

# FORUM

University of Edinburgh  
Postgraduate Journal of Culture and the Arts  
Issue 09 | Autumn 2009

<b>Title</b>	The Old Woman in the Cave of Lust: Edmund Spenser's Silenced Feminine Voices in The Faerie Queene
<b>Author</b>	Colleen E. Kennedy
<b>Publication</b>	FORUM: University of Edinburgh Postgraduate Journal of Culture and the Arts
<b>Issue Number</b>	09
<b>Issue Date</b>	Autumn 2009
<b>Publication Date</b>	12/12/2009
<b>Editors</b>	Lena Wanggren & Ally Crockford

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**The Old Woman in the Cave of Lust:  
Edmund Spenser's Silenced Feminine Voices in *The Faerie Queene***

Colleen E. Kennedy  
The Ohio State University

Edmund Spenser's epic Arthurian-centric poem *The Faerie Queene* (1590, 1596) is permeated by fairy tales and old wives' tales, but the very presence of the tales and their tellers is problematic, as these feminine voices are often included only to be silenced (Miller 6). When writing of the challenges to chastity and marital fidelity in the central books of his poem, Spenser creates a fairy tale damsel-in-distress, Amoret, as his model of a young bride overcoming her fears of the violence of sex and instability of marriage. When creating Amoret's narrative, Spenser appropriates and reutilizes one specific fairy tale type, namely "Bluebeard," repeatedly. Amoret's narrative is a series of "Bluebeard"-esque episodes. Spenser's anxiety of female voices, narratives, sources, and genres, however, becomes manifested in one very complicated and often overlooked character: the Old Woman in the Cave of Lust. She is a fairy tale remnant: she is found in some "Bluebeard" variations; she plays the role of female "frame tale-teller," the woman behind the text in many fairy tales; and she may be a version of the real-life female storyteller who related a "Bluebeard" tale to a young Spenser. This Old Woman is only found in one canto of Spenser's epic poem (IV.vii) and is denied a voice; she isn't given one line of dialogue. The very fact that this Old Woman emerges into the text, is ambiguously portrayed, temporarily vilified, and then retreats from the text unscathed demonstrates the power of the female voice in Spenser's text. Spenser is so troubled by this unruly fairy tale character that disrupts his masculine text that he makes the Old Woman vanish from the text abruptly and changes Amoret's own tale from fairy tale to epic quest in order to silence the Old Woman and her powers over his poem.

Spenser's poem is complicated: a socio-historical and religious allegory that is also a panegyric to Elizabeth I and designed to "fashion a gentleman or noble person in virtuous and gentle discipline" (Spenser, "Letter" 737), which incorporates an encyclopedic knowledge of biblical, classical, and contemporary texts, including fairy tales. Books III and IV which attempt to showcase the feminine virtues of Chastity and Friendship, respectively, are the most gynocentric books in the epic, in that the protagonists are both female: Britomart, the knight of married chastity, and the aforementioned Amoret. Books III and IV, because of

their gendered focus, are the two books that fully incorporate fairy tales, a traditionally feminine genre, as their main source and narrative voice.

It is in the Busirane episode at the end of Book III that most of the scholarship surrounding Spenser's use of fairy tales, especially the "Bluebeard" tale, revolves. Yet, this is not the only moment in Amoret's adventures where this fairy tale intrudes into the epic, nor is it the only moment that appropriates "Bluebeard" as a source. Despite scholars writing on the House of Busirane as a manifestation of the "Bluebeard" tale, two other "Bluebeard" moments concerning Amoret have been hitherto ignored: the appearance of Cupid and Psyche in the Garden of Adonis and the Old Woman in the Cave of Lust. The center of this discussion focuses on the appearance of the ambiguous Old Woman in the Cave of Lust, a character who appears in some versions of the "Bluebeard" tale.<sup>1</sup>

Reading the Amoret episodes of Books III and IV, especially the "Lust" episode, through the emerging yet repressed maternal materials as discussed by Coppelia Kahn, the Old Woman in the Cave of Lust simultaneously becomes character and storyteller. What I propose in this essay is that Spenser uses an oral variant of "Bluebeard" in several key episodes of Amoret's adventures, because this fairy tale more than any other depicts the possible horrors of marriage that our female heroines must resist or overcome in order to enter the world of married chastity. In "Bluebeard" tales, a heroine discovers that her husband or fiancé is a serial wife-murderer after she enters a forbidden space in his homestead. He discovers her transgression and is going to kill her when she is either rescued by familial help or she outwits her husband into admitting the murders. Either way, the heroine defeats the monstrous husband, receives his wealth, and marries again. I believe that the Old Woman in the Cave of Lust is a fairy tale remnant from certain "Bluebeard" tales that intrudes into Spenser's text. Her function in these fairy tales is as a talkative storyteller who saves the heroine from male violence. Confined together, she talks to the heroine and creates a community of sisterhood, where the elder voice informs and consoles the novice's fears of death and destruction at the hands of her husband (or husband substitute). Together, the women outwit the male captor(s) and escape. The heroine defeats or is rescued from the evil male figure, and the old woman character disappears from the text. Although many scholars have written on the parallels between Spenser's House of Busirane and "Bluebeard" tales, none have noted the Old Woman in the Cave of Lust as a character from certain "Bluebeard" tales. This study, however, is not an archetypal or source study of Old Woman characters and "Bluebeard" references in Spenser, but rather an inquiry into why Spenser would use *this*

fairy tale in these books, how the Old Woman character is marginalized and vilified, and how the tale is abruptly ended.

Spenser may be writing a historical and political epic poem, but the old wives' and fairy tales that he listened to as a child, especially "Bluebeard," continuously reappear in the various Amoret episodes. I will demonstrate that this Old Woman is so problematic because she represents the intrusive and instructive female voice. Without the text, that is in the production and composition of the *Faerie Queene*, this Old Woman is both the actual female voice who originally disseminated the knowledge of fairy tales to a young Spenser (mother, nurse, or female caretaker) and the garrulous female voice in literature that rework the "Bluebeard" tale (the unnamed old woman in Apuleius' *The Golden Ass*, the unnamed old woman in Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, etc.). Within the text of the *Faerie Queene*, her role is equally knotty. In fairy tale sources, she operates as a sage advice-giver, often as through her fairy tales; the mediator between male captor(s) and female victim; and as female companion and caretaker to the captive heroine. The Old Woman acts as storyteller and it is her advice and her voice that instructs the impressionable audience. Ultimately, Spenser finds his own unruly character as compromising his epic mission so much so that he denies any voice to the Old Woman and silences his heroine Amoret by abruptly ending both women's stories and allowing Amoret's husband to retell her tale as an epic quest to quell any more fairy tales.

Amoret is in a constant state of flux throughout Books III and IV. Her adventures are a series of substitutions, mostly a series of substitutions of one "Bluebeard" narrative for another. Maureen Quilligan, in *Milton's Spenser*, states, "Epic narrative's ultimate purpose was to reach the will of the reader—to persuade (that is, to move) him or her to act for the public good" (31). In Books III and IV, the specific intention of the epic form is to elevate the status of the wife (Quilligan 178). These two books give many threats to married fidelity: lecherous old men; young gold-digging brides; roaming, lusty knights; powerful female seductresses, and the like. Britomart takes on the role of the epic hero, as she actively defeats these adversaries as she quests for her true love, Artegall. Amoret, in a more passive role suitable for fairy tale heroines, resists these same types of sexual desires and threats before she is reunited with her husband, Scudamour. The goals of fairy tales and epics are ultimately similar. According to Bruno Bettelheim, the purpose of "Bluebeard" fairy tales is to teach future wives "that sexual feelings can be terribly fascinating and tempting, but also dangerous" (302). Whether in epic or fairy tale form, the "Bluebeard" narrative, especially as it is employed by Spenser, attempts to teach young women to overcome their fears of marriage and sex. Together, Amoret and Britomart defeat Busirane, the first "Bluebeard"

villain, a sorcerer who imprisons Amoret and forces her to partake in a cruel Masque of Cupid.<sup>ii</sup> By defeating this cold, courtly representation of Petrarchan and fairy tale clichés, the two heroines defeat the fear of male domination, and later, in a more literal victory, they conquer the monster Lust.

Amoret's tale(s) and their sources oscillate between what Mary Ellen Lamb, in her study of fairy tales as source for the *Faerie Queene*, refers to as the "known" Spenserian sources—classic sources, such as Ariosto, Tasso, and Virgil, among others—and the unknown fairy tale texts (81). Lamb creates a binary opposition between these competing source types: known to modern audiences/unknown to modern audiences, written/oral, educated/uneducated, literate/illiterate, and male/female (81). Charles Doyle, however, claims that such a distinction between "folklore and bookish learning [is] often difficult to distinguish because of the voluminous residue of orality that characterized schooling and literary craft" (Doyle 311). The fairy tale sources can be considered as inferior by male writers who appropriate them (Lamb) or fully integrated (Doyle); or, as I propose, the tales, as source, may be essential to Amoret's adventures, but the female storytellers are not openly referenced as the classical male authors are. The Old Woman both within and without the text is denied her voice as fairy tale teller. The use of such sources, however one reads their amalgamation, must be explored to further an understanding of several key episodes in the development of Amoret's narrative.

After Amoret's birth, her surrogate mother, Venus, places her ward in the hands of her son, Cupid, and his wife, Psyche, to be "trained up in true femininitee" and taught in "all the lore of loue, and goodly womanhead" (III.vi.51). Spenser glosses over the earlier feud between Venus and Psyche that comes from a classical source, Apuleius' *The Golden Ass*. This may belong to the tradition of male literary sources, but not only is the work more ribald than refined, the central episode of *The Golden Ass* is the long allegory of the marriage of Cupid and Psyche recounted by a "crazy drunken old woman" (Apuleius 142). This moment and this text are important for a fuller reading of the Amoret/"Bluebeard" connection for several reasons: the tale of "Cupid and Psyche" is a variation and inversion of the "Bluebeard" tale-type, the old woman becomes a storyteller in Apuleius' male authored text, and the old woman's role is ambiguous within the larger context of the work, but most importantly the parallels between the old woman in *The Golden Ass* and the Old Woman Amoret encounters in the Cave of Lust are uncanny.<sup>iii</sup>

The "Cupid and Psyche" tale has some similarities with both the "Bluebeard" tale and the Busirane and Lust episodes, but another significant and more important moment is that

this intrusive and long tale is told in the very middle of Lucius' own autobiography in *The Golden Ass*. In this male-authored (Apuleius) and male-narrated (Lucius) text, the most widely known and longest uninterrupted narrative is the one recounted by a female, an unnamed old woman, who acts as what Karen E. Rowe calls a "frame tale-teller."<sup>iv</sup> In her study of the importance of the female "frame tale-tellers," the women who disseminate oral tales, Rowe focuses on such characters' ability to relate "at one level to a total culture, but at another level to a sisterhood of readers who will understand the hidden language, the secret revelation of tales" (305, 301). Men may write these tales down, but the "question of authorial identity becomes yet murkier" (305) because of the dual storyteller—the male writer and the female storyteller. After hearing the tale of "Cupid and Psyche," Lucius becomes covetous of the old woman's storytelling abilities, so he dismisses the work and the teller while wishing he had composed just such a tale: "Such was the tale told by the *drunken old woman* to the captive young girl. I stood not far off, grieving by Hercules! that I had no tablet and pen to note down so pretty a *nonsense*" (142, my emphases).

This is Spenser's very issue in integrating "Bluebeard" tales into the *Faerie Queene*. Spenser will use such fairy tales as source, but since he does have tablet and pen, he is able to silence the original female storyteller. Lamb writes on the original tellers of fairy tales in the early modern world: the "nurses," "women servants," and "mothers" of the young male writers (82). Lamb states that these actual women are often ignored, but some characters—such as Acrasia, the seductress, and Phaedria, the female storyteller—are vilified as "dangerously (or pleasurably) effeminizing" (91). The Old Woman is even more troubling as she represents the fairy tale teller Spenser encountered as a child, but Spenser as writer, vilifies and silences this female storyteller. Spenser becomes like Lucius, the male who enjoys the female's story so much he wishes to claim it as his own, and Apuleius, the male who appropriates a female oral source for his masculine work by including the female-storyteller, but also repressing her importance.

A consideration of the framework surrounding the old woman's tale of "Cupid and Psyche" in *The Golden Ass* is important in order to clarify the connection between Apuleius' old woman and Spenser's Old Woman. Apuleius' old woman is the "sole housekeeper of this crowd" of male robbers, employed as domestic help, but also a sort of den mother (Apuleius 92). After the robbers kidnap Charite on her wedding day and confine her in a cave, the old woman is given "instructions to sit at the prisoner's side and distract her with agreeable chat" (101, 102). The old woman listens to Charite's own story of her ruined wedding day and her kidnapping before stating, "I'll do my best to take your mind off your troubles with some

pretty fablings and old-wives' tales" (104). Marina Warner uses the old woman in *The Golden Ass* to discuss the female sources for the major male fairy tale writers, but also the "pedagogical function" of such tales as the "exchange[d] knowledge between an older voice of experience and a younger audience" (314). Apuleius' old woman acts as teacher, mother, comforter, and in her telling of "Cupid and Psyche," author of fairy tales.

The "Cupid and Psyche" narrative, as well as the framework tale of Charite's rape on her wedding day mirror both the Busirane and Lust episodes of Amoret's tale. Amoret is captured by Busirane during her wedding feast to the knight Scudamour, and is confined to a room within his enchanted home, where he charms her and makes her perform in a cruel Masque of Cupid nightly. Later, after Amoret is rescued from Busirane by the female knight, Britomart, she is captured by Lust and confined to a cave, where she meets the Old Woman. Both Spenserian episodes employ Tatar's recipe for "Bluebeard" tales: the forbidden chamber, the violent male, and the captive female victim (*The Classic Fairy Tales* 138-139).

Amoret, in Book IV.vii, is captured by Lust while in the care of Britomart. Amoret wanders from her protectress into the woods and is snatched up by the horrifyingly phallic figure of Lust and thrown into his cave to be raped and eaten. In Lust's cave, Amoret meets two other female captives: Aemylia and the unnamed Old Woman. Yet in this horrible condition, Dorothy Stephens points out, "the cave protects these women's intimate conversation even as it imprisons their bodies" (537). Stephens' assertion that female discourse is protected here furthers my own claim that the Old Woman exists as a fairy tale character and storyteller while she is in a fairy tale situation. Just as Apuleius' Charite was comforted by the tales of the old woman, Lust's cave becomes a space where men are excluded ("of God and man forgot") (Spenser IV.vii.14), but also a site where a community of women who share their stories is formed instead (Amoret has come to "augment their mone") (Spenser IV.vii.13). Outside of the cave, the site of female discourse and the dissemination of fairy tale knowledge, the Old Woman enters the realm of masculine epic and just disappears.

Amoret and Aemylia immediately become fast friends; but Aemylia has also previously befriended this Old Woman who is also restricted to Lust's cave. In the twenty days of Aemylia's imprisonment, Lust has raped, killed, and eaten seven women. Aemylia has been spared because of the Old Woman "distracts him and satisfies his appetites" (Kawanishi 442). Who then is this Old Woman? She remains unnamed, she is given no lines, and she appears in only the one canto. The Old Woman who appears briefly in this episode is easily categorized as allegorizing female lust, especially Spenser's abhorrence for post-

menopausal sexuality; yet her self-sacrificial interactions with the two captive virgins, Amoret and Aemelia, makes her appearance in the episode more ambiguous and problematic. She repeatedly subjects herself to forced sex in order to protect the two virgins from rape and cannibalism. The Old Woman is also so ambiguous because she does not only save the virtue of the damsels, she also seems to possibly enjoy the sex.

She should also be read, however, as a remnant of the fairy tale sources and feminine voices that inspired *The Faerie Queene*, especially the constant references to “Bluebeard” type fairy tales that make up the story of Amoret throughout her several adventures. In various versions of “Bluebeard” tales, the murderer has a female servant, often employed in cooking the dead females, but she also helps the heroine escape the same fate. In these tales, the old woman is ambiguously portrayed, as she is both accomplice and savior. Sometimes she has a third challenging function, as in Apuleius’ *Golden Ass*: storyteller.

Very few critics have commented on the Old Woman, and as I have stated previously, no one has realized her function as fairy tale character and fairy tale author. She is usually written off as representing female lust and non-reproductive sexuality when compared to the two innocent novices. Two of the critics who note her, Goldberg and Stephens, read this character in a surprisingly positive light. Goldberg, in his study of the endless “substitutions” within the *Faerie Queene*, reads the Old Woman as yet another double, a “further alter ego” who takes Aemylia’s place in bed with Lust (11, 57). Stephens lauds her as being “selfless” in her attempts to preserve Aemylia’s virginity and believes that Aemylia’s gratitude makes the reader see her with “admiration” instead of “censure” (537). We cannot read the Old Woman as simply as Goldberg does. Aemylia and Amoret are practically interchangeable— young, beautiful, virginal, but betrothed damsels-in-distress—but the Old Woman does not share any of their characteristics. Stephens admires the Old Woman and expects reader to do the same, but Spenser, via the lauded character of Belphoebe, expresses disgust.

So how should we read this character? The Old Woman should raise several questions: How long has she been in the cave? Was she already there when Aemylia was captured? Why isn’t she eaten? And despite Belphoebe’s disgust, why does she escape from the tale unpunished for excessive lust or unrewarded for her selflessness? I would argue that the Old Woman has always been in the cave. She is the female storyteller that Spenser encountered in his childhood, but he silences her as he appropriates her story and makes it epic in nature. She is also an imprisoned female frame tale-teller, while on yet another level she is the ambiguous old woman character found in several “Bluebeard” narratives.

Lamb asks if the *Faerie Queene* “displace[s] or appropriate[s] childhood fictions to redeem fiction itself for masculinity” or if Spenser places “classical works within a large fairy tale” (86). In the Amoret cycle taken as a whole, Spenser appears to do the latter, as Amoret’s tale is one variation of “Bluebeard” after another. The appearance of the Old Woman, who does not further Amoret’s nor Aemylia’s narratives, is disconcerting: she is included only to be inconsequential. This can be read as Spenser displacing and appropriating the material he learned from an uncredited female source to create a male epic, but this maternal figure emerges nonetheless.

As the embodiment of the female storyteller that Spenser encountered as a child, the Old Woman becomes part of the “‘maternal subtext,’ the imprint of mothering on the male psyche, the psychological presence of the mother whether or not mothers are literally represented as characters” (Kahn 35). Within the Amoret cycle, we have a superabundance of mothers and maternal substitutions: Chrysogene, Venus, Psyche, and Womanhood. The Old Woman is another protective maternal figure and she is another mother-as-teacher figure, but she is also ambiguously cast. This excessive community of mothers becomes a source of male anxiety, and Amoret is separated from each mother in order to become her own woman and enter the patriarchal institution of marriage, in hopes of becoming a mother herself one day.

As Stephens has demonstrated, even in the gynocentric Books III and IV, women are often secluded from one another; when they are together and separate from male company, their discourse is a cause of male anxiety. The Old Woman can be accused of instigating female discourse and Spenser punishes her appropriately by denying her a voice. We don’t know why she was captured: we are denied her narrative—unlike Aemylia who shares her story with Amoret within the Cave, and to Belpheobe and Arthur without, and Amoret whose relates her story again at several points (IV.vii.15-18, IV.vii.34, IV.viii.21). This is another substitution: Aemylia’s and Amoret’s stories replace the Old Woman’s tale.

Goldberg reads the Cave of Lust as a site “in which narration and loss continuously and variously, and quite overtly, meet the shape of desire. Repeatedly, the desire takes the form of the wish to hear someone else’s story, to enter it compassionately, and to be lost in it because the other’s story is one’s own as well” (56). Aemylia is a double of Amoret in that she has been stolen from her lover by Lust before they were to elope, and both resemble Apuleius’ heroine Charite in this respect. W.H. Hendereen states that Aemylia’s story, introduced “*in media res*, through the framing narrative of Amoret... supplant[s] Aemylia from the center of her own story and makes her an aspect of Amoret” (9). I agree with

Goldberg that these three women all become versions of one another, and each becomes the female storyteller that Spenser apprehensively recognizes momentarily only to deny and reappropriate.

The old woman is denied the role of fairy tale provider which the similar old woman in *The Golden Ass* occupies. Spenser silences her, but not completely: Aemylia states that Amoret will “augment our mone,” implying that there was a feminine discourse between Aemylia and the Old Woman before Amoret’s appearance, and the ambiguous use of “each other” shortly after Aemylia’s conversation could indicate a conversation between Amoret and Aemylia, or even amongst the three women: “Thus of their euils as they did discourse, / And each did other much bewaile and mone” (IV.vii.20). Even after Amoret flees, but before Belphoebe frees the captives, she hears within the cave “some little whispering, and soft groning sound”: Aemylia and the Old Woman are still conversing, but the reader and Belphoebe are excluded from knowing the conversation.

Daniela Hempen writes of this very type of ambiguous old woman character who appears in several “Bluebeard” tale types, most famously, the Brothers Grimm’s “Castle of Murder” and “The Robber Bridegroom.” In these tales, the heroine encounters an old woman who is prisoner of the Bluebeard character—in fact, “her whole existence is restricted to this very chamber,” and she performs a “travesty of typical female household tasks” (Hempen 45, 47). Yet she is also allowed an “uncanny intimacy which is almost beyond words” with the male captor, and she acts a mediator between the “male murderer and his female victims” (46, 47). The old woman wants to escape and succeeds with the heroine’s help after she has helped the heroine in some sense. Then, “she quietly disappears from the scene” (46). This is almost the very description of the Old Woman in Lust’s cave.

The Old Woman in the Cave of Lust episode also disappears abruptly. Amoret escapes from the cave, leaving the other two women behind. Belphoebe rescues Aemylia and the Old Woman. Stephens states that outside of the protective matrix of the cave, the Old Woman becomes a “‘hag,’ who incurs both Belphoebe’s and the narrator’s contempt. The burden of disgust has moved from a male rapist to one of his captives. No one defends her; the poem does not refer to her again” (538). Why is Belphoebe moved to hatred of this woman who has saved two women? The obvious allegorical reading is that Belphoebe, the champion of virginity, finds this Old Woman as guilty of lust as Lust himself. The Old Woman is described after her rescue—and through the narrative lens of Belphoebe—as a “foule and lothsome creature,” and a “leman fit for such a louer deare” (IV.vii.34). Here, she

is fully vilified and becomes a female counterpart of Lust, but Aemylia never uses such derogatory terms for the Old Woman.

An alternative reading, more favourable to the old woman, would situate Belpheobe in the realm of male literature. She is a perfect mortal representative of Diana and belongs to the literature that Lamb claims transformed early modern boys into men, “myths, epics, [and] the histories of the classical world” (84) while the Old Woman and Amoret belong to the feminine realm of fairy tales. Belpheobe cannot recognize the significance of this literature and therefore cannot recognize nor tolerate the importance of a fairy tale teller or character. This also explains why she does not recognize her own twin sister: Amoret also belongs in the world of fairy tale, not of epic romance. When the Old Woman disappears, the last reference to “Bluebeard” or any other fairy tale also vanishes.

Therefore, the Old Woman is not loathed purely for her vicious sexuality, but she is also chastised because she is the purveyor of the old wives’ tales that create fear amongst a female audience. Spenser repeatedly tries to reject her authority among women by vilifying the Old Woman and denying her any lines within the text. However, her power as the female voice that tells the fairy tales that permeate this male-authored epic cannot be denied. This understanding of the Old Woman’s multiple significances, as female storyteller within and without the text as well as her ambiguous role within both “Bluebeard” variants and the *Faerie Queene*, demonstrates Spenser’s anxiety in using fairy tale as source in his epic.

Moreover, Spenser seems to remain apprehensive about allowing Amoret to become purely a fairy tale heroine. Like the Old Woman, whose true function as fairy tale character and storyteller within and without the tale is marginalized, Amoret is abruptly removed from the text when we expect her to reunite with her husband Scudamour in Book IV. Instead, what we are given is Scudamour’s story of his winning of Amoret. Stephens states that instead of the expected reunion, “it inexplicably replaces the bride’s presence with the bridegroom’s story of their courtship” (539). Goldberg claims that Amoret is reduced to “a figure in Scudamour’s tale rather than as his regained bride” (108). If we read Amoret’s story as “Bluebeard,” the omission of the reunion does not become a slip-up on Spenser’s part, but rather an explicit male reappropriation of fairy tale as source. Scudamour is Busirane, and therefore also Bluebeard, the fairy tale villain who removed Amoret from her happy home; and he is also Spenser, the male writer who continuously employs fairy tale, but rewrites Amoret’s story from the male viewpoint in the decidedly masculine genre of epic. Amoret, like the Old Woman in the Cave of Lust, is silenced as a character and abruptly removed from the epic text. She is rewritten by her husband, not as the fairy tale heroine, but

as a passive epic heroine to better suit Scudamour's and Spenser's ideals of the male authored text.

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<sup>i</sup> It is impossible to know exactly what version of "Bluebeard" Spenser was familiar with as whatever version Spenser knew was only circulated as an oral text. This lack of a material text makes this study at times anachronistic and possibly tenuous. I refer to "Bluebeard" tales by using the title of the most famous variant, Charles Perrault's "Bluebeard" or "Le Barbe Bleue" from *Histoires ou Contes du tempe passé* (1697). The late date of publication is problematic to any study on Spenser's use of fairy tales in his works; however, several critics cite at least one of these later fairy tales (usually "Mr. Fox") as a source for the Busyrane episode (Doyle, Gardner, Lamb).

<sup>ii</sup> For the most thorough reading of the "Busirane" episode as a version of "Bluebeard," see Marianne Micros's "Robber Bridegrooms and Devoured Brides: The Influence of Folktales on Spenser's Busirane and Isis Church Episodes." She concisely works through how and why Spenser uses

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“Bluebeard” as depicting the rituals of marriage and the threshold crossing of Spenser’s female characters into the married realm. Although she includes the Brothers Grimm’s “The Robber Bridegroom” as one of her “Bluebeard” sources, she neglects the old woman in that tale altogether!

<sup>iii</sup> Maria Tatar states that the “three distinctive features of Bluebeard narratives” are “a forbidden chamber, an agent of prohibition who also metes out punishments, and a figure who violates the prohibition” (*The Classic Fairy Tales* 138-39). The ancient tale of “Cupid and Psyche” has all three elements. Psyche lives in Cupid’s “palace built... by divine power” and she is allowed to explore every room, but the “forbidden chamber” in this tale is the face of Psyche’s husband. Cupid makes this prohibition as he has secretly wed the maiden despite his mother’s jealousy and he is attempting to protect her from the goddess’s wrath. Psyche, egged on by her sisters, violates her vow by sneaking up on the sleeping Cupid and holding a lantern in the darkened bedroom to see her husband for the first time. Cupid keeps his promise/metes out his punishment by abandoning his beloved wife. After arduous tasks and punishments—mostly doled out by Venus—the lovers are reunited.

<sup>iv</sup> Rowe believes that the female “frame tale-teller” par excellence is Scheherazade, the storyteller of *The Thousand and One Nights*. Maria Tatar wonders if “*The Thousand and One Nights* inspired ‘Bluebeard’ or contaminated it, or whether it simply stands as an Oriental counterpart, is not clear” (Tatar, *Secrets* 63). What is clear is that the tales have striking similarities: the husband who weds, beds, and beheads a succession of wives, and the singular wife (the unnamed “Bluebeard’s wife” and Scheherazade) who break the cycle of violence, the former by eliminating the husband, the latter by “satisfying” her husband “sexually and intellectually” (Tatar, *Secrets* 63).