

## 摘要

埃德蒙·斯宾塞是文艺复兴时期英国诗坛的伟大先驱之一，享有“诗人之诗人”的美誉。本文以双性同体的神话传说和基督教原型以及传统的西方宇宙论为依据，从人性、神性及宇宙的和谐三个层次研究斯宾塞敏锐独特的婚姻观，突出婚姻一爱的归宿这一主题。

第一章以双性同体的古典神话为基础探讨婚姻是人性的完美体现。人们对爱情的渴望反映了他们对外在及心灵美的追求，以及找回自身源头形成男女和谐整体的愿望。婚姻将理想与现实、肉体与精神联系起来。对婚姻创造的人性美的强调以及及时享乐的思想体现了斯宾塞重要的人文主义思想。

第二章以基督教传统为背景论述了婚姻体现了双性同体的完美神性。一方面，世间之美是天国之美的反映，世俗之爱是神圣之爱的摹本。婚姻犹如一条金链将两者联系起来，实现从世俗到神圣，从变化到永恒，从人性到神性的升华。另一方面，婚姻体现了神的眷顾，是上帝的恩赐。

第三章探究婚姻是维系大宇宙和小宇宙和谐必不可少的因子，主要体现在以下几个方面：宇宙对立统一的本质，人与神的和谐关系，宇宙生存之链的完整及等级，社会小宇宙的延续与和谐。

**关键词：**斯宾塞 婚姻 人性 神性 宇宙和谐

## **Abstract**

Edmund Spenser is one of the great forerunners of the poetic altar of the English Renaissance and is hailed as “the poets’ poet”. This thesis synchronizes the classical mythology of androgyny with the Christian prototype and the traditional western cosmology to study Spenser’s keen and unique rendering of marriage from three levels of humanity, divinity and the harmony of cosmos, highlighting the theme of marriage as the destination of love.

The first chapter explores marriage as the access to the perfection of humanity based on the classical mythology of androgyny. Man’s thirst for love reflects their quest for beauty physically and virtuously and the desire to find their origin and form the harmonious wholeness of male and female. Marriage links the ideal and the reality, the flesh and spirit. Spenser’s humanist concept is clearly displayed by his stress on the perfect humanity created by marriage and his thought to seize time to enjoy life.

The second chapter deals with Spenser’s view of marriage as the embodiment of the perfect divinity of androgyny with the background of the Christian tradition. On the one hand, earthly beauty is the reflection of heavenly beauty and secular love is the copy of the sacred love. Marriage serves as a golden chain linking them together, achieving the ascent from the worldly to divine, from mutability to eternity and from humanity to divinity. On the other hand, marriage represents the divine providence and receiving God’s blessing.

The third chapter discusses marriage as an indispensable factor for the concord of the macrocosm as well as the microcosm, which is mainly analyzed from the following aspects: the discordant concord essence of the universe, the harmonious relationship between God and man, the wholeness and hierarchy of the great chain of being of the universe, the continuation and the harmony of the social microcosm.

**Key words:** Spenser marriage humanity divinity cosmic harmony

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本人所提交的学位论文《爱的归宿—埃德蒙·斯宾塞的婚姻观 The Destination of Love—A Study of Edmund Spenser' s View of Marriage》，是在导师的指导下，独立进行研究工作所取得的原创性成果。除文中已经注明引用的内容外，本论文不包含任何其他个人或集体已经发表或撰写过的研究成果。对本文的研究做出重要贡献的个人和集体，均已在文中标明。

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学生赵丽红所提交的学位论文《爱的归宿—埃德蒙·斯宾塞的婚姻观 The Destination of Love—A Study of Edmund Spenser' s View of Marriage》，是在本人的指导下，由其独立进行研究工作所取得的原创性成果。除文中已经注明引用的内容外，该论文不包含任何其他个人或集体已经发表或撰写过的研究成果。

指导教师（签名）：

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## Introduction

Edmund Spenser is regarded as the greatest nondramatic poet of the English Renaissance. He is still one of the four founding fathers of modern English literature, along with Chaucer, Shakespeare and Milton. Spenser inherited and developed the tradition of the epic, lyric and allegorical poetry. His poetry is finely framed in the structure, musical in the meter and the pictorial in the effect. Spenser wrote in a deliberate archaic style, using those ancient solemn words and knitting them shortly and intricately, so Ben Jonson claimed that Spenser, in affecting the ancients, “writ no language.”<sup>1</sup> More importantly, he created new poetic forms—“Spenserian Stanza”, an ingenious and effective nine-line concoction of eight lines of iambic pentameter followed by an iambic hexameter, or alexandrine ( abab bcbc c ). His invention of Spenserian Stanza strengthens his position as a great master of English poetry and engenders great influence on a number of later poets, including such famous Romantics as Shelley, Byron, and Keats. He completely deserves the reputation of “the poets’ poet”.

However, the biggest things do not work quickly.<sup>2</sup> It is after centuries that Spenser’s position becomes apparent. There is a history of great literature which has a slower rhythm than that of literature in general, and which goes on in a higher region.<sup>3</sup> Spenser’s influence is more significant in the age of John Milton and the Romantics than in the Elizabethan period. Milton regarded Spenser as “a better teacher than Scotus or Aquinas” and invoked him as a “sage and serious poet.”<sup>4</sup> Wordsworth says in the 1815 preface to *Lyrical Ballads* that Spenser’s genius was “to give the universality and permanence of abstractions to his human beings, by means of attributes and emblems that belong to the highest moral truths and the purest sensations”<sup>5</sup> William Hazlitt addresses Spenser: “Of all the poets, he is the most poetical...Spenser’s poetry is all fairy-land... we wander in another world, among ideal beings. The poet takes and lays us in the lap of a lovelier nature, by the sound of softer streams, among greener hills and fairer valleys, He paints nature, not as we find it, but as we expected to find it...He waves his wand of enchantment –and at once

embodies airy beings, and throws a delicious veil over all actual objects.<sup>6</sup>

In the field of twentieth-century Spenser criticism Paul Alpers described it as “moribund” until C.S.Lewis published *The Allegory of Love* in 1936, in which C.S.Lewis asserted Spenser’s work “like a growing thing, a tree;...To read him is to grow in mental health”.<sup>7</sup> It was not until the 1960 that Spenser became “a normal subject of critical and scholarly investigation”<sup>8</sup> This development in Spenser criticism laid the foundation for the further studies. Berger edited an important collection of essays and characterized in the introduction the various critical methods adopted in the Spenser criticism of the 1960s as “the rhetorical, the allegorical, the numerological, the iconographic, and the archetypal (or mythological)”. The 1970s’ studies gave an overview of *The Faerie Queene*, especially in terms of allegory, such as A. Bartlett Giamatti’s *Play of Double Senses: Spenser’s “Faerie Queene”* (1975), and James Nohrnberg’s *The Analogy of “The Faerie Queene”*(1976). With the introduction of some innovative critical approaches such as new historicist and feminist theories, as well as psychoanalytic or other interdisciplinary approaches, the 1980s could be referred as the great transformation of Spenser studies. These criticisms on Spenser from various viewpoints deepen and enrich the understanding of the poet’s poet, and a great number of relevant studies are being conducted.

This thesis deals with the theme of love and marriage, so it is necessary to have a better review on the studies in this aspect. Love, as a universal literary theme, is a strong stimulus and gets most fully expression in Spenser’s works whether in his minor poems or his masterpiece. His first major work *The Shepheardes Calendar* met an immediate success. Sidney in his *Defence of Poesy* calls it one of the few English works with “poetical sinews”.<sup>9</sup> It is the first book of English eclogues modelled on Virgil’s writing style. Therefore, Spenser is regularly hailed as the English Homer or Virgil.<sup>10</sup> According to R.M. Cummings, the success of this pastoral poem leads to his popularity as a love poet, which is due to the Elizabethan notion that pastoral poetry is primarily erotic.<sup>11</sup> E.K. commends Spenser in his *Dedicatory Epistle to The Shepheardes Calender* (1957), “ No less I think deserveth his wittiness in devising, his pithiness in uttering, his complaints of love so lovely, his discourses of pleasure so

pleasantly, his pastoral rudeness, his moral wiseness, his due observing of decorum everywhere- in personages, in seasons, in matter, in speech and generally in all seemly simplicity of handling his matter and framing his words.”<sup>12</sup>

Spenser as a love poet goes so far that he is addressed as “the prince of poets in his time” and his masterpiece *The Faerie Queene* is considered a great romantic epic, in which he portrays a world of love and displays his meditation and peculiar understanding of love. C.S.Lewis, the most important critic of Spenser in the first half of the twentieth century, gives an elaborate analysis of the allegory of love in *The Faerie Queene*. He makes explicit the allegorical core in each of the books through which he sheds light upon Spenser’s treatment of courtly love. Lewis lays emphasis on the third and the fourth book, “for in them Spenser becomes our collaborator and tells the final stages of the history of courtly love”.<sup>13</sup> The subjects of the two books are respectively Chastity and Friendship. Lewis treats them as a single book on the subject of love. On the authority of Lewis, Chastity, in the person of Britomart, turns out to mean not virginity but virtuous love, and friends are found to be merely “another sort of lovers”.<sup>14</sup> While Malecasta and Busirane are the embodiment of the courtly love or the false love, which is the foe of Chastity. The story tells the struggle between the married love and courtly love. Therefore, Britomart’s helping Redcrosse out of the entanglement in Malecasta’s Castle Joyeous and her later delivery of Amoret from her imprisonment in the House of Busirane signify the triumph of matrimonial love over the courtly sentimental.

W.L.Renwick, in his analysis of Spenser’s philosophy,<sup>15</sup> points out that Spenser can inherit all available authorities, all that ancients believed to be true, which makes easier the interfusion of one with another. For Spenser, all of the philosophies are intimately mingled together, but Bible is his principal source and the foundation of his faith. According to W.L.Renwick, the books of Chastity and Friendship, which really deal with Love, are drawn from Lucretius as well as from the Nicomachean Ethics.<sup>16</sup> Plato has great impact on Spenser, but he is not the unique source of principle, nor the final authority. He enforces the spiritual activity of love, but the complementary truth that love is a primary function of the animate universe, essential to its continuance, is

set forth with equal force by Lucretius, and these two principles are reconciled for Spenser in the final authority, the teaching of the Church of England, defined in the Marriage Service of the prayer Book.<sup>17</sup> Heavenly love and Earthly love are not eternal antagonists, but the mutual complements. The representative of Chastity is neither nun nor sage, but a redoubtable knight who is also a woman in love, destined to the honorable estate of matrimony and the procreation of a noble line; for chastity is nothing other than truth and honor in the question of sex, sanctified by the spirit of God, Who is Love.<sup>18</sup>

Benjamin G. Lockerd adopts psychoanalytic approach to interpret Spenser's love theme in *The Faerie Queene*, which reflects the significant role played by human identity in the progress of maturation. In Book I, the complement between Redcrosse and Una ensures their victory over the devils and their union in sacred marriage. Their separation and the final reunion signify the process of entire maturation. Book II deals with Guyon's defeat of Acrasia and the destruction of the sensuous Bower of Bliss, showing Guyon's separation of ego-consciousness from the maternal unconscious. Book III centers on the confused desire of adolescence, which is properly directed to a mature integration of romance and friendship, ending in the symbolic marriages in Book IV. In Book V, love is laid on a broader social level of the institution of marriage, stressing the parenthood in Book VI.<sup>19</sup>

As for Spenser's later minor poems, *Amoretti* has more to say about love, for *Amoretti* itself means "little loves"<sup>20</sup> or "little love poems"<sup>21</sup>, and it can be translated as: "intimate little tokens of love made out of ancient material deriving, primarily, from Italy."<sup>22</sup> This love sequence lyric, a record of the poet's courtship to his second wife Elizabeth Boyle, ended up with an *Epithalamion* to celebrate his second marriage. The critical world mainly focuses on its relationship and difference with other Elizabethan sonnet sequences, or other Petrarchan sonnets. *Amoretti* belongs to the Elizabethan sonnets bearing Petrarchan influence which is established and borrowed from Italian poet Petrarch. William J. Kennedy points out that Petrarch's Rime and other Petrarchan poetry provide Spenser with models for *Amoretti*.<sup>23</sup> While at the same time, critics have realized that *Amoretti* betrays Petrarchan sonnets. F.T.



Prince claims that Spenser, while taking much from Italy, contrives to adapt and exploit his borrowing in such a way as to make them appear a new and fertile beginning rather than an end in themselves.<sup>24</sup> William J. Kennedy points out the most striking features of *Amoretti* compared with traditional sonnets: "Whereas Spenser's speaker can look forward to a joyous reunion with the beloved at his journey's end, Petrarch's has no such consolation."<sup>25</sup> Quoting Sinfield's words, Gary Waller thinks that *Amoretti* is an "unprecedented puritan humanist adaptation of the sonnet sequence to a relationship which ends in marriage".<sup>26</sup>

Therefore, seen from the previous studies, Spenser's treatment of love is both traditional and innovative. Unlike his predecessors or contemporaries, what he endeavors to build up is the ideal love, which is directed towards marriage. His praise of marriage is bold act or even a revolution in his days. Therefore, this thesis focuses on Spenser's viewpoint of marriage. However, different from the other Spenser criticism, in this thesis classic and Christian tradition together with the Ptolemaic system of astronomy are combined to interpret the theme of marriage as the destination of love, stressing the function of matrimonial love to achieve the androgynous perfection of humanity and its uplift to the perfect divinity, creating the harmony of the cosmos.

The thesis is divided into three chapters, followed by a conclusion.

The first chapter explores how Spenser interprets marriage as the access to the androgynous perfection of humanity. According to the classical mythology, original human being was androgynous with so powerful and perfect nature that Zeus felt threatened and cut them in half. The result was that each thereafter sought to unite with the missing half through love. The androgynous craving for love kindles Spenser's literary imagination in the seeking for perfect humanity. The reintegration of male and female in marriage achieves the complete identity and the complement of two sexes physically and virtuously, representing their quest for beauty and the thirst for the union of flesh and spirit. Spenser's humanist concept is clearly displayed by his stress on the perfect humanity created by marriage and his thought to seize time to enjoy the eternal bliss of life.

The second chapter deals with Spenser's view of marriage as the access to the perfect divinity of androgyny. In Christian tradition, God is prototype of the androgynous unity, representing the supreme perfection. Human beings were created androgyny by God in the origin, then divided into two sexes. Thus, they endeavor to regain their original wholeness and a sense of oneness with God. Marriage serves as a golden chain linking secular love and divine love, achieving the ascent from the worldly to divine, from mutability to eternity and from humanity to divinity. Man's pilgrimage towards the married love is the endeavor to imitate the divine love and pursue the perfection of divinity, representing the Providence of God and receiving God's blessing.

The third chapter discusses Spenser's rendering of marriage as a factor access to the harmony of universe. On the part of macrocosm, the harmony created by marriage can be embodied in three aspects. First, it represents the cosmic nature of the unity of the opposites. In the second place, it lies in the harmonious relationship between human beings and God. More importantly, marriage can create the eternity by begetting children, maintaining the life and virtue in the posterity, ensuring the completeness and hierarchy of the great chain of being, making the whole universe full of pleasant music. In addition, human society is regarded as the social microcosm—the copy of the macrocosm. Marriage is also an important factor to create the harmony of the social microcosm in different aspects.

The conclusion, first, gives a summary on Spenser's understanding and treatment of marriage at the three levels —humanity, divinity and cosmos. Second, it sets a high value on Spenser's concept of marriage, pointing out its epoch-making significance and the profound influence on later poets.

## Chapter One

### Marriage— Access to Androgynous Perfection of Humanity

#### A. The mythology of androgyny

Either in the classical tradition or in the Christian tradition, love is an eternal subject in all ages. For human beings, the nature of love is a search for something, which can help man gain virtue and blessedness.

According to the ancient Greek mythology cited by Aristophanes in Plato's *Symposium*, original human nature was not like the present, but different. The sexes were not two, as they are now, but originally three in number; there was man, woman and a union of the two. The "shape of each human being was completely round, with back and sides in a circle; they had four hands each, as many legs as hands, and two faces, exactly alike, on a rounded neck" and "one head with four ears." (*Symposium* 189E) The circle tends to be regarded as the most beautiful among all the geometric figures, which symbolizes order, eternity, perfection and harmony. Therefore, these original round-shaped people were the perfect state of humanity. They were so wise and powerful, threatening the authority of Gods. Thus Zeus came up with the solution: "Methinks I have a plan which will enfeeble their strength and so extinguish their turbulence; men shall continue to exist, but I will cut them in two and then they will be diminished in strength and increased in numbers; this will have the advantage of making them more profitable to us." <sup>1</sup>

After Zeus split the androgynous being into two, love was born as the attempt urging the male and female halves to become one again "each desiring his other half, came together, and throwing their arms about one another, entwined in mutual embraces, longing to grow into one."<sup>2</sup> As a matter of fact, the androgynous pattern implies a return to the origin, whose core lies in the harmonious union of opposite sexes in marriage, just as Simon Goulart's account of androgyny: "This Greek word, composed of two divers names, signifieth a Man-woman...Man and woman lawfully

joined in marriage, are two in one flesh: and an amorous, amiable and venerable Androgine, that is to say, a subject composed of Man and Wife, who are but one body, one flesh and one blood.”<sup>3</sup> The myth of androgyny serves as a metaphor of love as a search for something in the universe or in the human world. Plato regards the essence of love as the desire for the beautiful, the good and the true. Spenser draws inspiration from the Platonic love tradition plus his own intuition and meditation of the subject, building up his ideal of love, the chaste, reciprocal, rationalized married love, which can achieve the perfection of humanity.

### **B. The perfect combination of masculine and feminine humanity**

The androgynous union of humanity Spenser craves for is the melting of both sexes in mind and body, soul and flesh, or sense and sensibility through the bridge of marriage.

Love will first be inspired by the beauty:

To all things faire, that kindleth lively fyre,  
Light of thy lampe –which shyning in the face,  
Thence to the soul darts amorous desire,  
And robs the hearts of those which it admyre.

( *An Hymne in Honour of Beautie*, 58-61)

In *An Hymne in Honour of Beautie* dedicated to the praise of Venus, Spenser claims that beauty derives from heavenly race, serving as pattern to “this world’s great workmaister”.<sup>4</sup> It is an eternal spiritual light shinning outwardly in the comely corpse. Therefore, the beauty of body cannot be ignored, which is like magnet attracting numerous lovers to quest his or her other half to achieve their androgynous beauty. This idea also accounts for the poet’s bold descriptions of the physical splendor of his fiancée in *Amoretti* and of his bride in *Epithalamion*. In Sonnet LXIII, his beloved is described as a garden of sweet flowers:

Her lips did smell lyke vnto Gillyflowers,  
her ruddy cheekes, lyke vnto Roses red:  
her snowy browes lyke budded Bellamoures  
her louely eyes lyke Pincks but newly spred,  
Her goodly bosome lyke a Strawberry bed,  
her neck lyke to a bounch of Cullambynes:  
her brest lyke lillyes, ere theyr leaues be shed,  
her nipples lyke yong blossomd lessemynes,

( Sonnet LXIII, 5-12)

In Sonnet XV, Spenser declares all the treasures in the world shine in her beautiful body:

if Saphyres, loe her eies be Saphyres plaine,  
if Rubies, loe hir lips be Rubies found;  
If Pearles, hir teeth be pearles both pure and round;  
if Yuorie, her forehead yuory weene;  
if Gold, her locks are finest gold on ground;  
if siluer, her faire hands are siluer sheene,

( Sonnet XV, 7-12)

The most charming of her body is her eyes, whose beauty goes beyond comparison. Anything glitters in the world is destined to be overshadowed by them. Her eyes even shine at night, in which the sun cannot match. They never wane like the moon, nor do they go out like the fire. They are much purer than stars and tenderer than Diamonds. Crystal may feel unworthy for nothing in the world is able to sever her eyes. Faced with the eternal glory, lightning seems so transient and glass looks so base.

His bride in the wedding ceremony is described as a maiden Queen full of splendor:

Her long loose yellow locks lyke golden wyre,  
Sprinckled with perle, and perling flowres a tweene,  
Doe lyke a golden mantle her attyre,  
And being crowned with a girland greene,  
Seeme lyke some mayden Queene,

(Epithalamion, 155-159)

Beauty is the cause of love, and love inevitably arouses desire. Thus, the sincere love to the charming beauty of the lady stirs up the strong desire in the heart to achieve the combination of the bodies and return to the original beauty. A.J.Smith ever makes such a comment on love-making: “ This mutual enjoyment of physical coupling consummates in pleasure as in offspring the perpetual union of lovers; and it also figures the harmonious fulfillment of our whole nature, sense profiting by its interplay with mind instead of seeking its own blind way of self-indulgence.”<sup>5</sup>

Spenser never hesitates to vivify the sexual passion in love. In his eyes, the beauty of the flesh is acknowledged and seen as a potentially positive quality. Love as human dealings insists that flesh and sex be indispensable as long as they are based on the ration and disciplined and restrained within the bounds of marriage. Such love differs from the absolute lust lacking in rational elements, which is merely a physiological impulse like the blind natural force to promote the growth of plants or the falling of the grits.<sup>6</sup> It is likely to deteriorate from the excess erotic to incontinence and even bestiality, which he assumes to be the result of courtly love's abuse. C.S. Lewis describes courtly love in *The Allegory of Love* in terms of four features: Humility, Courtesy, Adultery and the Religion of love. As regards adultery, Lewis attributes it to the actual practice of feudal society, where marriage had nothing to do with love. “All matches were matches of interest, and, worse still, of an interest that was continually changing. Any idealization of sexual love, in a society where marriage is purely utilitarian, must begin by being an idealization of adultery.”<sup>7</sup> In addition, passionate love, according to medieval view, was wicked, and did not cease to be wicked if the object of it were your wife.<sup>8</sup> It is clear that courtly love is too

casual in loving-making and digresses marriage, only to meet the absolute lust. Spenser's understanding is quite different from the courtly love in this respect. In *The Faerie Queene* Book III, he distinguishes between chaste love and lust: "filthy lust" inflames with base affections in brutish minds, while "sweet fit" of love derives from true beauty which springs all noble deeds and never dying fame. (The Faerie Queene, III, iii, 1)

His renderings of sex and physical pleasure of love can be mirrored clearly in his poetry. For example, he shows his own carnal desire on the wedding night in *Epithalamion* and in *Prothalamion* as the benediction for the spousal of two noble girls:

Now welcome night, thou night so long expected,  
That long daies labour doest at last defray,  
And all my cares, which cruell love collected,  
Hast sumd in one, and cancelled for aye:  
Spread thy broad wing over my love and me,  
That no man may us see,

(*Epithalamion*, 315-320)

And let your bed with pleasures chaste abound,  
That fruitfull issue may to you afford,

(*Prothalamion*, 103-104)

Apparently, "pleasure" here refers to sexual acts, but modified by "chaste" highlighting the purity and the ration of the sexuality. Such chaste pleasure is nobler and directs towards marriage, deserving to pursue.

Similarly, such passion is expressed boldly in *Amoretti*:

And twixt her paps like early fruit in May,  
whose haruest seemd to hasten now apace:  
they loosely did theyr wanton winges display,

and there to rest themselves did boldly place.

Sweet thoughts I envy your so happy rest,

which oft I wisht, yet neuer was so blest.

(Sonnet LXXVI, 9-14)

The lady's breasts are depicted as the ripe fruits—sweet, sexual and pleasant, waiting to be enjoyed. However, such bliss is experienced by the lover's "thoughts" rather than by any physical part. The lover's "sweet thoughts" loosely outspread their "wanton winges" to rest themselves between the two "paps", implying reason's domination. Physical pleasure is not fulfilled by force, but through the faithful love and courtship. Eventually, the sweetness will be tasted in the marriage.

The physical beauty and love, as the human dealings, are never left behind in Spenser's works, while love as the spiritual aspiration is highly eulogized. The beauty of body is the outward reflection of the virtue of the mind, which is the celestial light within the soul. The soul in its passage to earth takes light from the heaven, imparting this to the body which it assumes. Therefore, there is no disparity between the beauty of body and the virtue of mind.

Whether in Plato or in Aristotle, virtue as the leading principle of love is inseparable from love. Spenser spares no efforts to accentuate love as a search for virtue: "For love does alwayes bring forth bounteous deeds, / And in each gentle hart desire of honour breeds." (*The Faerie Queene*, III, I, 49); and "in braue sprite it kindles goodly fire, / That to all high desert and honor doth aspire" (*The Faerie Queene*, III, v, 1). Here "Bounteous" means "full of good" and "virtuous", and "desert" is synonymous with virtue. Spenser employs them to praise virtue as the essence of love. In his poetry, the speaker is always keen to catch and appreciate flesh beauty of the beloved, and takes further steps to explore the virtue from it. The speaker yearns for such virtue, struggling to unite with it, accomplishing the androgynous melting of the minds.

This idea is continually displayed in *Amoretti*. In Sonnet LXXXI, the speaker is



so intoxicated with the charming appearance of his lover. He uses so many colorful words to praise the lady's beauty: golden hair waving with wind; the rose in her red cheek; the eyes sparked by the fire of love; her breast like a rich laden boat with precious merchandize; her smile driving away the cloud of pride. However, when the speaker penetrates through the charm of the body, a gate appears with the decorations of shining pearls and rubies. Making further exploration, he finds what is the fairest—the heart of the lady, which is the work of astonishment. Compared with it, the rest is only works of natural wonder. Such love is stimulated by the beauty of the lady and rooted in her virtues, "For all that faire is, is by nature good;" ( *An Hymne in Honour of Beautie*, 139) It is the infusion of highest beauty and the noble heart. The speaker's love of the lady shows his search for androgynous consummation of humanity.

The speaker's pursuit of beauty and virtue is more vividly and directly portrayed in Sonnet LXXIX. The gentle wit and the virtuous mind of the lady outweigh the colors fair or goodly complexions, because the beauty of soul is eternal unlike the flesh's corruption with the time passing.

but the trew fayre, that is the gentle wit,  
and vertuous mind is much more prayd of me.  
For all the rest, how euer fayre it be,  
shall turne to nought and loose that glorious hew:  
but onely that is permanent and free  
from frayle corruption, that doth flesh ensew.

( Sonnet LXXIX, 3-8)

The hymn to the lady's virtue is played splendidly in *Epithalamion*. Her inward beauty is garnished with heavenly gifts of high degree. There dwell sweet love and unswerving chastity, unspotted faith and comely womanhood, regard of honor and care of modesty. Her virtue reins the law like the Queen in royal throne; hence, any base affections have to obey her will and no uncomely thought may approach to tempt her mind. The speaker thirsts for the merging of soul as well as the combination of

body with his lover, which will be fulfilled in the sacred marriage with the beautiful song. Marriage serves as a bridge to link them together and to make them return to the originally perfect existence of human being.

The androgynous beauty of humanity also finds the noble expression in the unity of the heroes and the heroines in *The Faerie Queene*. The matrimonial union of Britomart and Artegall is a good case. Britomart, the only woman knight in the epic, is a maid of chaste love as beautiful as Venus, but disguised as an armed knight. When she removes her helmet and turns out to be a lady at the castle of Malbecco, all the other knights are astonished at her beauty:

Which whenas they beheld, they smitten were  
With great amazement of so wondrous sight,  
And each on other, and they all on her  
Stood gazing, as if suddein great affright  
Had them surprised.

(*The Faerie Queene*, III, ix, 23)

Apart from her beauty, Britomart is also chaste and tender. She despises the Lady of Delight, hostess of the Castle Joyous, who is too casual to love; She, as the symbol of chastity, makes the giant Ollyphant (a type of lust) frightened. Her tenderness is expressed in her rescuing Amoret from the House of Busirane and her warm care for Amoret. She is sincere and faithful to love. When she encounters Artegall she has long loved and searched for, she does not accept him until she ensures that Artegall's love to her is from his deep heart. Once accepting his courting, she keeps missing him day and night when he is away to perform the task assigned by Fairy Queen. Obviously, she embodies the womanly beauty in both body and mind.

When Britomart looks into Venus's mirror and finds the handsome face of her destined husband Artegall, she immediately falls in love with the image:

Eftsoones there was presented to her eye

A comely knight, all armed in complet wize,  
Through whose bright ventayle lifted up on hye  
His manly face.....  
.....

Lookt foorth, as Phoebus face out of the east,  
Betwixt two shadie mountains doth arize;

(The Faerie Queene, III, ii, 24)

The mirror, as Lesser says, “in which the portrait one gets back is not the self one expects but the lost self, for which one searches.”<sup>9</sup> Merlin’s prophecy inspires Britomart to seek Artegall. She disguises herself as an armed knight, setting out her journey. When a person whether male or female, sets out to search his/her beloved, it is undoubtedly the search for androgynous perfection. When she meets Redcrosse, she inquires of him about Artegall. Redcrosse describes him as the incarnation of the justice, a noble knight, wandering from place to place and performing virtuous deeds protecting the weak from “tyranny”, which wins him “fame” and raises his “honour” to “heavens hight”:

But restlesse walketh all the world around,  
Ay doing things, that to his fame redound,  
Defending Ladies cause, and Orphans right,  
Where so he heares, that any doth confound  
Them comfortlesse, through tyranny or might;  
So is his sovaine honour raised to heavens hight.

(The Faerie Queene, III, ii, 14)

Redcrosse’s comment makes Britomart pleased with Artegall’s virtue, which is just she is searching for. Their final betrothal not only symbolizes of the mingling of the physical beauty of masculine and the feminine but also the union of justice and chastity, which is the embodiment of perfect humanity in androgyny. Britomart’s

quest for Artegall is just the process of seeking for the lost half of humanity which is what she is not and what she is longing for, like Aristophanes' divided human being,—the absolute beauty and absolute fulfillment.

The dream of the androgynous union of humanity attracts and encourages every stubborn lover to go onto the road. To Spenser's heroes or heroines, such "sweet" pilgrimage is worth the effort. No matter what dangers or barriers he/she may encounter, no matter what failure or pain he/she has to experience, no matter what temptation he/she will face, the seeker has to stick to his goal with desperate determination. Moreover each lover's seeking the blissful union of androgynous happiness is the process of self-production. In *The Faerie Queene*, Redcrosse suffers a lot at the beginning due to his swelling pride and is led by Duessa into the House of Pride and afterwards hurled into the giant Orgoglio's dungeon. Later, he falls into the House of Despair and then encounters the dreadful Dragon. However, with Una's help, he finally obtains the virtue of holiness, overcomes all trouble, saves Una's parents and culminates in the sacred marriage to Una. The separation and gradual reuniting of Redcrosse and Una lead to a spiritual fulfillment in the House of Holiness, and it is also a process of the maturation of human identity. It is true of Britomart. When she first sees the image of Artegall, she suffers from lovesickness. She neither sleeps nor eats well. Experiencing a number of adventures and fierce fights, she unites with Artegall. Her search for Artegall is in effect a process of self-perfection, in which she masters the knowledge of virtue and the good, displaying honor, dignity, and self-respect by accomplishing a series of virtuous deeds. In *Amoretti*, Spenser's portrait of the faithful courtship to his beloved is most striking and moving. The process of court takes one year, which can be called the temper of mind. It is a tortuous road full of bitterness and sweetness as well. Love is disease which makes him painful, (Sonnet L) and a storm that he must sustain, (Sonnet XLVI) a strong fortress that needs his "greater might" to fight against. (Sonnet XIII) His beautiful beloved's pride and her ice-like heart torture him again and again, though such pride is worth high praise. He feels depressed and worried at times, but he is never discouraged. His persistent pursuit of the lady also ennoble his heart, just as what he

said in Sonnet VIII:

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

( Sonnet VIII, 9-12)

Ultimately, the proud lady is moved by his sincerity. They fall in love with each other, achieving the wholeness within the psyche. Through sacred marriage they fulfill humanistic dream of perfection, and restore humanity to the original bliss of union before it is split into two separate halves.

Marriage is the lovers “happy shore”, “joyous safety” and “eternal bliss”(Sonnet LXIII), as well as a symbol for concord. In the realm of marriage, lovers enjoy the pleasure of the earthly paradise and acquire the satisfaction of the bliss union of the androgynous happiness. Therefore, Spenser earnestly urges the lovers to seize time to gather the rose of love while it is in the prime, for it will never flourish after decay. Such idea finds nobler expression in *Amoretti* in which the speaker appeals to fresh spring, the herald of loves, to awake his beloved who is still carelessly lying in her winter bower and to make her ready to wait on love:

where euery one, that misseth then her make,  
shall be by him amearst with penance dew.  
Make hast therefore sweet loue, whilst it is prime,  
for none can call againe the passed time.

( Sonnet LXX, 11-14)

Spenser stimulates people to cherish the married love and enjoy its pleasure, ultimately to achieve the combination of the perfect humanity. His deep renderings of

human love and humanity reflect his humanistic ideal. B. E. C. Davis, a famous Spenser critic, believes that: "No other English poet was more preoccupied with the humanistic ideal than Spenser did."<sup>10</sup>

Spenser's rich humanist heritage stimulates him tossing the praises of matrimonial love as the androgynous perfection of humanity, while his vehement Protestantism makes him uplift the secular love to a higher level—divine love.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Marriage—Access to the Perfection of Divine Love**

#### **A. The Christian prototype of androgyny**

The androgyny is indeed the perfect divinity in Christianity. According to the bible, God created man in his own image out of love and breathed into his nostril the breath of life. Then the man became a living creature. God named him Adam and put him in the Garden of Eden. God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.”<sup>1</sup>(Gen.2:18) Then God put the man into a trance, and while he slept, he took one of his ribs and closed the flesh over the place. God then build up the rib, which he had taken out of the man, into a woman. He brought her to the man, and the man said: “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken.”<sup>2</sup>(Gen.2:18) Here woman means “from man”. Apparently, the Christian version of the creation of human beings suggests that God has both sexes and so in his image created an androgyny which was later divided into two sexes, male and female. To regain the original wholeness, “Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh”<sup>3</sup>(Gen.2:24), which is the Christian ideal of marriage.

As it can be seen God is the prototypical androgyny, and human beings were also created as androgyny at the beginning. The male-female unity is the essential characteristic of the first man, who is the image and likeness of God. Then they were divided into two sexes and thus endeavored to regain their original androgyny through the holy marriage. Just as Simon Goulart's description: “One bloud, God having made of Adam onely, two body, in tying them together by the knot of holy marriage.”<sup>4</sup> Hence, the term androgyny is identified with making one of two, the experience of the wholeness and a sense of oneness with God, the absolute Perfection.

However, when Adam and Eve were seduced to eat the forbidden fruit, they were

against God's will and driven out of paradise. Their fall meant the loss of heavenly body and heavenly life and the loss of the harmony with God. But the redemption and the resurrection by Christ restored the androgyny of man and his total identity with God. The process of decent and ascent was one through which man strived to return to the original state to reunite with God. Therefore, Christ, as the androgynous vision of wholeness is reiterated, just as what is said in *THE New Testament*: "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ."<sup>5</sup>(1Corinthians 12:12) And this sense of oneness is just what the Christians strive to achieve all their lifetime.

The perfection of love in Christianity gets full expression in Nohnberg's rendering of Du Bartas's poem about the marriage of Adam and Eve:

Source of all joyes! Sweet Hee-Shee-Coupled-one!

Thy sacred Birth I never think upon,

But (ravisht) I admire how God did them

Make two of one, One of Two again.

O blessed bond! O happy marriage!

Which dost the match twixt Christ and us presage!

O chastest friendship, whose pure flames impart

Two Soul in one, two Hearts into one Heart!<sup>6</sup>

Here the marriage of the two androgynous lovers—Adam and Eve is connected with the union of Christ and his bride(Christians), symbolizing the a spiritual union with God—divine love.

## **B. Marriage—the golden chain linking secular love and divine love**

According to the central theory of Plato and his followers, the world comprises two levels—the conceptual world and the material world. The ultimate truth exists in



the conceptual world, “but harmony on the material level is potential, whose actualization is only an imitation of the cosmic harmony on the conceptual level.”<sup>7</sup> The conceptual world is the dwelling place of the divine—the City of Heaven, which is intangible and can be apprehended only by intellect. While the material world — the City of man is visible and can be apprehended only by senses. The human being belongs to the second world, and his soul which comes from the first has a longing for a return or ascent to the first.<sup>8</sup> It is love as the first principle of the universe that links the two worlds, for “God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.”<sup>9</sup> (1 John, 4:16) What is more, the love between man and woman in the sublunary world is the first ladder leading to the divine love.<sup>10</sup> Through the Christian marriage, the secular love and the divine love are closely linked together, which is just what Spenser tries to convey in his poetry.

In *Amoretti*, Spenser expresses his strong love for and pursuit of the Infinity — God through his wooing for his lover. He thirsts to return to the original heavenly life of Adam and Eve through the holy marriage, achieving the sublimation of the secular love to the divine love. Spenser believes that divine love is always identified with divine beauty. Heavenly love bestows his lover with the divine beauty. In the poem the speaker is amazed at his lover's sovereign beauty or the “wondrous sight of so celestial hew”, (Sonnet III) which kindles heavenly fire in his frail spirit, raising him from baseness to pureness. Her eyes are like the Maker best, “ whose light doth lighten all that here we see.”(Sonnet IX) Her amiable smile is like the fair sunshine in summer day. When a dreadful storm flits away, it will spread goodly ray over the broad world. (Sonnet XL). Then the lady appears in Sonnet XLV as the image of “Idea” in the poet's heart so divine as not to be enjoyed by earthly eyes: “The fayre Idea of your celestial hew, / And euery part remains immortally:”( Sonnet XLV,7-8) In the poet's heart, the lady is born of heavenly seed, derives from the Holy Spirit and amounts to a saint dwelling in the place of God:

The glorious image of the makers beautie,

.....

For being as she is diuinely wrought,  
And of the brood of Angels heuenly borne:  
And with the crew of blessed Saynts vpbrought,  
Each of which did her with theyr guifts adorne;

(Sonnet LXII, 5-8)

Glory comes from God and it is the characteristics of God Himself. A.C. Hamilton points out that the word “glorious” is used for the description of Christ’s cross before being applied to secular matters.<sup>11</sup> Here it centers on the beautiful and virtuous lady, uplifting her from the earthly beauty to the divine beauty, which is fully displayed in Epithalamion.

The bride Spenser describes is “so sweet, so lovely, so mild and so faire a creature” “adornd with beautyes grace and vertues store.” The beauty and purity of her body can be seen clearly through her shining bright eyes like Saphyres, her white forehead like ivory, her cheeks like apples redded by the sun, her breast like a bowle of cream uncrudded, her paps like lylies budded and her snowy neck like marble tower. While her whole body is like a faire palace, parts of which are like many stately stairs from the feet to the head, ascending up to chaste sweet bower and reaching honors seat through the marble tower-like neck. “The ‘sweet bower’ refers to head, and ‘the honor seat’ represents soul. The description from ‘the stately stairs’ to ‘the sweet bower’ to ‘the honor seat’ shows the upward movement from the flesh to the soul,”<sup>12</sup> and a uplifting process from the carnal beauty to the divine beauty or from sensuous beauty to intelligible beauty by ordered steps. Just as Ficino says in his *Commentary on the Symposium*, “Hence it happens that the passion of a lover is not quenched by the mere touch or sight of a body, for it does not desire this or that body, but desire the splendor of the divine light shining through bodies...”<sup>13</sup> Such divine beauty inflames his gentle heart with the strong desire for the divine love. Moreover, his love and courtship to the lady add up to the worship of God. Within his mind exists her faire temple in which her glorious image is placed. He attends his thought day and night on the image just like a sacred priest for which he would rather sacrifice his heart as his tribute. (Sonnet

XXII) He addresses the lady as goddess and earnestly requests her to accept his sacrifice and unite with him in the holy marriage: "So let vs loue, deare loue, lyke as we ought, / Loue is the lesson which the Lord vs taught." (Sonnet LXVIII.)

Spenser believes love of man is access to love of God and Christ. To unite with the lover means to unite with God and Christ. God created man out of love in His image, and sent down His son Christ to save man after the fall:

This ioyous day, deare Lord, with ioy begin,

And grant that we for whom thou didest dye

Being with thy deare blood clene washt from sin,

(Sonnet LXVIII, 5-7 )

Therefore, man should return God's love by loving each other, which is God's command, as it is said in the Christian *Bible*: "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have love you... I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another."<sup>14</sup> (John,15:12,17)

And that thy loue we weighing worthily,

May likewise loue thee for the same againe:

And for thy sake that all lyke deare didst buy,

With loue may one another entertayne.

(Sonnet LXVIII, 9-12 )

Such androgynous love directing to marriage is what Spenser strives for in *Amoretti*, love both being sublunary and saintly. John Dryden refers to it as "a perfect image of that passion which God infused into both sexes."<sup>15</sup> Such love is also mirrored in his epic *The Faerie Queene*. The beloved are all shining the light of the Maker—the divine beauty endowed by God. Gloriana, the Queen of the Fairyland is a case in point. Although she is absent in the poem, almost all the major heroic knights

are closely connected with her. In their hearts, Gloriana is absolutely beautiful like a goddess. "For she is heavenly borne, and heaven may justly vaunt." (*The Faerie Queene*, I, x, 59). For Guyon, the queen is the symbol of heavenly beauty or the beauty of God:

..... the beutie of her mind .....,  
That is her bountie, and imperiall power,  
Thousand times fairer then her mortall hew,  
O how great wonder would your thoughts deuoure,  
And infinite desire into your spirite poure!

(*The Faerie Queene*, II, ix, 3)

Apart from her goodness and the beauty of mind, Guyon portrays Gloriana's divine image appeared on the shield to Arthur. She is presented as as God on earth, full of glory and mercy, shining the divine grace and chastity. Like God, she spreads the glorious light over the earth. She is also compared to the "the morning starre", (*The Faerie Queene*, II, ix, 4) which derives from *Bible*: "I Jesus ...am the bright morning starre"<sup>16</sup>(*Revelation*, 22: 16). The steadfast star "sendeth light from farre / To all, that in the wide deepe wandring arre."(*The Faerie Queene*, I, ii, 1), serving as a guide for human actions in the state of peace as well as in the war.

Similarly, in the eyes of Redcrosse, Gloriana is also shining heavenly light, representing the divine glory which originates from God and is given to "those who by patiently doing good seek for glory and honour and immortality".<sup>17</sup> (*Romans*, 2:7):

"Thine, O then," said the gentle Redcrosse knight,  
"Next to that Ladies love, shalbe the place,  
O fairest virgin, full of heavenly light,  
Whose wondrous faith, exceeding earthly race,  
Was firmest fixt in mine extremest case.

(*The Faerie Queene*, I, ix, 17)

Arthur's dream vision of Gloriana is "the royall Mayd", whose dainty limbs are softly lying by his side, speaking of divine words ("ne living man like words did ever heare") and filling Arthur with ecstasy: "So faire a creature yet saw never a sunny day./ Most goodly glee and lovely blandishment /she to me made..." (The Faerie Queene, I, ix, 13)

The perfect divinity of Gloriana is highlighted whether she appears on Guyon's shield or in the dream vision of Arthur, or somewhere else. Moreover, Spenser depicts her as an absent figure, whose image cannot be seen directly but is filtered through indirectly by other knights. Such arrangement also gives prominence to her divinity, for there is a distance between the divine and human world before human beings' fulfillment of the unity with God. The heavenly light shining in Gloriana is too brilliant to be seen directly by the mortal eyes, which can be traced back to *The Old Testament*, Moses's talk with God on Mount Saint Sinai makes his face shine so dazzlingly bright that he has to cover it with a veil when he speaks to the Israelites.<sup>18</sup> (Exodus, 34:29, 30, 34, 35) Arthur's quest for Gloriana is the endeavor to combine with the divine.

Another protagonist of the epic, Una, is also the incarnation of divine glory. The following description can speak strongly for her divinity:

.....Her angels face  
As the great eye of heaven shyned bright,  
And made a sunshine in the shadie place;  
Did never mortall eye behold such heavenly grace.

(The Faerie Queene, I, iii, 4)

The blazing brightnesse of her beauties beame,  
And glorious light of her sunshyny face  
To tell, were as to strive against the streame.

(The Faerie Queene, I, xii, 23)

Here the image of Una is depicted as the shining sun. In *The Faerie Queene*, the sun serves as an image of God, for it is: "Great father....of generation ...th'author of life and light"(The Faerie Queene, III, vi, 9) In Christianized cosmology, "the planet most representative of the divine is the sun."<sup>19</sup>Therefore, Una's light becomes an earthly reflection of "that soveraine light, / From whose pure beams al perfect beauty springs".(An Hymne of Heavenly Beautie, 295-296) Besides, in the Revelation, the image of the true church is "a woman clothed with the sun"<sup>20</sup>(12:1) "The sun in the Revelation of St. John is taken as Christ, while "a woman clothed with the sun' is taken as the spousal or the bride (church) of the bridegroom (Christ)."<sup>21</sup>Therefore, Una is closely connected with Christ and is the symbol of true church. Through the sunlight, Una's humanity is closely linked with divinity. Redcrosse's adventure and final betrothal with Una signify the unity with the true church and Christ.

Whether the unity between Arthur and Gloriana or the betrothal between Redcrosse and Una, it takes on the process of union-separation-reunion. Arthur's encounter with Gloriana in his dream accompanied by the separation after his waking up ends up in the union with her in the fairyland. Similarly, Redcrosse sets off with Una to free Una's parents and to restore the Garden of Eden. But due to Redcrosse's swelling pride, he leaves Una and is led by Duessa into the House of Pride. Thanks to Una's forgiveness and aid, he fulfills his task and is ultimately engaged to Una. Such a process is identified with that of original man's pursuit his origin in the mythology mentioned in Chapter One as well as that of the Christian androgynous Adam's unity with Eve. This pattern of union-separation-reunion forms a circle, which is the symbol of perfection and eternity. The holy married love serves as a chain, linking the top and the end together. It not only means the happy union of the two lovers, but also implies the perfect union with God.

Such androgynous love directed to marriage represents the Providence of God, as Lewis restates Leone Ebreo's remarks on God's androgyny: "in God the lover, the beloved and their love are one and the same, and although we count them to be three and say that the lover is informed by the beloved and that love derives from both (as from the father and mother) yet the whole is one simple unity and essence..."<sup>22</sup> Their

quest for their lovers, to some extent, is the divine plan and gets the divine blessing. For instance, Britomart falls in love with the image of Artegall in Venus' glass. Venus is called "Great God of men and women" (*The Faerie Queene*, III, x, 47). As the divinity of beauty and love, the androgynous Venus symbolizes the harmonious union in marriage. Merlin, a magician and Christian prophet, is the embodiment of Providence here. Merlin persuades her to accept the divine plan, telling her it is divinely destined:

It was not, Britomart, thy wandering eye,  
Glauncing unwares in charmed looking glas,  
But the streight course of heavenly destiny,  
Led with eternal providence, that has  
Guided thy glaunce, to bring his will to pas:  
Ne is thy fate, ne is thy fortune ill,  
To love the prowtest knight, that ever was.  
Therefore submit thy wayes unto his will,  
And do by all dew meanes thy destiny fulfill.

(*The Faerie Queene*, III, iii, 24)

There is no denying that Redcrosse's fulfillment of his task and betrothal to Una are attributed to the divine aid. Una is the agent of God on earth, which is mentioned above. She appears as a lovely and fair lady, riding upon a lowly ass much whiter than snow. Yet she is "much whiter" and "so pure an innocent, as that same lambe". (*The Faerie Queene*, I, I, 4-5) Her lowly white ass is the emblem of purity and humility. Matthew 21:5 describes Christ's entry into Jerusalem on an ass,<sup>23</sup> and in John 1:29 "John saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, 'Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!'"<sup>24</sup> Thus, Una is associated with Jesus Christ. Just as God sends Christ to save human, Una is also the child of God, sent to help Redcrosse, which is the predestination. Owing to Redcrosse's swelling pride, he ignores Una's alarm of the danger of in the wood. When he is wrapped in Error's tails, it is Una's

timely instruction that helps him to cope with the trouble: “Add faith unto your force, and be not faint: /Stangle her, else she sure will strangle thee.”(The Faerie Queene, I, I, 19) So Redcrosse’s successful release from the entanglement is attributed to Christian truth and the mercy of God. When Redcrosse encounter with Archimago—the representative of Satanic devils, he is deceived by the chief magician and abandons Una. He is led by Duessa, an ominous witch and treacherous seducer, into the House of Pride and indulges himself in physical pleasure with Duessa. However, to Redcrosse’s furthur degeneration, God never discards him, no matter how far he goes astray. It is also Una who meets Arthur and asks him to defeat Orgoglio, and destroys the dungeon. God’s benevolence rescues Redcrosse again. When Redcrosse is persuaded by Despair to commit suicide, Una again gives him the hope and leads him to Caelia’s House of Holiness, where he gets regeneration and spiritually purified. When Redcrosse fights against the great Dragon, the wrathful Dragon sends out of its wide devouring mouth a flake of fire, causing intolerable pain and torture. He falls into the well of life. When he rises out of the well, he is transformed into an eagle of the sun and his weapons are endowed with the divine power. The water of life symbolizes the God’s almighty power. It is also the divine plan that makes him fall the tree of life, shaping him as a greater fighter. The Providence of God helps him triumph over Dragon, rescuing Una’s parents and holding the ceremony of betrothal to Una.

God is absent but everywhere. God is “a sun and shield” and “will give grace and glory” to those “who walk uprightly”.<sup>25</sup>(Psalms 84:11) It is the providence that Arthur encounters with the fairest royal maid—Gloriana in his dream while sleeping on a grassland. He feels something divinely urge him to quest his lover:

“Full hard it is,” quoth he, “ to read aright  
The course of heavenly cause, or understand  
The secret meaning of th’ eternall might,  
That rules mens wayes, and rules the thoughts of living wight.

(The Faerie Queene, I, ix, 6)



Guided by Merlin and armed with the sun-beaming helmet(The Faerie Queene, I, vii, 31) and magic shield —the gift endowed with by God, he defeats evil forces or save people from danger or cure the wounds in the course of his quest. Obviously, his search for Gloriana is inspired and directed by the divine power.

Spenser never set aside the secular for the sake of the divine, nor he live in the secular in despite of God. In the eyes of Spenser, the love directed to marriage is not merely the wish to return to the original perfection of humanity, but also represents the higher pursuit to unite with god, which is God's will as well as His blessing to human beings. The combination of profane love and the divine love inevitably leads to the harmony of the cosmos.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Marriage — Access to the Harmony of Cosmos**

#### **A. Access to the harmony of macrocosm**

The word “cosmos” is first invented by Pythagoras. In Greek, “cosmos” means “the beautiful order of things”, or “fitting together”. The classical writer Photius says cosmos “is perfect, and is embellished with all living creatures and with beautiful signs.”<sup>1</sup> In the Christian tradition, God created the perfect universe in his image, the essence of which is harmony or the unity of opposites, just as Gorman mentions that “Photinus often speaks of the cosmos as a harmony”<sup>2</sup> Similarly, an author of a mid-sixteen-century cosmography also gives such an account of cosmos: “the harmonious mixing and indeed the most beautiful arrangement by which it was set forth by god, the supreme artisan...the coagmentation of things, disposed beautifully and well-ordered.”<sup>3</sup> The androgynous union of man and woman in marriage reflects completely the cosmic nature. Therefore, human’s pilgrimage to marriage is the microcosmic endeavor to imitate and pursue the macrocosmic harmony.

In addition, harmony also derives from an appropriate relation. In the Greek conception of the cosmos, it is composed of two levels: the intelligent level and the material level. Harmony comes from the proper relationship between the two levels, or rather, between God and man. God created man out of love, so Aristotle argues that love is the source of energy that sets the universe in motion and God is the first mover. Love is a golden chain linking God and man together. The terrestrial love and celestial love work together, creating the universal harmony. As for the married love, it just embodies the perfect merging of a threefold form of love: the love of God and Christ for human, human’s love in return, and the love among human beings, which has been discussed in the first two chapters. Thus, in this sense, the married love is a factor to guarantee the harmony of the cosmos.

From the viewpoint of the Renaissance people on the whole macrocosm, there exists a great chain of being. According to Tillyard, the idea of the Great Chain

“began with Plato’s *Timaeus*, was developed by Aristotle, was adopted by the Alexandrian Jew...[and ]was spread by the Neo-Platonists”<sup>4</sup>. During the Renaissance the conception emerged as the dominant theory to explain the existence of God and how the universe and all its parts interact. Within this Chain, God was on the top, representing perfection in the highest degree. Linked by love, the chain stretched from the foot of God’s throne to the meanest of inanimate, and it takes on such a vertical sequence from the highest to the lowest degree of perfection: God — angel —man —animal—plant—stone<sup>5</sup>. The great chain denotes three general features of the universe: plenitude, continuity, and gradation. The principle of plenitude states that the universe is full, exhibiting the maximal diversity of kinds of existences. The principle of continuity asserts that the universe is composed of an infinite series of forms, each of which shares with its neighbor at least one attribute. According to the principle of linear gradation, this series ranges in hierarchical order from the barest type of existence to the Supreme Being, or God. The chain depends on its completeness and its static nature to ensure its perfection. Hence, the universe would not be complete and harmonious if the chain did not extend all the way to the bottom or if it had gaps in it. In this sense, the great chain of being is the symbol of the order, the hierarchy and the harmony of the cosmos.

Man occupies the medium position in the great chain of being, like a knot linking the conceptual world and the material world. Without this knot, the chain would be broken, and the order of the universe would be destroyed. The holy marriage can create the eternity of the time, sustaining the existence of human beings and maintaining the harmony of the universe, which is what Spenser strives to convey in his poetry.

Time bears the linearly as well as cyclic nature. The linear time is fleeting and evanescent, which progresses like a line, having a beginning and an end. Thus, Linear time is destructive and devouring. With time’s passing as a line, everything on earth as an individual is doomed to meet its end at last. In *The Faerie Queene*, Spenser depicts the law of the linear time like this, “For all that lives, is subject to that law: / All things decay in time, and to their end do draw.” (*The Faerie Queene*, III, VI, 40) It is

true of human being as an individual, beginning his life and dying in the end. "For all the rest, how euer fayre it be,/ shall turne to nought and loose that glorious hew." (Sonnet LXXIX, 5-6) Contrast to linear time is time as a cycle without beginning and ending. This cyclic and endless time is an image of infinity and eternity.<sup>6</sup> That is to say, it progresses by a kind of predetermined and constantly repeated pattern. For Spenser, the linear time contains a cycle in its passage. So the universe moves on by time units such as hours, days, months, seasons and years in a linear forward way as well as in a repeating way to form a circulation from the beginning to the end.<sup>7</sup> Human being is correspondent with the universe, and "human life is lived linearly within cyclic natural patterns."<sup>8</sup> As the existence of a single being, man is limited by the linear time and never escapes from the death. However, the process of the whole human race presents a cyclic pattern accomplished by the procreation through marriage. This endless cyclic or circular pattern makes eternity of human race, ensuring the completeness of the great chain of being and the hierarchy of the universe.

For Spenser, the realm of marriage is a "fayre soyle" full of "all that deare and daynty is alyue"(Sonnet LXIII, 7-8)—in other words, an abundance or fertility of offspring. The procreation of children has been closely associated with marriage throughout the ages. With the aspiration for beauty, the lovers are united together through the Christian marriage and give birth to beautiful children, impressing the form of beauty on the materials.<sup>9</sup> What true lovers desire is not the lust for the intercourse but pursuit of beauty and the desire to maintain the beautiful virtuous seeds. This procreation, on the one hand, will make the human race continue; on the other hand, it offers possibility for virtue to be rooted in the soul of a newborn babe.<sup>10</sup> Such love accords with Plato's view about the function of love. Plato thinks that all human beings are pregnant both in body and in soul when they reach the age. Pregnancy and procreation instill immortality in a living, mortal being. Therefore love is of procreation and giving birth in beauty.<sup>11</sup> Procreation is eternal and immortal, insofar as anything can be such in a mortal thing, and, given what we've agreed, one necessarily desires immortality along with the good, since love is of the good's being

one's own forever. On the basis of this account, love is necessarily also of immortality.<sup>12</sup> In this sense, married love creates the eternity by the begetting of children. It is in marriage where love finds its requital—children, from whom the lovers can see the image of themselves. It is through marriage that lovers extend to eternity in the flesh as well as in the fame and name, so that time is overcome through posterity and human race as the medium knot of the great chain will remain forever. More vividly, this idea is expressed in *Epithalamion*. As soon as the curtain of night hangs down, the groom urges his bride to lie in bed, which is the sign of lovemaking and children birth.

Now day is doen, and night is nighing fast:

Now bring the Bryde into the brydall boures.

Now night is come, now soone her disaray,

And in her bed her lay;

(*Epithalamion*, 298-301)

Then the groom appeals to Cynthia, the patroness of childbirth, to give them blessing to be pregnant so as to enlarge generations: "And the chaste wombe informe with timely seed, / That may our comfort breed." (*Epithalamion*, 380-387) Great Juno, who patronizes the laws of marriage, is also invited to bind the eternal band of love. In glad Genius's gentle hand, the bridal's bower and genial bed remain stainless. The sweet pleasure of their love is offered secretly and the fruits of progeny are conveyed. Faire Hebe and free Hymen grant lovers fruitful descendants.

Spenser extols marriage through which hope of large posterity and lasting happiness for human beings are engendered. More important, it also promotes their large descendants to uplift to the heaven and enlarge the number of saints, sustaining the macrocosm. Thus, in *Epithalamion* the poet yearns for the pouring of the plenteous blessing from the Temple of the Gods so that they may raise a large posterity. They may mount up to the Temple of Gods with lasting happiness and inherit the heavenly tabernacle to increase the count of blessed Saints.

Mortal nature seeks as far as possible to be eternal and immortal, and it is only in this way, by producing offspring, that it is able to do so, through always leaving behind another, a young one, in place of the old.<sup>13</sup> The matrimonial love creates the continuity of the microcosm as well as realizes the eternity of soul in the paradise, leading to the universal peace and harmony. Such is the object of human love, just like Spenser's interpretation in *An Hymne in Honor of Love*:

Not for lusts sake, but for eternitie,  
Seekes to enlarge his lasting progenie.  
For having yet in his deducted spright,  
Some sparks remaining of that heavenly fyre,  
He is enlumined with that goodly light,  
Unto like goodly semblant to aspire:  
Therefore in choice of love, he doth desyre  
That seems on earth most heavenly, to embrace.

(*An Hymne in Honor of Love*, 104-111)

In Spenser's other works, the ideal of marriage is also beautifully realized and expressed. The prayer for married love and for the begetting of children is as holy as prophet. For example, in *The Faerie Queene*, Britomart is the knight of Chastity, yet Chastity as she embodies is not confined to virginity. In Lewis's opinion, it means constant, fertile, monogamous and felicific love. And though Britomart is a virgin during the action of the poem, she seems much more a mother goddess than a virgin goddess.<sup>14</sup> Merlin prophesies that her union with her lover will produce glorious progeny who are to rule over Britain and have an age of sacred Peace:

Renowned kings, and sacred Emperours,  
Thy fruitful Ofspring, shall from thee descend,  
Brave Captaines, and most mighty warriours,  
That shall their conquests through all lands extend,

(The Faerie Queene, III, V, 23)

By the prediction of Britomart's fortune Spenser reveals his view that associated with fertile generations and hence with eternity, married love is virtually invincible and never to be exhausted.

In the Garden of Adonis, lovers enjoy each other, and an endless process of generation and regeneration continually renews the essential nature of beings. Cupid and Psyche are united in deep married love, whose fruit is a child called Pleasure. So are Venus and Adonis:

There wont faire Venus often to enjoy  
Her deare Adonis joyous company,  
And reape sweet pleasure of the wanton boy;

(The Faerie Queene, III, Vi, 46)

All be he subject to mortalitie,  
Yet is eterne in mutabilitie,  
And by succession made perpetuall,

(The Faerie Queene, III, Vi, 47)

As analyzed, marriage can overcome time and prolong love in the flesh or in the soul by the begetting of children so that human race can get eternal in the great chain of being and makes the medium knot more perfect, promoting the harmony of the cosmos.

Music exists anywhere full of harmony and perfect order, for harmony was originally a musical term originated from Pythagorean cosmology. According to Pythagorean's theory, each sphere in its moving around the earth must produce a note, and the different notes made by all the spheres unite together, creating the most perfect and harmonious music in the cosmos—the music of the spheres. The notion of cosmic harmony came to full bloom in the Renaissance, and the cosmic music was the most appropriate and comprehensive metaphor in proof of harmony fashioning the universe, which was frequently reflected in the works of Renaissance writers. The

marriage-song played by Spenser is undoubtedly a magnificent movement of the heavenly music. The music of the sphere is always accompanied by the celebrations of the marriage.

At the end of Book I in *The Faerie Queene*, Spenser describes the music of the sphere in the celebration of both Redcrosse's victory over the dragon and his betrothal to Una. In the great feast made to solemnize that day, sweet music is played to drive away the dull Melancholy. While one sung a song of love and jollity, there was an heavenly noise heard through all the palace, as if it had been many an Angels voice singing before the eternal Majesty.

Music is classified into three types by Boethius in his *The Principles of Music*. The first type is the music of the universe (*musica mundane*), the second type, that of the human being (*musica humana*), and the third type is that which is created by certain instruments(*musica instrumentis constituta*).<sup>15</sup> Spenser melts these three types of music in *Epithalamion*. The pipe, the tabor, and the trembling Croud agree with each other without any jar, and the merry music resounds from far. Young girls are wreathed in smiles, smiting their timbrels, dancing and singing sweet carol, which stir up all senses. Boys' crying Hymen io Hymen, Hymen are like one voice, reaching the heaven and filling all the firmament. People standing about applaud and cheer in chorus. All of these combine together, playing a splendid marriage song.

In this poem, the diverse associations of marriage actual and poetic, pagan and Christian are all harmonized. All created things are found in the wedding ceremony full of joyful harmony. It is placed in the city full of the atmosphere of jubilation, which comprises the social environment. Rivers, forests, sea, flowers, Mulla, lake and singing birds also participate in the celebration as part of the natural surroundings. The bride is led towards the bower by the fairies in classical mythology: Phoebe shining upon her from above, nymphs to escort her, and hymen awaiting her arrival. At the same time angels and pagan gods and goddesses are found merged into a fully Christian sanctification of the wedding. Here music combines everything together: the intelligent world and the material world, man as the microcosm in the great chain and the universe as the macrocosm, reality and imagination, society and nature, human being, plants and



animals. The whole universe is in a harmonious condition and permeated with merry songs.

## **B. Access to the harmony of the social microcosm**

Corresponding with the macrocosm, the human community or society is regarded as a microcosm. According to the Ptolemaic cosmology, the earth stands still at the center of the cosmos, surrounded by the successive transparent celestial spheres in the outer space, which contain respectively the seven planets and the fixed stars.<sup>16</sup> God's love pushes the whole universe to move in an ordered and harmonious way. Similarly, in the picture entitled *Sphaera Civitatis*(1588) by John Case, Queen Elizabeth is compared to the *Primum mobil*; the Star Chamber, judges, heroes, and councilors are compared to the sphere of the fixed stars; various departments of the government are compared to the seven planets.<sup>17</sup> The Queen's love sets the society in harmonious movement, so she is the prime mover of the social microcosm, just as God is called the first mover of the macrocosm. Therefore, there exists the striking resemblance between the macrocosm and the microcosm. The social microcosm is the copy of the macrocosm, and the harmony in the social microcosm is the reflection of the macrocosm.

For Spenser, marriage is not only a factor leading to the harmony of the social microcosm as well as the macrocosm. The lovers make up a harmonious family through the sacred marriage. If the society is compared to an organism, the family is the cell. Marriage can be addressed as the keystone of the society. The harmony of every family constitutes the stability and the prosperity of the whole society, and the procreation of the marriage can lead to the eternity of the social microcosm from which the flesh and the soul can be prolonged through the fruitful offspring. As for this aspect, it has already been analyzed above.

Apart from this point, Spenser also endows marriage of his heroes or heroines with allegorical meanings, stressing its function to promote the harmonious society. For

instance, in *The Faerie Queene*, Britomart, a tender and chaste woman, represents equity. Just as What Spenser suggests in his Letter to Raleigh, Britomart embodies the public personality of Queen Elizabeth. Artegall stands for justice. The union of Britomart and Artegall is the combination of equity and justice, which is the embodiment of the moderate politics of Queen Elizabeth. This political hermaphrodite results from the love between the Queen and her people, and the marriage of justice and equity will produce a nation as powerful as the lion (often as an emblem of royal power) in Britomart's dream, which will subdue all other beasts.<sup>18</sup>

Gloriana, the Queen of the Fairyland, just like the estimate of Guyon "Far reaches her mercies"(The Faerie Queene, II, ix, 4) is the incarnation of mercy. She holds twelve-day banquet every year to entertain the knights, in which people in trouble turn to her for help. She never refuses them and sent out her knight to accomplish the missions. Therefore, Gloriana, also stands for her country and its people. She tends to be identified with Queen Elizabeth, for Spenser says in the Letter to Raleigh, "in that Faerie Queene I mean glory in my general intention, but in my particular I conceive the most excellent and glorious person of our sovereign the Queene, and her kingdom in Fairland."<sup>19</sup> Arthur, with twelve virtues in him, often appears in the poem as the agent of God, saving other from the devils, like Jesus Christ. Gloriana's union with Arthur is endowed with the religious significance, that is to say, the marriage of England or its people with Jesus Christ or God. The fairyland takes on the perfect, orderly and peaceful atmosphere, full of merry songs and graceful dance, which is the copy of the heavenly music and the cosmic dance<sup>20</sup>—the symbol of harmony.

In addition, the marriage of the Medway and the Thames gives a sign of the concord in social and political order. Heale mentions that Spenser "gives us a rich and complex image of elemental concord in the marriage of the rivers Thames and Medway"<sup>21</sup> The Medway, refers to Elizabeth, and the name of the river, Medway, means midway, implying the moderate politics of Queen Elizabeth. The Thames stands for England. So the marriage allegorizes that Queen Elizabeth's marriage to England and the concord in England with her moderate political policy. The highly ordered wedding process symbolizes both social and cosmic harmony. It is at this

highly symbolic wedding that Marinel and Florimell unite into a wholeness which implies that harmony in individual life is in accord with political, social and cosmic harmony.

Concord is closely associated with what Spenser conceives of marriage, through which he intends to give readers a vision of its positive function in the harmony of the macrocosm as well as the social microcosm.

## Conclusion

As a love poet, Spenser has broad and profound understanding as well as noble expressions concerning love and marriage. He depicts a world of diverse love in his poetry, through which he not only conveys what is the ideal love he conceives but also aims his love at marriage. For Spenser, the courting couples' loyal and faithful love should be guided by ration and properly restrained in marriage and ultimately achieved the androgynous perfection. Whether in the classical tradition or in the Christian tradition, androgyny represents human's wish to regain the wholeness and return to the original perfection, so Spenser advocates the reciprocal love that directs to marriage is the ideal way to fulfill human's longing dream of perfection.

As a humanist, Spenser keeps firm foothold on the ground and hails love and marriage in human terms. He believes man's quest for love is in effect the quest for beauty, or rather the quest for androgynous beauty in flesh and mind, which can be fulfilled in marriage, creating the androgynous perfection of humanity. As a faithful Christian, Spenser sings songs for divine love, claiming earthly love in a forward and upward movement leads to a higher level— heavenly love. By the perception of beauty and experience of love man moves closer to divine love, because to love man is to love God in man and to love God is to love man. Spenser neither declares the earthly incompatible with the heavenly, as Sidney does, nor does he envision an unbroken ascent which spurns earth in its aspiration for heaven. He would have both loves, the one infinitely good, the other good too because, though finite, it imitates the infinite.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, Spenser's notion of love is the fusion of profane and sacred love, just as Nelson's summary: Spenser's system of love, as even so cursory a study shows, reaches upward from this world but keeps foothold within it... He saw a likeness between the love that draws the sexes together, producing noble deeds and perpetuating the race, and the love that draws man to God and fills the world with beauty.<sup>2</sup> Spenser draws sublunary love to saintly love with marriage as the holy aim, endowing marriage with the perfection of divinity. In a larger context, Spenser regards

marriage as an indispensable factor for cosmic concord. It not only reflects the harmonious relationship between God and man but also embodies the discordant concord essence of the universe. More importantly, the union of the male and the female in marriage, like the serpent biting its own tail, symbolizes the eternity.<sup>3</sup> The procreation of the marriage can sustain the existence of the social microcosm and ensure the wholeness and harmony of the great chain of being of the universe.

Spenser's notion of love and marriage represents the union of body and spirit, sense and ration, worldliness and divinity, ideal and reality, full of harmony and eternal bliss just as Lewis's remark that "His love, if not the best kind to read about, was a happy kind to live in."<sup>4</sup>

Spenser can be addressed as a genius in dealing with love and marriage. He takes faithful love between lovers as the ultimate basis of marriage, and in turn, marriage is regarded as the perfect destination of love. This conception is commonplace to people in modern society, but it was an epoch-making revolution in his age. In the original English poems, love was always neglected or negated, even if in the Medieval Ages, love came apart from ration and existed mostly outside marriage. Up to the sixteenth century, love was more involved in marriage, but the conflict between passion and ration still existed, which can be clearly seen in *Astrophil and Stella* by Sidney, Spenser's contemporary. It is Spenser who links rational love and marriage together, the fruit of which is the offspring through which the eternity of human can be achieved. Therefore, C.S. Lewis estimates him as "the great mediator between the Middle Ages and the modern poets."<sup>5</sup> "In the history of sentiment he is the greatest among the founders of that romantic conception of marriage which is the basis of all our love literature from Shakespeare to Meredith."<sup>6</sup>

In addition, Spenser celebrates the equal and harmonious relationship between man and woman in the marriage. In his poems, women as the individuals are equal to their companions in marriage or even surpass them. Spenser appreciates women's beauty in appearance, fair in virtue, and even endows them with the divine quality. Spenser's view of women's status in marriage and his stress on the mutuality of the couples also distinguishes him from those former poets even his contemporaries. He

is deservedly hailed as the first great poet of married love, and has for this matter affected English poetry ever since the sixteenth century.<sup>7</sup>

Spenser's keen renderings of love and marriage are "the peculiar flower of a peculiar civilization."<sup>8</sup> Even at present, they still play a positive role in constructing the harmonious society.

## Notes

All the selected poems of Spenser's *An Hymne in Honor of Love & An Hymne in Honour of Beautie* are quoted from *Edmund Spenser's Poetry: Authoritative Texts, Criticism*. 2nd ed. by Hugh Maclean (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1982).

All selections from Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* are quoted from *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. the 5<sup>th</sup> edition. By M.H. Abrams (New York: W.W Norton & Company, 1986).

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  18. Ibid., 204.
  19. Paul J. Alpers, ed., *Penguin Critical Anthologies Edmund Spenser* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1969), 42.
  20. God made a perfect pattern of all things in the universe, when these things move, they seem to dance and produce music. The dance is termed as "the cosmic dance". The cosmic dance and the music of the spheres embody the perfect harmony in the universe. See E. M. W. Tillyard, *The Elizabethan World Picture* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1943), 94-99; 胡家峦, 《历史的星空—英国文艺复兴时期诗歌与西方宇宙论》(北京: 北京大学出版社, 2001), 81.
  21. Elizabeth Heale, *The Faerie Queene: A Reader's Guide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 98.

## Conclusion

1. William Nelson, *The Poetry of Edmund Spenser* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1965), 99.
2. Ibid., 115.

3. In Iconography, the serpent biting its own tail, symbolizing a union of the male and the female, is a hieroglyph of eternity, and it can be taken as a visible image of the universe which feeds on itself and return to itself again. See Liu, Lihui, *Harmony of Life: A Study of the Underlying Argument in Spenser's The Faerie Queene* (Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, 2004), 194. To the ancient Egyptians, "the serpent, swallowing its tail, was an 'Hieroglyphick' of eternity".( M. Hope. Nicolson, *The breaking of the circle Studies in the Effect of the New Science Upon Seventeenth Century Poetry* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), 47.
4. C.S.Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteen Century excluding Drama* (Oxford: Clarendon , 1954), 373.
5. C.S.Lewis, *The Allegory of Love* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1958), 360.
6. Ibid., 360.
7. W.B.C. Watkins, *Shakespeare and Spenser* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1950), 194-197.
8. C.S.Lewis , *The Allegory of Love* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1958), 360.

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