him wilfully for convention's sake. Being unenlightened, he cannot understand that she rejects him because he loves her for the wrong reasons and in the wrong way. (Ricks 10)

While the poet/lover finds encouragement, spiritual renewal and a sustaining of the relationship in the lady's eyes, his advances are hindered by her pride. Realizing that he has reached an impasse, he changes his strategy, and the three sonnets of praise (Am. 7–9) are followed by a group of contrasting sonnets (Am. 10–12), in which he laments her disdain. In this second trio of sonnets, the lady's "fayre eies", lauded in the 'donna

angelicata' sonnets as God-like, assume negative characteristics. Previously acknowledged as a medium of instruction, the lady's eyes become a medium of destruction, as the poet/lover, who perceives himself as the victim of the gaze in Am. 10, 11 and 12, reverts to the conventional imagery of bondage and captivity with which he is so familiar. Since there is a separate and extensive chapter on imagery of bondage and captivity, my comments on these particular sonnets are intended merely to highlight the eye imagery, which stresses the lady's apparent tyranny and obduracy and reveals the conflict that characterizes their relationship in the early stages of the courtship.

In Am. 10, the eyes of the lady, who is described as a "Tyrannesse" intent on "mightie vengeance", make "huge massacres". All the poet/lover's efforts to end the conflict prove futile in Am. 11 as the seemingly cruel and hard-hearted lady

> …seekes with torment and turmoyle,
> to force [him] live and will not let [him] dy.

Blind to the fact that she is only forcing him into life so that a true relationship with the real lady can develop, the poet/lover then seeks "with her hart-thrilling eies / to make a truce and termes to entertaine" (Am. 12). Despite his complaints against the lady's eyes and his appeal for justice, the poet/lover's ambiguous reference to the eyes as "false enimies" in line 3 reveals his awareness that she is not really the enemy, and warns the reader against taking his hyperbolic allegations of her cruelty too seriously. This view is supported by Louis Martz who detects a touch of "humour, parody or comedy" (158) in Am. 10, and by Rosemond Tuve, who sees the poet/lover's depiction of the situation as "delicate mockery" (254).

The gentle humour evident in these sonnets comes to the fore in Am. 16, as the poet/lover "blends the playful Anacreontic mode with the potentially more serious figure of the lady's eyes as a lamp, introduced in Am. 1, line 6" (Yale 610). In both the classical and medieval traditions, the figure of Cupid as Lord of Love was common. However, with the appearance of a small winged boy and his mother, Venus, in "a discourse usually called 'Anacreaontic', playfulness and whimsicality began to dominate" as "what was serious human cruelty in the medieval Cupid [became] mischief in that small boy" (Spiller 30).

Whereas in most of the sonnets, the poet/lover assumes the more passive role as the object of the lady's gaze, in Am. 16, both the lady and the poet/lover are presented as gazers. As in Am. 12, he begins his poem by describing what happened on one particular day when, in an unguarded moment, he was caught gazing at the lady's "fayre eies":

> One day as I unwarily did gaze
> on those fayre eyes my loves immortall light:
> the whiles my stonisht hart stood in amaze,
> through sweet illusion of her lookes delight,
> I mote perceive how in her glauncing sight,
> legions of loves with little wings did fly:
> darting their deadly arrowes fyry bright,
> at every rash beholder passing by.

Described in the first quatrain as his "loves immortall light", her eyes are once again attributed heavenly qualities, and their effect on the poet/lover is much the same as it was in Am. 3. The "amaze[ment]" and astonishment which the poet/lover experiences as a result of his "gaz[ing]" on the "fayre eyes" signify not only his perplexity, but also the maze of Petrarchan, Courtly and Neo-Platonic loves into which he has worked himself.

The "sweet illusion of her lookes delight" suggests both "deceptive appearance" and "perhaps mockery and teasing" (Maclean and Prescott 593), and calls to mind the poet/lover's earlier reference to the lady's eyes as "false enimies". Similarly, "her lookes delight" can ambiguously be taken either as the lady's looks at which the poet/lover is gazing with delight, or as the delight the poet/lover would experience if the lady focused her gaze upon him.

The second quatrain reveals that on this particular occasion, however, the lady is not looking directly at the poet/lover, who is almost an observer of her look, rather than the focus of her gaze. His use of the word "unwarily" in line 1 and the reference to the lady's "glauncing sight" in line 5 suggest that at this point in the sequence, the poet/lover is still a long way from mutuality.

The third quatrain marks a movement from illusion to perception as the poet/lover sees himself as a possible victim of the lady's gaze. On turning his attention to the actions

of one of the “loves” he detects an arrow being aimed “at [his] very hart”. With “twincle of her eye”, the lady deflects the archer’s arrow, and in so doing, not only saves the poet/lover’s life, but also protects him from the full force of her gaze. Although he does feel the pain, her action brings a moment of relief and offers hope of mitigation.

> One of those archers closely I did spy,
> ayming his arrow at my very hart:
> when suddenly with twincle of her eye,
> the Damzell broke his misintended dart.
> Had she not so doon, sure I had bene slayne,
> yet as it was, I hardly scap’t with paine.
>
> [Am. 16]

While the sonnets discussed so far hint at the development of a healthier relationship, at this point in the sequence, the poet/lover is still locked into dependence and conventional imagery. It is only once these two avenues have been exhausted that he will see her pride and meekness, not as exclusive alternatives, but as combining and co-operating in the training of his looks. Yes, look at me, her meekness invites; but not like that, her pride rebukes him. While “his art shows a supreme mastery of Petrarchan convention, it earns criticism from the beloved”, and he “must do more than colonize literary conventions” (Kennedy 236) if he wishes to succeed in his suit.

It is not, however, until Am. 21, the final sonnet of the first section, that the poet/lover comes to the important conclusion that “the solution [to his problems] comes, not from male literary tradition, but from the female reader” (Bell 161).

Am. 21 encapsulates the action, as well as a number of themes from the first group of sonnets. It begins with a question in which the art/nature dichotomy comes to the fore. A common quest in Elizabethan literature was seeking to combine nature and art. Douglas Brooks-Davies clarifies this stock Petrarchan theme as follows:

> The complementariness of the two [art and nature] is a Renaissance commonplace: Nature [as the art of God] fell from perfection with the Fall of Man; Art (in some Measure) redeems that fallenness. (232)

The poet/lover's art has been the subject of a number of the earlier sonnets as he has sought fitting words and terms by which to "expresse [the lady's] fill" (Am. 17). His problems arise from the fact that "his vision, even his experience of Elizabeth has been experienced completely and concretely within a literary context in which loving is equated with art" (Johnson, "Gender Fashioning" 512).

As long as the poet/lover is merely describing the lady according to the conventions of art, he can capture only aspects. Forced to confront his poetic limitations, he admits in Am. 17 that the lady's qualities,

> The lovely pleasance and the lofty pride,
> cannot expressed be by any art.

As in Am. 9, the solution is to be found in "the Maker selfe".

> A greater craftesmans hand thereto doth neede,
> that can expresse the life of things indeed.

Although at this point the poet/lover is still caught in the bind of writing and is unable to escape art's construction, this acknowledgement is a significant step forward, as it is only when art begins to combine with nature, that real interaction between the poet/lover and the lady is possible.

The lady, it appears, represents that tempering of art and nature. Her blending of pride and humility in Am. 13,

> Myld humblesse mixt with awfull majesty,

and her reconciliation of physical and mental beauty in Am. 15,

> But that which fairest is, but few behold,
> her mind adornd with vertues manifold,

reappear in the opening quatrain of Am. 21:

> Was it the worke of nature or of Art?
> which tempred so the feature of her face;
> that pride and meeknesse mixt by equall part,
> doe both appear t'adorne her beauties grace.

If he keeps looking, "the feature of her face" may help him to move beyond convention.

Play on the notion of 'looks' and 'looking' has been noted in a number of the earlier sonnets, and in these first four lines, attention is focused on the lady's 'looks', her beauty, which the poet/lover so admires.

The ambiguity of the "sweet illusion of her lookes delight" (Am. 16) presents itself again in Am. 21 in the "pride and meekness" that "appear t'adorne her beauties grace". The lady has previously been linked to the idea of deception, and the connection is re-established in these lines by the words "appear" and "adorn". If "appear" is taken to mean "seem, as distinguished from *to be*" (*OED* appear, *v*.11) and "adorn" as to "decorate, or embellish" (*OED* adorn, *v*. I. 1), then the suggestion is that the lady's 'looks' are an illusion, an appearance of beauty. A more positive interpretation, however, reads "appear" as "to become visible" and "adorn" as "to add beauty" (*OED* adorn, *v*. II.4)), in which case, the "pride and the meeknesse" can be seen to enhance her beauty. The question of whether her "lookes" are natural or artificial remains unanswered.

In the second quatrain, the gaze is interactive as attention shifts away from the lady's 'looks', that is her "beauties grace", to the way in which she looks at those who gaze upon her.

> For with mild pleasance, which doth pride displace,
> she to her love doth lookers eyes allure:
> and with sterne countenance back again doth chace
> their loose lookes that stir up lustes impure.

Contrary to the poet/lover's claims in Am. 18 that the lady "as steele and flint doth still remayne", the verbs in this quatrain indicate action: With her "mild pleasance" she

"*displaces* pride" and "*allure*[s]" admirers'eyes, and with her pride she "*chace*[s] loose lookes" (italics mine). The verb "allure" signifies the lady's ability to attract, as well as her alleged propensity to entrap, both of which have already been mentioned in several of the poems. Although it does not become clear until the end of the sonnet, the significance of the word "allure" in Am. 21 extends beyond the idea of entrapment and captivity. "Allure" has its root in 'lure', which, in one sense of the word, is

> An apparatus used by falconers, to recall their hawks, constructed of a bunch of feathers, to which is attached a long cord or thong, and from the intersices of which, during its training, the hawk is fed. (*OED* lure, *sb*.[2] 1: see also *OED* allure, *v*.).

The importance of the association with the notion of training is reinforced by the poet/ lover's choice of the adjective "sterne" in the next line of the sonnet. In addition to conveying the idea of the lady's severity as she rebuffs "looser lookes that stir up lustes impure", the word "sterne" also has the connotation of "enforcing discipline" and together with "allure", anticipates the conclusion to which the poet/lover comes at the end of the poem.

Meanwhile, in the third quatrain, the focus narrows as the poet/lover moves away from discussion of the lady's 'looks', and their effect on "lookers" in general, to her eyes and the effect that they have on him, in particular:

> With such strange termes her eyes she doth inure,
> that with one looke she doth my life dismay: 10
> and with another doth it straight recure;

The lady, whose eyes actively "recure" and "dismay", is clearly in control. Unresponsive to his earlier attempts "with her hart-thrilling eies / to make a truce and termes to entertaine" (Am. 12), the lady now puts into practice her own "strange termes". With her smiles and frowns, the poet/lover, who is entirely at her mercy it appears, is drawn towards her and sent away. The alternating action in line 12 mimics, not only the action in Am. 7, where the frenzied poet/lover was portrayed as darting backwards and forwards between

life and death, but also “summarizes the activity” of the first twenty-one sonnets, “and draws the moral” (Dunlop 38):

> Thus doth she traine and teach me with her lookes.

The lady is using her ‘lookes’ in the first two quatrains, and the actions of her eyes in the third quatrain, to “traine and teach” the poet/lover, who “seeks to persuade his beloved by laying at her feet imitations not only of Petrarch, but also of Italian and French poets who themselves colonized Petrarch” (Kennedy 235–236). Using her eyes, she encourages the right kind of look and discourages false love. With her smile, she “drawes” him to look at her. The more his eyes are trained upon the lady, the more they will be subjected to a discipline. Similarly, when she frowns at him, she drives him away. In so doing, the poet/lover is eventually compelled to look at her in such a way as to see past her. The process is described in George Herbert’s poem, ‘The Elixir’:

> A man that looks on glasse,
> On it may stay his eye:
> Or, if he pleaseth, through it passe,
> And then the heav’n espie.

.

The whole sequence of poems can be said to be a discipline as the poet/lover turns and looks again and again at the lady. Initially, his eyes are distracted, and he regards the lady’s eyes as a medium of destruction, because all that he sees is artificially induced. As long as her eyes are merely a product of art, they will be destructive and antagonistic. During the course of the sequence, the fictional lady directs his gaze, until finally his self-generated artistic image is transformed into her likeness.

Having just acknowledged the lady’s eyes as a medium of instruction, the poet/lover concedes that her art is superior to his art. The lady’s “lookes”, in all senses, are both nature and art combined. While her looks (beauty) and eyes are natural, being God’s gift to the lady, her looking is artful, in that she has mastered the art of using her eyes to “lead [the poet/lover] to a higher sort of love and understanding than he ever found in

books" (Kennedy 236). He may know and practise all the conventions of love, but her art, which surpasses his, presents a challenge. In the final line of the sonnet he states,

> such art of eyes I never read in bookes.
>
> [Am. 21]

Although the poet/lover has admitted understanding what the lady is doing, and some progress in the courtship has been made, at this point in the sequence, the lady's lesson has yet to be learned. While his heart can see meekness and pride adorning her grace, his pen, trained in Petrarchism, merely divides the two. Consequently, the conflict continues for a good part of the middle section of the sequence, the Lenten sequence, which, significantly, begins in the very next sonnet, Am. 22.

"The heart finds its voice"

During this middle section, the discipline of Lent is reflected in the discipline of the eyes to which the lady subjects the poet/lover. Lent is a time of renewal and reconciliation as the penitent prepares for the gifts of grace, which await him at the end of the period. In the same way, the poet/lover has to purge both his heart and his art of all those elements that render his love unacceptable to the lady. Like the penitent, the poet/lover experiences trials and tribulations at this time. Nonetheless, the general tone of the Lenten sequence is positive, as ever present in the *Amoretti* is the suggestion that the lady is attainable, and that the betrothal, which occurs in Am. 67, does ultimately lead to marriage. Despite his complaints about the lady's cruelty and her alleged lack of interest in him, the poet/lover, who "embraces his woes, and accepts his suffering" (Dunlop 41), both "for [his] faults" (Am. 24), and as "meanes of blisse" (Am. 25), is gradually being humbled into seeing the pain of 'rejection' as part of the process by which his heart is finding a voice, so that when she frowns, he can do more than just complain—he can hope and believe.

The process of reconciliation begins in Am. 22, the first sonnet of the Lenten sequence. The Lenten sequence signifies a change of direction, as the poet/lover willingly "inclyn[s]" himself to the task of enlightenment. For the moment, attention moves away from consideration of the lady's eyes and looks, to the image of her that he has created

within himself. The sonnet begins with a reference to the “holy season” and “men” in general, narrowing in the lines that follow to one “holy day” and “himself”. The “fast[ing]” and “pray[ing]” constitute part of the purification process:

> This holy season fit to fast and pray,
> Men to devotion ought to be inclynd:
> therefore, I lykewise on so holy day,
> for my sweet Saynt some service fit will find.

In the second quatrain, the “glorious portrait” of Am. 17 is given a more concrete form by the poet/lover who “creates a mental image [of the lady] which is at once a testament of his worship of her” and in the context of the temple metaphor, a statue to serve as “a memory construct which will enable him to recall her image in times of doubt” (Brooks-Davies 233). The “temple” also represents a more helpful and constructive image than the pride/meekness dichotomy on which he was earlier fixated:

> Her temple fayre is built within my mind,
> in which her glorious ymage placed is,
> on which my thoughts doo day and night attend
> lyke sacred priests that never thinke amisse.

In the third quatrain, the religious metaphor of the “sacrifise, / burning in flames” combines with the Petrarchan one of the heart being sacrificed. In this instance, “the object to be sacrificed in the process of Lenten purgation is [the poet/lover’s] heart when he bred his ‘unquiet thought’ in II” (Yale 613):

> There I to her as th’author of my blisse,
> will build an altar to appease her yre:
> and on the same my hart will sacrifise,
> burning in flames of pure and chast desyre:

The problem of reality and illusion, and the difficulty the poet/lover has in dealing with the "sweete illusion of [the lady's] lookes delight" (Am. 16) has been a common theme in the earlier sonnets. This poem reveals not only his idealization of the lady, who is first described as a "Saynt" and then as a "goddesse", but also defines his relationship to her; she is both his teacher and the object of his worship. The poem ends with a plea that the lady accept his heart:

> The which vouchsafe O goddesse to accept,
> amongst thy deerest relicks to be kept.
>
> [Am. 22]

The two possibilities (teacher and idol) are rehearsed again in Am. 24 as the reader is reminded that during this time, the poet/lover experiences inner turmoil and contradictory feelings. Although the lady has not responded positively to his plea that she accept his heart, some progress has been made and in this sonnet, the pain experienced by the poet/lover seems redemptive or punitive rather than vengeful.

In Am. 22, his thoughts, "like sacred priests", waited upon his "sweet Saynt", and she was the object of his worship. In Am. 24, it is "the maker" who is honoured and admired for his work in the lady:

> When I behold that beauties wonderment,
> And rare perfection of each goodly part:
> of natures skill the onely complement,
> I honor and admire the makers art.

This is followed by a rapid transition from praise of "the makers art" to complaint about the Lady's "art of eyes":

> But when I feele the bitter balefull smart,
> which her fayre eyes unwares doe worke in mee:
> that death out of theyr shiny beames doe dart,
> I thinke that I a new *Pandora* see,

Whom all the gods in councell did agree,
into this sinfull world from heaven to send:
that she to wicked men a scourge should bee,
for all their faults with which they did offend.

In the concluding couplet, meekness and pride are combined as the poet/lover acknowledges that she is his "scourge" and appeals to her not to be too harsh on him:

But since you are my scourge I will intreat,
that for my faults you will me gently beat.
[Am. 24]

By Am. 25, the poet/lover's uncertainty regarding the "strange termes" (Am. 21) is in evidence. No longer sure about the effectiveness of his poetic abilities to win the lady over, and finding difficulty in accepting her gentle beating, he hovers between fear that she will reject him and withdraw from the game, and hope that she will take pity on him and yield:

How long shall this lyke dying lyfe endure,
And know no end of her owne misery:
but wast and weare away in termes unsure,
twixt feare and hope depending doubtfully?

His weariness is reflected in the alliteration in "wast and weare away" in line 3, and anticipates the "weary woes" of Am. 36 in which he is presented as a frustrated supplicant for peace to the supposedly hostile lady. The poet/lover's weariness turns to dismay in Am. 34, the first of a quartet of eye sonnets, when he loses sight of her guiding light.

This sonnet is "based on the common Petrarchan metaphor" (Brooks-Davies 241), in which the lover is compared to a "storm-tossed sailor who cannot see the guiding stars of his lady's eyes" (Maclean and Prescott 600). The first quatrain tells of a ship that goes astray when her star is dimmed:

Lyke as a ship that through the Ocean wyde,
by conduct of some star doth make her way,
whenas a storm hath dimd her trusty guyde,
out of her course doth wander far astray.

In the second quatrain, the poet/lover applies the image to his own situation, and the literal storm becomes a figurative emotional storm within himself, as he wanders in the darkness of "the world where [the lady's] light shined never" (Am. 8):

So I whose star, that wont with her bright ray
me to direct, with cloudes is overcast,
doe wander now in darkness and dismay,
through hidden perils round about me plast.

The repetition of the word "wander" in lines 4 and 7, and again near the end of the sonnet in line 13, emphasizes the poet/lover's loss of direction. The darkness in which he finds himself contrasts strongly with the lady's "bright ray" and his inability to see is reinforced by the reference to "*hidden* perils" (italics mine). While the poet/lover neither identifies the dangers which surround him, nor specifies what constitutes the "cloudes" that obscure the lady's "lovely light", the third quatrain reveals his optimism that the storm will eventually pass:

Yet hope I well, that when this storm is past
my *Helice* the lodestar of my lyfe
will shine again, and looke on me at last,
with lovely light to cleare my cloudy grief.

As in previous sonnets, the lady's eyes are attributed celestial qualities, and the image of the lodestar in line 10 "epitomizes her role as guide in love" (Yale 620). Without her, the poet/lover is helpless as "his salvation depends on the assistance and guidance of his lady" (Dunlop 44). Until he is able to "see beyond the darkening storms (of passion) to follow her (pure) light" (Yale 620), he will continue to

…wander carefull comfortlesse,
in secret sorrow and sad pensivenesse.
[Am. 34]

However, as he is already hoping in despair, the two states are beginning to be reconciled even as he continues to alternate between them. Nonetheless, "the sonnet lover's enlightenment [which] is necessary to eliminate his wandering" (Johnson, "Greener Hymnes" 436), will not occur until much later in the sequence.

The poet/lover's "restless emotions" (Kennedy 266) and his reliance on the lady's light for guidance extend into Am. 35, the first sonnet to focus entirely on his, rather than on her eyes. Described by Myron Turner as "the most complete statement of restless appetite" (288), this sonnet invokes the Narcissus myth which is outlined below:

> At the heart of Ovid's beautiful and teasingly enigmatic story of Narcissus is the theme of awakening self-consciousness….Narcissus proudly rejects all who love him…and one of the scorned suitors prays that Narcissus himself will have to suffer the fate of his suitors—to love and not be able to gain the thing he loves. Nemesis arranges that Narcissus see his reflection in a pool and fall in love with it without recognizing it as his own. He woos his beautiful reflection with a growing sense of helplessness, and even when he at last recognizes the image as his own, he cannot stop loving it. In despair he wishes that he could be separated from his own body. He dies with his eyes fixed on this image and even in the underworld continues to gaze at his reflection in the Stygian pool. A flower that bears his name takes the place of his body. (Edwards 63–64)

In the first eight lines of Am. 35, the poet/lover compares his situation to that of Narcissus:

My hungry eyes through greedy covetize
still to behold the object of their paine;
with no contentment can themselves suffize,
but having pine and having not complaine.

For lacking it, they cannot lyfe sustayne, 5
and having it, they gaze on it the more:
in their amazement lyke Narcissus vaine
whose eyes him starved: so plenty makes me poore.

The food imagery ("hungry", "greedy", "suffize", "having", "having not", "lacking", "lyfe sustayne", "starved", "plenty", "poore", "filled", "store" and "brook"), which is inextricably connected to the eye imagery ("behold", "gaze", "sight", "looke", "showes" and "shadowes") throughout the poem, suggests that the eyes are nourished by what they see. The association of the first two image groups was initiated in lines 11 and 12 of the opening sonnet,

when ye behold that Angels blessed looke,
my soules long lacked foode, my heavens blis
[Am. 1]

and extended in Am. 2 where the "Unquiet thought" is said to be "with sighes and sorrowes fed" and urged to

…seeke some succour both to ease my smart
and also to sustayne thy selfe with food.

Just as the poet/lover's expectations that his love and his poetry will provide "succour" and an easing of the "smart" are thwarted in Am. 2, so in Am. 35, he finds that his appetite "is satisfied neither with nor without the object of his 'hungry eyes', the 'faire sight' of the lady who is first explicitly identified in the last line" (Edwards 71–2) of the poem. When the poet/lover is unable to see the lady, his eyes are not fed and "cannot lyfe sustayne". Yet, the more his hungry eyes "gaze" on the lady, the more his hunger increases, so that paradoxically, the abundance that he experiences when looking at her, also makes him poor.

Although the poet/lover emphasizes the similarities between his situation and that of Narcissus, there are obvious discrepancies. While Narcissus, deluded by shadows, was

"enraptured with his own image reflected in the water", the poet/lover "concentrates all his attention on the lady excluding all goals and other persons" (Yale 621). Unlike Narcissus, who, as a consequence of his behaviour, died at the water's edge, the poet/lover does not starve as a result of his obsession. The differences between Narcissus and the poet/lover are confirmed by the prominent positioning of the word "Yet" at the beginning of the third quatrain:

> Yet are mine eyes so filled with the store
> of that faire sight, that nothing else they brooke,
> but lothe the things which they did like before,
> and can no more endure on them to looke.

The poet/lover's response is a mixture of satisfaction and frustration. While it is through his eyes that he has become poor, they are so filled with abundance that they require nothing else. Although the "store" is still inadequate and his world without her light remains meaningless, this unsatisfied hunger has awakened new possibilities of seeing his suffering as redemptive. With the help of the lady, the poet/lover is in the process of correcting his own faulty vision and has learned the lesson that Narcissus failed to learn. The poet/lover recognizes that the world's glory is "vayne" and sees the connection between "showes" and "shadowes". His description of the lady as a "faire sight" in line 10 forms a contrast with the reference to "shadowes" in the final line of the poem:

> All this worlds glory seemeth vayne to me,
> and all their showes but shadowes saving she.
> [Am. 35]

The poet/lover's misery intensifies in the three sonnets that follow. In Am. 36, the "pine" of the previous poem is transformed into "pining langour" and the daily seeking and suing for peace of Am. 12 becomes the more despairing:

Is there no meanes for me to purchace peace,
or make agreement with her thrilling eyes:
but that their cruelty doth still increace,
and dayly more augment my miseryes?

Am. 37 is a caution to the poet/lover's eyes not to stare "too rashly" at the lady whose "golden tresses" have assumed some of the characteristics of her "guilefull eyen" of Am. 12. By Am. 38, which marks a return to the storm imagery of Am. 34, the poet/lover "seems almost to despair of ever persuading the lady to submit" (Dunlop 46). Unlike Arion, whose "sweet musick" saved him from the "tempests cruel wrack", the poet/lover's "rude musick…cannot with any skill / the dreadfull tempest of [the lady's] wrath appease".

Then unexpectedly, in Am. 39, the lady smiles at the poet/lover. Images of sight and taste are combined in the "sweet smile" and his "hungry eyes", which in Am. 35 beheld "the object of their paine", are now satisfied as he feeds

…on the fulnesse of that chearefull glaunce.
More sweet than Nectar or Ambrosiall meat
seemd every bit, which thenceforth I did eat.

The poet/lover continues his description of the smile and the resulting joy that he experiences in Am. 40:

Mark when she smiles with amiable cheare,
And tell me whereto can ye lyken it:
when on each eyelid sweetly doe appeare
an hundred Graces as in shade to sit.

In Am. 34, when the lady's "bright ray…with cloudes [was] overcast", the poet/lover expressed the hope

… that when this storme is past
my *Helice* the lodestar of my lyfe
will shine again, and looke on me at last,
with lovely light to cleare my cloudy grief.

The lady's positive response is registered in Am. 40. Likened to the sun, the lady's looks are once again associated with imagery of light. All nature responds to the sunshine/smile, which, according to Alexander Dunlop, "seems to hint at the merciful intent behind the lady's intransigence" (58):

Lykest it seemeth in my simple wit
unto the fayre sunshine in somers day:
that when a dreadfull storme away is flit,
thrugh the broad world doth spred his goodly ray:
At sight whereof each bird that sits on spray,
and every beast that to his den was fled
comes forth afresh out of their late dismay,
and to the light lift up theyr drouping hed.

The storm apparently having passed, the poet/lover concludes the sonnet on a positive note:

So my storme-beaten hart likewise is cheared,
with that sunshine when cloudy looks are cleared.
[Am. 40]

The poet/lover's optimism continues into Am. 43, where, in a reversal of roles, he vows

Yet I my hart with silence secretly
will teach to speak, and my just cause to plead:

and eke mine eies with meeke humility,
love learned letters to her eyes to read.

This sonnet marks a crucial development as, for the first time, the heart is close to finding its voice. In Am. 8 it was the lady who was to teach his heart to speak, but in this sonnet, the poet/lover's heart and eyes will tell her what he has been unable to express in words. Alexander Dunlop points out that it is, of course, "only the lady's steadfastness that has brought him to this resolve" and that "she is teaching him, though he is not yet fully aware of it" (47).

Am. 45, which "seems to be a further development of the state of total concentration that the lover achieved in XXXV" (Dunlop 48), expands on the idea of the poet/lover's role as reflector of the lady's beauty. However, whereas it was the poet/lover who gazed in Am. 35, here it is the lady who is called upon to see herself as he mirrors her. Addressing the lady directly, he urges her to use "her deep wit, that true harts thought can spel, /…conceive, and learn to construe well" (Am. 43) and to look within him for a picture of her true self, rather than rely on the mere reflective vanity of her "her glasse of christalle clene":

Leave lady in your glasse of christall clene,
Your goodly selfe for evermore to vew:
and in my selfe, my inward selfe I meane,
most lively lyke behold your semblant trew.
Within my hart, though hardly it can shew
thing so divine to vew of earthly eye:
The fayre Idea of your cellestiall hew,
and every part remaines immortally:

Now that his heart is seeing her, she can cast her looks on him without reproach.

In Am. 7 the poet/lover wrote of the lady's "fayre eyes, the myrrour of [his] mazed hart", and showed how he was reflected in her. In this sonnet, in what Kennedy describes as "a gesture of narcissistic self-promotion" (238), he removes the mirror and suggests that within his heart, which in Am.43 he taught to speak in silence secretly, the lady will find

more than mere appearance, such as that found in the “glasse of christalle clene”. Instead, she will see her own “semblant true”. Maclean and Prescott point out that the “paradoxical ‘semblant true’ implies that the lover’s inner reflection, like poetry, can capture what it imitates better than realistic copying” (605).

In the third quatrain, however, it transpires that the “fayre idea” is with “sorrow dimmed and deformd”. The poet/lover’s assertion, that if the lady ceases to be cruel, her “goodly ymage” will appear “clearer then christall”, depends on the idea that the beams from her eyes transmit the image of her to his heart through his eyes:

> And were it not that through your cruelty,
> with sorrow dimmed and deformd it were:
> the goodly ymage of your visnomy,
> clearer then christall would therein appere.

The phrase “goodly ymage” recalls the “glorious ymage” of Am. 22 as well as the “goodly Idoll” of Am. 27. Like Narcissus, the poet/lover is in love with an image. Unlike Narcissus, he loves two images—the “beloved’s reflected image” and “his own constructed image” of the lady (Kennedy 238). He has yet to realize that the real lady and the image are actually one. The “dimmed and deformd” image is the result of his faulty vision, and not the lady’s cruelty. As the sequence progresses, this constructed image is replaced by a real image, “clearer than christall”, as his Petrarchan reaction is gradually replaced by the responsiveness of the heart. Enlisting the help of the lady in the couplet, he appeals to her to “remove the cause by which [her] fayre beames darkned be” if she recognizes that he is at last seeing her as she is.

The poet/lover’s progress is reflected in Am. 47 where he warns against trusting

> …the treason of those smyling lookes,
> untill ye have theyr guylefull traynes well tryde:
> for they are lyke but unto golden hookes,
> that from the foolish fish theyr bayts doe hyde:
> So she with flattring smyles weake harts doth guyde
> unto her love and tempte to theyr decay,

whome being caught she kills with cruell pryde,
And feeds at pleasure on the wretched pray:
Yet even whylst her bloody hands them slay,
her eyes looke lovely and upon them smyle:
that they take pleasure in her cruell play,
and dying doe them selves of payne beguyle.
O mighty charm which makes men love theyr bane,
and thinck they dy with pleasure, live with payne.

Linked by rhyme, the lady's "lookes" are "hookes" which "hyde" their baits to "guyde" so that she can kill with "pryde". Earlier, the "golden hookes" were seen as the lady's "golden tresses" (Am. 37) and "weake harts" have been drawn to her several times. However, as the poet/lover has already stated in Am. 21 that the lady trains and teaches with her looks, the baiting image used in this sonnet is ultimately of a positive, not negative, nature, because the cruelty is an illusion, here presented with humorous exaggeration.

Vision and looking are again the subject of Am. 49 as the lady's powerful and imperious eyes are compared to those of the Cockatrice, "a fabulous creature with body of cock and serpent's tail, supposedly born from a cock's egg; identified with the basilisk [which] had the power to kill with its glance" (Brooks-Davies 254). Based on a claim to have been "humbled" and to have learnt a new way of looking, this is not quite the same plea as before:

Fayre cruell, why are ye so fierce and cruell?
Is it because your eyes have powre to kill?
then know, that mercy is the mighties jewell,
and greater glory thinke to save, then spill.
But if it be your pleasure and proud will
to shew the powre of your imperious eyes:
then not on him that never thought you ill,
but bend your force against your enemyes.
Let them feel th'utmost of your crueltyes,
and kill with looks, as Cockatrices doo:

but him that at your footstool humbled lies,
with mercifull regard, give mercy too.
Such mercy shal you make admyred to be,
so shall you live by giving life to me.

[Am. 49]

Although still using images and language employed earlier in the sequence—the lady's pride goes right back to Am. 2, death-dealing qualities were attributed to the eyes in Am. 7 and the lady's cruelty was bemoaned as early as Am. 10—the poet/lover has made some progress. No longer resigned to accepting the Petrarchan lover's doomed state of continued suffering as he was in Am. 42—

The love which me so cruelly tormenteth,
so pleasing is in my extreamest paine:
that all the more my sorrow ot augmenteth,
the more I love and doe embrace my bane.
Ne doe I wish (for wishing were but vaine)
to be acquit fro my continuall smart:
but joy her thrall forever to remayne,
and yield for pledge my poore captyved hart;
The which that it from her may never start,
let her, yf please her, bynd with adamant chyne:
and from all wandring loves which mote pervert,
his safe assurance, strongly it restrayne.
Onely let her abstain from cruelty,
and doe me not before my time to dy

—the poet/lover appeals in Am. 49 for relief. Having "apologize[d] for his transgressions and explain[ing] that his aggressive rhetoric was not caused by any flaw in her character for [he] 'never thought [her] any ill'", the poet/lover admits that "if she acted precipitously, 'ere she could thy cause wel understand' (Am. 48), he was at least partially to blame…for not realizing how offensive his language must have seemed to her" (Bell 170).

The introduction of the quality of mercy is also significant. Throughout the poems, the poet/lover has complained about the injustice of the lady's treatment of him. Now, for the first time, he seems to recognize and accept that she has not been unjust in her attitude towards him, and the words justice and injustice disappear from the sonnets that follow.

Am. 58, the companion sonnet to Am. 59, which provides "the lady's answer to the lover's pleadings and complaints in XXII through LVII" (Dunlop 59), represents a further, better combination of the lady's pride and meekness and provides a new term for her proud looks. The poems, which allow for a loving interaction, "announce a decisive turning point in the *Amoretti*" (Kennedy 244) as they "mark the beginning of a change in the lover's attitude in preparation for the fulfilment that occurs in LXVIII" (Dunlop 59):

> Weake is th'assurance that weake flesh reposeth
> In her owne powre and scorneth others ayde:
> that soonest fals when as she most supposeth
> her self assurd, and is of nought affrayd.
> All flesh is frayle, and all her strength unstayd,
> Like a vaine bubble blowen up with ayre:
> devouring tyme and changeful chance have prayd
> her glories pride that none may it repayre.
> Ne none so rich or wise, so strong or fayre,
> but fayleth trusting on his own assurance:
> and he that standeth on the hyghest stayre
> fals lowest: for on earth nought hath enduraunce.
> Why then doe ye proud fayre, misdeeme so farre,
> that to your selfe ye most assured arre.
>
> [Am. 58]

Significantly, the sonnet concludes with a question, rather than an imperative, showing that the poet/lover "has finally begun to consider the woman's point of view" (Bell 171). The answer to the question with which the sonnet ends, is found in the "subsequent, and affirmative" sonnet, Am. 59 (Ricks 11), which, according to Alexander Dunlop, "is the

poet's response to the lady's lesson in LVIII [and] expresses the insight gained from the lady's lesson" (60).

Throughout the sequence the lady "steadfastly has aimed at drawing [the poet/lover] into participation with her" and in Am. 59, the now-opened discourse actually becomes dialogue when the poet responds directly to her" (Johnson, "Gender Fashioning" 514). Having gradually been humbled into seeing the pain of 'rejection' as part of the process by which his heart is finding a voice,

> his language in Amor. 59 is notably different from that of many early poems. The structures of male dominance paradoxically depicted through images of feigned subjection are now displaced by gentle humor, direct response, sincere admiration and acceptance. Not only does the poet affirm Elizabeth's difference, but this discourse reveals a sense of mutuality in which he is free to play with the language *she* insisted he open. Poet and poem, lover and love are altered as the lady's "lessons" (in her voiced comments and actions) move the couple steadily away from the stylized, male-dominant, atrophic situation described in earlier sonnets, to the liberating, relational, empathic ones in the later poems. (514)

In the opening quatrain, the lady is said to be"thrise happie". Well assured, both in herself, and in her heart, she is allured neither by the desire for betterment, nor does she live in fear of change for the worse:

> Thrise happie she, that is so well assured
> Unto her selfe and setled so in hart:
> that nether will for better be allured
> ne feard with worse to any chaunce to start.

The ship image of Am. 34 and 56 reappears in the second quatrain, but whereas in Am. 34 the poet/lover was represented as a conventional Petrarchan ship, "blown hither and thither by the sighs and tears of unrequited love" (Bell 172), and in Am. 56 he was the "ship of succour desolate" who "suffer[ed] wreck both of her selfe and goods", in this sonnet, the lady is "like a steddy ship" who, "amid the 'raging waves' and 'tempests' of

passion" (Dunlop 60), stays on course. In addition to being steadfast and well assured, the lady also possesses that same sense of single direction that the poet/lover has been seeking since Am. 34.

> But like a steddy ship, doth strongly part
> the raging waves and keepes her course aright:
> ne ought for tempest doth from it depart,
> ne ought for fayrer weathers false delight.

In the third quatrain the lady's happiness is attributed to the fact that she neither fears "the spight / of grudging foes", nor seeks the favour of friends:

> Such selfe assurance need not fear the spight
> of grudging foes, ne favour seek of friends:
> but in the stay of her owne stedfast might,
> nether to one her selfe nor other bends.

This is a significant step forward as the poet/lover acknowledges that his previous statements about having to defend the lady's pride and protect her from the criticism of others do not matter to her. Having "finally come to understand and to appreciate the lady's supposed pride, [which] is not pride at all, or at least not the cold pride of the Petrarchan mistress, [but] the laudable self-assurance of the superior woman whose physical beauty outwardly manifests a beautiful soul" (Ricks 13), he concludes with a "seeming paradox that both the lover and the beloved end up 'most happy' when she is self-assured" (Kennedy 247).

> Most happy she that most assured doth rest,
> but he most happy who such one loves best.
>
> [Am. 59]

Although the lady is “most happy”, the poet/lover, the one she loves best, is even happier, both because he loves such a one best, and because he is the one whom such a one loves best:

> “Though the word ‘but’ implies a logical disjunction between the degrees of happiness that each experiences, the word ‘most’ asserts that both can attain the highest happiness when one’s satisfaction overlaps with the other’s. The paradox incites a moment of recognition and a change in the lover’s attitude towards himself and the beloved. Reassessing the nature of their relationship, he now assigns a new meaning to her earlier resistance. (Kennedy 247)

His vision thus corrected and the heart having found its voice, the “negative portion of the *Amoretti* gives way to the positive” (Ricks 12), and old images acquire new meaning.

On three previous occasions, the poet/lover used the image of the ship to symbolize the journey through the courtship. His fresh, new vision of their relationship is evident as he re-uses that image in Am. 63. The first quatrain concerns the “stormes and tempests”, the “trial and testing” (Maclean and Prescott 612) of the past, that tossed his “silly barke” which was led astray by his own foolish, misguided sense of direction:

> After long stormes and tempests sad assay,
> Which hardly I endured heretofore:
> in dread of death and daungerous dismay,
> with which my silly barke was tossed sore….

In the second quatrain, the poet/lover focuses on the present and the sight of

> …the happy shore
> in which I hope ere long for to arryve:

The “happy shore”, with its “store / of all that deare and daynty is alyve”, holds the promise of “eternall blisse”. The consolation of finally achieving “so sweet a rest” is so much greater than the remembered tempests, that the poet/lover is willing to forgo

"remembrance of all paines". Although similar sentiments were expressed to boost his flagging spirits in the midst of turmoil and despair in Am. 26 ("Why then should I accoumpt of little paine, / That endlesse pleasure shall unto me gaine?") and again in Am. 51 ("Onely my paines wil be the more to get her, / but having her, my joy will be the greater"), in this sonnet, the "happy shore" is in sight. Described in the opening sonnet of the sequence as an angel whose "blessed looke" has the power of life and death over the poet/lover, the final lines of the poem,

> All paines are nothing in respect of this,
> all sorrowes short that gain eternall blisse

serve not so much as a consolation, but more as an affirmation of the poet/lover's current happiness as he hails the resolution of his suffering.

"Mutual converse"

In the final twenty-one sonnets, the emphasis shifts away from the eyes of the lady to the poet/lover's sight of her. Having begun to see her pride differently, the image in his heart has gradually developed to the point, where, in this third section, there is mutual converse between the poet/lover's heart and the lady's eyes. As the true effects of the transformation are seen, everything points to a relationship with a real woman; tested by the contrast with the way the rest of the world looks and sees. Having seen the lady as she really is, and not just as a constructed image in which she merely mirrors his expectations, and having come to re-interpret her 'rejection', the poet/lover now becomes part of a truly interactive world.

Described in Am. 72, as she was in Am. 3, as "that soverayne beauty", the poet/lover finds in the sight of the lady, his greatest joy. She is his "hevens blisse" on earth, and where in Am. 3, the unproductive poet/lover was "ravisht…with fancies wonderment", the earlier stasis is transformed into productive living when his "fraile fancy [is] fed with full delight". As in Am. 1 when he sought "her alone to please", the poet/lover's delight is in pleasing the lady. Instead of seeing her as "*my* deare harts desire" (italics mine) as in Am. 5, the poet/lover's bliss now becomes his pleasing of the lady through selfless actions that bring happiness to both of them.

Oft when my spirit doth spred her bolder winges,
In mind to mount up to the purest sky:
it down is weighd with thoght of earthly things
and clogd with burden of mortality,
Where when that soverayne beauty it doth spy,
resembling heavens glory in her light:
drawne with sweet pleasures bayt, it back doth fly,
and unto heaven forgets her former flight.
There my fraile fancy fed with full delight,
doth bath in blisse and mantleth most at ease:
ne thinks of other heaven, but how it might
her harts desire with most contentment please.
Hart need not wish none other happinesse,
but here on earth to have such hevens blisse.

[Am. 72]

The image of the poet/lover's "spirit' as a bird that "mount[s] up" and is then "weighd" down in the first quatrain calls to mind a similar action by the lady in Am. 13 when "her faire face she reares up to the skie: / and to the ground her eie-lids low embaseth". Just as in Am. 13, the lady, with her "lofty countenance" had seemed to "scorne / base thing", so the poet/lover, by Am. 72, has learned to scorn base things and aspire to his own heaven. Imagery relating to eyes, light reflection and mirrors reappears in this sonnet, but whereas these images previously were seen as imprisoning and dismaying, here they are very constructive.

In Am. 73 the image of the bird is used to represent the poet/lover's heart, which, "wont on [the lady's] fayre eye / to feed his fill, flyes back unto [her] sight". Throughout the early stages of the sequence, the lady's eyes were seen as "literal sources of destruction", but in this sonnet, they "now are metaphoric nourishment" (DeNeef 73). The third quatrain marks a return to the notion of teaching as the poet/lover asks the lady to take him into her heart where he will learn to sing.

Being my selfe captyved here in care,
My hart, whom none with servile bands can tye
but the fayre tresses of your golden hayre,
breaking his prison forth to you doth fly.
Lyke as a bird that in one hand doth spy
desired food, to it doth make his flight:
even so my hart, that wont on your fayre eye
to feed his fill, flyes backe unto your sight.
Doe you him take, and in your bosome bright,
gently encage, that he may be your thrall:
perhaps he there may learne with rare delight,
to sing your name and prayses over all,
That it hereafter may you not repent,
him lodging in your bosom to have lent.

[Am. 73]

Throughout the last section of the sequence, in order to demonstrate the contrast between their previous use and the new meaning that all things have assumed since "old yeares annoy [changed] to new delight" (Am. 62), the poet/lover has re-used images from earlier sonnets. Am. 83, which, with the exception of a single word, is an exact repetition of Am. 35, gains a new meaning from its new context and is an example of such reinterpretation.

My hungry eyes, through greedy covetize
Still to behold the object of theyr paine:
with no contentment can themselves suffize,
but having pine, and having not complayne;
For lacking it, they cannot lyfe sustayne,
and *seeing* it, they gaze on it the more:
in theyr amazement lyke Narcissus vayne
whose eyes him starv'd: so plenty makes me pore.
Yet are myne eyes so filled with the store

of that fayre sight, that nothing else they brooke: 10
but loath the things which they did like before,
and can no more on them endure to looke.
All this worlds glory seemeth vayne to me,
And all theyr shewes but shadowes saving she.

(italics mine)
[Am. 83]

The one word difference between the two sonnets, (*having* in line 6 of Am. 35 and *seeing* in Am. 83), is vital. Having just complained in Am. 34 that the lady's "bright ray…with cloudes is overcast, the poet/lover's "hungry eyes" want to see more of her, "the object of their pain", in Am. 35, and in this instance, "having [the object of his desire], the speaker introjects and assimilates the beloved to himself; he does not love her so much as he loves the image or idea of himself in her" (Kennedy 270). Not being with the lady caused the poet/lover's pain and ironically, being with her augmented the pain as he could not have her.

By Am. 83, however, the poet/lover has been successful in his courtship and the focus is now on seeing more of her. His eyes are "so filled with the store / of that fayre sight", that he no longer compares the lady to other things, but devotes his praises entirely to her "rare perfection" (Am. 84). In

> seeing [the object of his desire], he confronts her difference, neither assuming her identity with himself nor projecting himself upon her: " In theyr amazement lyke Narcissus vayne / whose eyes him starv'd: so plenty makes me pore." He desires only her absolute difference and radical otherness. (Kennedy 270)

Just as in Am. 83 and Am. 84 the poet/lover was "filled" with "joyous sights" of the lady, so in Am. 85, inspired with "heavenly fury", he fills his "glad mouth with her sweet prayses". Similar "in concept and phrasing" (Dunlop 72) to Am. 3 and 5, this sonnet demonstrates just how far the poet/lover has come since being pained with "unquiet thought…bred / On th'inward bale of [his] love pined hart" (Am. 2). Whereas in Am. 5 the poet/lover defended and defined the lady's pride, in Am. 85 a change in his attitude is

registered as he counter-attacks the earlier accusations, and simultaneously reintroduces the notion of the lady as his inspiration:

> The world that cannot deeme of worthy things,
> when I doe praise her, say I doe but flatter;
> so does this Cuckow, when the Mavis sings,
> begin his witlesse note apace to clatter.
> But they that skill not of so heavenly matter,
> all that they know not, envy or admyre,
> rather then envy let them wonder at her,
> but not to deeme of her desert aspyre.

In Am. 3 the lady "kindled heavenly fyre, / in [the poet/lover's] fraile spirit", but being "with her huge brightnesse dazed", his tongue was stopped. In Am. 85, however, the lady both inspires him and fills his "glad mouth" with praises. His "parts entyre", which previously contained a deep wound, now serve as a "closet" in which "her worth is written with a golden quill", enabling him to "fall back on the inner image that he has formed in the preceding sonnets" (Dunlop 72):

> Deepe in the closet of my parts entyre,
> her worth is written with a golden quill:
> that me with heavenly fury doth inspire,
> and my glad mouth with her sweet prayses fill.
> Which when as fame in her shrill trump shal thunder,
> let the world chose to envy or to wonder.
>
> [Am. 85]

It is the lady's image, which the poet/lover holds in his mind's eye that sustains him during her absence in the last three sonnets of the sequence. Am. 88 plays on ideas from previous sonnets, particularly the repeated sonnet, Am. 83, to which it is "closely related in theme and imagery" (Edwards 74).

The first quatrain, with its reference to the poet/lover "wandering as in darknesse of the night / affrayd of every dangers least dismay", recalls Am. 34 when the unenlightened poet/lover was said to "wander now in darkness and dismay, / through hidden perils about [him] plast". However, whereas in Am. 34 the poet/lover's blindness to the lady's "bright ray" was caused by his own inner confusion and emotional turmoil, in Am. 88, his sight is responding to something 'out there'. An objective relationship is assumed and the situation arises from the lady's absence. The reference to "light" in the first line reiterates the poet/lover's earlier assertion that the lady transforms his world, bringing him the comfort and security that he seeks. Without her, even the "least dismay" causes alarm:

> Since I have lackt the comfort of that light,
> The which was wont to lead my thoughts astray:
> I wander as in darknesse of the night,
> affrayd of every dangers least dismay.

The association of light with comfort and darkness with despair gives way in the second quatrain to a comparison of what the poet/lover sees, even on the "clearest day", with what others see. The line, "when others gaze upon theyr shadowes vayne", is a paraphrase of the poet/lover's observations in the closing lines of Am. 83 that "All this worlds glory seemeth vayne to me, / and all theyr shewes but shadowes saving she". Unlike the shadows, which "are 'vayne' because [they are] made by mere physical light, the lady's light is transcendently real: with sparkles of it still in his eyes, [enabling] the lover [to] see her divine form when he looks in his soul, feeding his heart" (Maclean and Prescott 622). While others gaze upon their "shadowes vayne", the poet/lover looks within himself where he is rewarded by "th'onely image of that heavenly ray":

> Ne ought I see, though in the clearest day,
> when others gaze upon theyr shadowes vayne:
> but th'onely image of that heavenly ray,
> whereof some glance doth in mine eie remayne.

Ocular and food imagery reappear in the third quatrain. In the very first sonnet of the sequence, the poet/lover referred to the lady as his "soules long lacked foode". In the next poem, he sought to "sustayne [him] selfe with food". Now, in the penultimate sonnet, the poet/lover's "love-affamisht hart" is fed by the very thought of the lady. In Am. 2 his "inner part" contained "unquiet thoughts"; by Am. 85 this came to be the "closet" of his "parts entyre" and in Am. 88, the reformed poet/lover's parts become "purest parts". The "glorious ymage" of Am. 22 is transformed in this sonnet to the "Idea plaine", which, while not preferable to the lady's presence, does to some extent bring comfort to the poet/lover:

> Of which beholding th' Idæa playne,
> through contemplation of my purest part:
> with light thereof I doe my selfe sustayne,
> and thereon feed my love-affamisht hart.

In the couplet, the inadequacy of the "Idæa playne" to satisfy his needs fully is made explicit. Although his mind is filled with the brilliance of the image of the lady, his body is still starving and his eyes are blinded, either by the "huge brightnesse" of the lady's image, or by tears of sorrow, leaving the poet/lover in darkness as he was at the beginning of the poem.

> But with such brightnesse whylest I fill my mind,
> I starve my body and mine eyes doe blynd.
>
> [Am. 88]

While the poet/lover's "contemplation of [his] purest part has provided some sustenance and relief, it has also increased his awareness of the deprivation he experiences without the lady's presence. During the course of the sequence, "he has learned pure love of the lady both as physical being and as spiritual 'idaea'. The image of the lady has been enriched with symbolic values, but it is still the lady that he loves, and with whom he longs to be reunited in flesh and blood and spirit" (Dunlop 74).

In the final sonnet he declares,

> Ne joy of ought that under heaven doth hove
> can comfort me, but her owne joyous sight:
> whose sweet aspect both God and man can move,
> in her unspotted pleasauns to delight.

The reference to heaven suggests, as it has throughout the sequence, the lady's celestial qualities, expressed primarily in terms of light. In the opening sonnet the poet/lover praised the "starry light" of "that Angels blessed looke, / …my heavens blis". The word "blis" is mentioned for the final time in the *Amoretti*'s very last word, as the poet/lover, "wandring here and there", awaits the promised return of the lady/light:

> Dark is my day, whyles her fayre light I mis,
> and dead my life that wants such lively blis.
> [Am. 89]

Although the sequence ends with separation and darkness, it is not final. The singing, initiated in Am. 1 where "leaves, lines, and rymes" were sent to "seeke her to please alone", and the "wishfull vow[s]" sung by the Culver/poet/lover in Am. 89 will continue in the *Epithalamion*, when the poet/lover and his lady are finally united. The need to see her now is a simple acknowledgement of what she is to him, rather than (as before) a dependence on or an addiction to a fabricated fantasy.