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**An Analysis of Selected
Stanzas From Book II, Canto
VII of Spenser's Faerie
Queene¹**

I

Her face right wondrous faire did seeme to bee
That her broad beauties beam great brightness
threw

Through the dim shade, that all men might it see:
Yet was not that same her owne native hew,
But wrought by art and counterfitted shew,
Thereby more lovers unto her to call;
Nath'lesse most heavenly faire in deed and vew
She by creation was, till that she did fall;
Thenceforth she sought for help, to cloke her
crime withall.

Philotime, at first glance, seems an aristocratic
Acrasia. Both employ art to improve upon their natural

¹For the sake of variety and to tread new ground,
this paper will avoid any reference to poetic and
decorative devices. Nor will there be any mention of
the Petrarchan Convention.

beauty; captivate men with their looks—in every sense of the word; and lounge in luxury and ease. We also see a common insatiability: “Thereby *more* lovers unto her to call” (my italics), though Philotime’s desires never descend—or at least are never *seen* to descend—into the sexual realm of Acrasia’s. But here the similarities end.

Philotime, like Acrasia, is—to coin a word—bedecked with seemingness. She sits “*as in* glistering glory”; and “wondrous faire did *seem* to bee,” (my italics). Clearly she is not all as she would seem² and is making use of ornament to augment her beauty; but where Acrasia was possessed of only a surface beauty, Spenser, most importantly, brings a decided grandeur to Philotime, by tracing the source of her fairness to “creation.” Indeed, to further strengthen this allusion, Philotime seems to possess many of the qualities of Eve. Her beauty, though artificially maintained, for it vanished with her Luciferian “fall,” was nevertheless divinely ordained.

Any artificiality we see in Philotime is used to help satisfy a greed and a vanity that feeds upon the attention of men. Accordingly, as we have said, her artfulness brings not simply lovers but “more” lovers.

²What woman is?

Like Mammon, the god of riches, it is quantity that counts, not quality.

Notice, also, that Philotime lives in "dim shade." Indeed, dimmer than dim: she lives in a cave. The light her looks beam, strangely, *unnaturally*, throw light not on others, but on herself. Here then is another indication of the unquestionable vanity of Philotime.

If we might turn for a moment to Sir Guyon, still standing in the wings, and doubtless still feasting his eyes. We should remember that our noble knight represents no narrow Temperance, but a universal Temperance, one which addresses all temptations—and not only those of the senses. Thus we see here that the beauty of Philotime is only a part of her charm—indeed, a minor part, for *that* jurisdiction lies further down the trail, in the Bower of Bliss. Her principal attraction, and thus the principle temptation which Guyon must resist, has yet to be revealed.

II

There, as in glistring glory she did sit,
 She held a great gold chaine ylincked well,
 Whose upper end to highest heaven was knit,
 And lower part did reach to lowest Hell;
 And all that preace did round about her swell,
 To catchen hold of that long chaine, thereby
 To clime aloft, and other to excell:

That was *Ambition*, rash desire to sty,
And every lincke thereof a step of dignity.

Sir Guyon has so far resisted the riches of Mammon, but now he faces the temptation of Ambition, which we might describe as being beauty, fame, money, power. Certainly, all these elements are present in Philotime, and, if the chain is an extension of her self, then we might consider these qualities like links of Ambition.

There can be no doubt that Philotime holds in her hands a real chain, not merely a representation of an idea. It should not be doubted then that the bondage of this chain is equally real, and though certain men may climb from link to link, ever upwards, for every man's ascent comes another's descent. This is, above all else, a chain leading both up and down.

The chain is also an artful chain, cast in gold, designed to please the eye. It fits quiet well with Philotime's wardrobe, for we saw her in stanza 44 "richly clad." Artfulness actually seems to be the key word in all *Book II*, for everywhere we tread it favours our eyes.

Note also that the chain reaches not to Heaven but heaven, and descends not to hell but to Hell. The glories found at the top of this chain then are of no spiritual composite; but are wrought of the same gold as the chain itself: gold, as we saw earlier during

Guyon's guided tour, dug from the bowls of the earth, fired in the fires of Hell. In a sense then, the top of the chain is much like the bottom of the chain. This is a chain which imprisons men in a dark dungeon of greed and malice, where no *humanity* can bode. A Dungeon whose *ceiling* is the "heaven," *painted* with gold leaf and gold cloud.

What then is "dignity" doing, wrapped about each link like a pleasant ribbon? Certainly we could explain this problem away by deciding that this is an *ironic* dignity; or a worthless dignity; or that all that dignity is not dignified dignity. Certainly we could argue ourselves out of this dungeon and any other. And yet this dignity is more likely *real* dignity. It must needs be, for there is a certain duplicity in the depiction of Philotime, which we have already noted in her simultaneous nobility and vanity; the counterfeit aspect of her looks opposed to the source of her original beauty: "creation"; and the incorporation of dignity in a chain that represents "rash desire" to climb: namely ambition, is simply another example of this twofold rendition.

The explanation for this must be left until the conclusion.

III

Some thought to raise themselves to high degree,

By riches and unrighteous reward,
Some by close shouldring, some by flatteree;
Others through friends, others for base regard;
And all by wrong wayes for themselves prepard.
Those that were up themselves, held others hard,
Ne suffred them to rise or greater grow,
But every one did strive his fellow downe to
throw.

Fortunately we have reached the conclusion.³

The duplicity, the twofold nature of Philotime's delineation, to which we have already referred, is echoed again in the first line of this stanza, for there is in the word "degree" not only multiple meanings, but two which are poles apart. Namely: the nearness of relationship; and, comparative amount of criminality. In the former we have the idea of wholesomeness and caring, in the latter of disease and excessive self-indulgence.

As well as this, we must refer to the stanzas 48 and 50, for there we find any previous negative depictions of Philotime counter-balanced by Mammon's praise of his daughter. Suddenly, rather than representing greed, dissatisfaction and inhumanity, now she stands for "honour and dignitie." Not only this, but she is now also the source of "all this worldes bliss"; and,

³Light hearted jocularly in a school paper is much like a fish out of water—a tasty morcel.

though we saw an implication that only base men climbed her chain of Ambition, now *all* men are implicated, for we see, "For which ye men do strive: few get, but many miss" (my italics). Of course, we must bear in mind that this assesment comes from Mammon, who is also using his daughter as bait. And yet, if this is all smoke and mirrors, why is there no indication, no "seemingness"? Even Sir Guyon accepts the account, and if this can be explained by his natural chivalry, not wishing to call the god of riches a liar, why is there no evidence of this in the text? It is worth noting, in passing, that Mammon offers the hand of Philotime, not if that is the *wish* of Guyon, but if that is the "lust" of Guyon.

Actually, all this duplicity is not surprising, for Spenser is forced to treat Philotime with a certain amount of prudence. She does, after all, represent sovereignty—whether an allegorical one, with its actual presence in the Spanish court, or simply a metaphorical one, suggesting the wealth she incorporates has become, to the worst of men, the ruler of their lives. And so, as sovereignty, she

cannot be man-handled.⁴ The right to rule is certainly here a devilish right to wrong, and this is perhaps one reason that Spenser is unwilling to portray Philotime as the counterfeit—the Queen with no more right to rule than the right purchased by gold—we expect her to be. Indeed, since chivalric manners are so much a part of *The Faerie Queene*, it would be strange for our narrator to exhibit anything which does not find its place in the manners and decorum of the court, no matter which court that might be. It might be added also that the duplicity we find in Philotime could be seen as an example of the Elizabethan doctrine of “the two king’s bodies,” which consist of the “body Mortal” and the “body Politic”; and what we are seeing is an example where the former is influencing, by its human weakness, the latter.

Since we are dealing with duplicity, it would be fitting if there was a second explanation, and indeed there is: Just as Philotime cloaks her crime—sin—with art: jewellery and cosmetics we might say, it is perhaps not beyond the bounds of possibility to see also this criticism of the Spanish court as a cloak

⁴The importance of decorum and chivalrous respect for monarchy is underlined in *Henry V* where the Dauphins’ transgression of this rule costs him dearly.

under which Spenser might slyly and subtly decry the well known susceptibility of Elizabeth I to the flattery of courtiers and favourites.⁵ This certainly seems an arguable point, for there is an ever present didactical quality, as well as that of glorification, in *The Faerie Queene* ; and especially when we take note of:

Some thought to raise themselves to high
degree,
By riches and unrighteous reward,
Some by close shouldring, some by flatteree;

This twofold censure upon both the court of Spain as well as the court of England, further explains the

⁵Even if this is not actually Spenser intention, the fact remains that this section could have been understood in this light, and that, in itself, would be enough to have brought caution to Spensers' pen. Further more, even though the praise of Elizabeth is an essential part of *The Faerie Queene*, we must not presume Spenser to have been entirely blind to the dynamics of the court flattery. Indeed, often times, it seems that Spenser is himself guilty of the flattery he here denounces, just as he seems, by too intimate an understanding, to be guilty of the sin he elsewhere assails.

duplicity of Spenser rendition of Philotime. And, bearing in mind the nature of the targets, we can hardly be surprised to discover that this double-barrelled gun is loaded not with real bullets, but simply with a charge of powder that will go bang.⁶

⁶Following the now well established tradition of a final foot note that does not count, I hope the sudden "bang," was not too much of a shock to the system—although I refuse to clarify to which system I refer.