Helmets off: Spenser's Britomart and Radigund Unveiled

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HELMETS OFF: SPENSER’S BRITOMART AND RADIGUND UNVEILED

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Of the Requirements for the Degree of
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Lorette Courchaine
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ABSTRACT

In *The Faerie Queene* Edmund Spenser portrays two women, Britomart and Radigund, whom critics often interpret as binary opposites. The chaste Britomart, they argue, represents the qualities of the proper woman, whereas Radigund, the Amazon queen who has usurped power from men, represents lust and tyranny.

Interpretations of this type fail because they discount the many similarities shared by the two women, who are both derived from Ariosto's Bradamante, a strong, assertive, woman who defies gender definition in *Orlando Furioso*. Concerned that his conservative readers would reject a strong heroine, Spenser splits Bradamante into two women, Britomart and Radigund, but Spenser's fascination with Bradamante forces him to surreptitiously supply Britomart with Bradamante's strong characteristics and show only ostensible disapproval of Radigund. Spenser approves of both women, who each excel in combat, demonstrate leadership, and exhibit both vanity and jealousy.

Moreover, both Britomart and Radigund are exceptionally beautiful, a fact revealed when they are unveiled in scenes that imitate Bradamante's unveiling at the castle of Tristan in *Orlando Furioso*. Because Britomart wears the armor of a knight, other characters in *The Faerie Queene* assume her to be male. During one unveiling episode, Britomart's helmet falls away, revealing her beauty to her opponent, Artegall, the knight of justice. Immediately inspired by her beauty, Artegall worships her as divinity. In a similar scene, Artegall combats Radigund, whose helmet he removes, and upon seeing her beauty, Artegall submits to her rather than kill her.

The episodes where Britomart and Radigund fight Artegall parallel each other. The similarities between the two scenes firmly connect the two women; both stand strong against Artegall initially, but eventually tire while he endures. Both are unveiled, and the beauty of each produces the same response in their opponent. He yields to both. Spenser describes the beauty of the two with similar images, revealing that he is as attracted to Radigund as he is to Britomart.
HELMETS OFF:

SPENSER’S BRITOMART AND RADIGUND UNVEILED
In Italo Calvino’s *The Nonexistent Knight*, the young warrior Raimbaut is aided in battle by the periwinkle knight, who, when the fighting is won, refuses to acknowledge Raimbaut’s words of thanks and spurs away. Angered by this evasion, Raimbaut seeks the knight, and when he eventually finds “him,” she has “pushed the head forward and the behind back and beg[u]n quietly and proudly to pee. She was a woman of harmonious moons, tender plumage, and gentle waves. Raimbaut fell head over heels in love with her on the spot” (46). Upon seeing the undressed periwinkle knight, named Bradamante, Raimbaut’s anger melts, replaced by amorous desire.

This humorous episode is reminiscent of three Renaissance scenes where a knight is unveiled to reveal the beauty of a woman: Ariosto’s Bradamante removes her helmet in the castle of Tristan, and both Spenser’s Britomart and Radigund are unveiled when their helmets come off during separate battles with Artegall. While the “harmonious moons” of the Renaissance women are not revealed, the beauty of their faces is described with celestial imagery, and each unmask in situations where her beauty plays a prominent role. Bradamante and Britomart unveil several times, at times revealing their beauty to their future spouses, Ruggiero and Artegall. The beauty of Bradamante and Britomart inspires immediate adoration and love in their suitors. In addition, Artegall, awed by Radigund’s beauty the moment he sees her face, submits to her. By describing Raimbaut’s instant infatuation with Bradamante’s back side, Calvino parodies this Renaissance motif. Since Ariosto
wrote before Spenser and since Calvino borrows the name of Ariosto's lady, Calvino is imitating Ariosto rather than Spenser, but in doing so, he is like Spenser, for Spenser borrows heavily from his Italian predecessor, frequently alluding to and imitating him.

Ariosto's strong, assertive, masculine heroine attracts Spenser. Bradamante is beautiful and graceful, yet she defies gender definition. Her vibrant character entices Spenser, who admires both her masculine and feminine qualities. However, Spenser realizes that Bradamante, as an amalgam of strong and submissive characteristics, is culturally questionable. Because he is writing for a conservative readership that fears strong women, Spenser cannot openly appear to endorse masculine characteristics in women. To alleviate his audience's fears about strong women, Spenser portrays a Britomart who appears less questionable than Bradamante and creates another character, the Amazon queen Radigund, who represents Bradamante's strong characteristics. Like Bradamante, Radigund is strong, beautiful, and defiant of gender definition. Spenser openly portrays domineering characteristics in Radigund, who forces men to dress and live like women, and shows her consequent destruction by Britomart, who appears more submissive and whom many consider to be a figure of Elizabeth, who cast herself as an exception to the accepted rule that women should obey men.

Although Spenser divides Bradamante into two women, he undermines the idea that women should be only feminine by showing only ostensible
disapproval of Radigund. Furthermore, Spenser surreptitiously supplies Britomart with Radigund’s strong characteristics and Radigund with Britomart’s soft characteristics. Once Britomart kills Radigund, she completely assumes the Amazon’s strong characteristics. She is no longer Bradamante minus her culturally questionable characteristics; she is Bradamante. Neither is she a figure of Elizabeth; she represents every woman. Because they share both the grace and the assertiveness of Bradamante, Spenser approves of both Britomart and Radigund.

Critics see Spenser’s approval of Britomart, but they fail to see that he approves of Radigund and of strong characteristics in all women. Moreover, critics fail to recognize that Spenser surreptitiously supplies Britomart with the qualities he appears to disapprove of in Radigund. A few critical studies will be discussed herein, followed by an examination of Spenser’s use of Ariosto, and finally, a reading of the text arguing that both Britomart and Radigund exhibit strong qualities derived from Bradamante.

Spenser’s approval of Britomart and his ostensible disapproval of Radigund have led critics to interpret Britomart as proper and Radigund as improper. For example, in “Bondage and Deliverance in the Faerie Queene: Varieties of a Moral Imperative,” J. C. Gray says that “both in her physical beauty and her role as a female warrior, [Radigund] closely resembles Britomart, but in that she uses her beauty and her arms to debase warriors and to pervert their heroic seeking of virtue, she is really an antitype to Britomart” (10).
antitype to Britomart, Radigund, argues Gray, illustrates the unacceptable woman warrior.

Several critics observe that Artegall, the knight of justice, succumbs to error, including lust, which is represented by Radigund, and must be freed from this susceptibility, which is accomplished by Britomart. T. K. Dunseath is one such critic. In Spenser’s Allegory of Justice in Book Five of The Faerie Queene, Dunseath argues that Artegall, the knight of justice, has several internal problems:

Spenser’s plotting of his hero’s character reveals a keen understanding of psychology...for just as [Artegall’s] estimation of his own abilities increases, his power of self-control declines....The deterioration of his character is a slow process, a sad chronicle of a descent into a hellish discord of the passions. (86)

Dunseath argues that this descent culminates in Artegall’s surrender to Radigund. As Hercules fell to concupiscence when he submitted to Omphale, Artegall willfully submits to Radigund, thereby falling to lust. Artegall’s error, Dunseath argues is a “happy fall” that enables him to “prove his love for Britomart” by rejecting Radigund’s advances through her servant Clarin and remaining faithful to Britomart during his bondage (142). Dunseath contrasts Radigund “whose schemes would remove Artegall’s galling chains only to wrap him securely in the toils of endless despair” with a “loving Britomart, whose heroic efforts would free him from enslavement” (141). According to Dunseath, Radigund inspires lust and would have Artegall as a love slave, thereby excluding him from his duties as the knight of justice. In contrast, Dunseath
argues, Britomart inspires Artegaill with proper love, and when he succumbs to
lust, Britomart corrects his error by killing Radigund, releasing her prisoners,
including Artegaill, and restoring order to Radegone. Finally, Dunseath observes
that when it is time for Artegaill to resume his quest, Britomart bids him farewell.
Unlike Radigund, Britomart will not prohibit the completion of Artegaill’s duties by
binding him to her physically or emotionally.

Dunseath’s argument, however, fails because it reduces Britomart and
Radigund to mere representations of good and bad: the good woman, Britomart,
courages Artegaill without overstepping her bounds, whereas the bad woman,
Radigund, subjects Artegaill to imprisonment, thereby impeding his mission.
Dunseath mistakenly believes that Spenser’s ostensible disapproval of
Radigund is real. He fails to see that Britomart assumes Radigund’s strong
characteristics.

In addition to arguing that Britomart is an instrument of instruction,
Dunseath argues that the lady knight must overcome weakness. When Artegaill
does not return as he promised he would, Britomart assumes that he has
betrayed her, imagining that he has forsaken her for another lover. “[Britomart’s]
jealousy and her doubts of [Artegaill’s] constancy,” says Dunseath, “are
inappropriate to a woman whose mission is to help continue the British nation”
(143). Dunseath argues that, like Artegaill, Britomart must undergo trials
whereby her character will be strengthened so that she can free the imprisoned
Artegaill. “Her basic problem,” Dunseath says, “is one of perception. . . . She is
fondly led by the vision of [Artegall’s] natural beauty” (166). Dunseath argues that Britomart, like Artegall, must undergo character growth and that her growth is completed in the Temple of Isis when she receives a vision “not given to the outward eye of nature but to the inward eye of the spirit, the intellective soul” (177). As a result, when Artegall leaves her the second time, Britomart “has all the attributes of a perfect wife” (181). Dunseath perceives Britomart as a girl who overcomes her infatuation with beauty, maturing into an exemplar of womanhood. While Dunseath recognizes that Britomart’s character is not stagnant, he still insists that she is the good woman, “a perfect wife,” and by doing so, he oversimplifies her character.

Dunseath is not the only critic who refuses to acknowledge that Spenser approves of both Britomart and Radigund. In *Icons of Justice: Iconography and Thematic Imagery in Book V of The Faerie Queene*, Jane Aptekar also argues that Artegall succumbs to lust. Comparing Artegall’s imprisonment by Radigund to Hercules’ enslavement by Omphale, Aptekar argues that “the bondage of men to women should be taken as symbolizing the bondage of man to lust” (177). Unlike Dunseath, who argues that Artegall is completely faithful to Britomart, Aptekar questions Artegall’s fidelity. Aptekar observes that in the sixteenth century “‘will’ meant sexual desire (and even both male and female sexual organs)” (175). Focusing on Spenser’s use of the word “will,” Aptekar cites passages from the battle between Artegall and Radigund:

after by abandoning his sword
He wilfull lost, that he before attained. (V, v, 17)
Then tooke the Amazon this noble knight,
Left to her will by his own wilfull blame (V, v, 20)

Aptekar argues that Spenser’s wording implies Artegall and Radigund engage in sexual intercourse and that by surrendering to Radigund, Artegall surrenders to the temptations of Pleasure. However, Aptekar credits Artegall with eventually making the right choice, “Britomart and virtue” (183). Like Dunseath, Aptekar reduces the two women to representations of virtue and vice.

While Aptekar indicates that Britomart and Radigund represent the opposition between sexual desire and proper restraint, she especially focuses on how the two women represent different aspects of justice. Aptekar argues that “Book V is concerned, in the first place... with justice’s relationship to God; it is also concerned, more ambiguously, with justice’s place in the ambivalent traditions connected with force and fraud, and with Hercules” (6). Aptekar argues that Artegall, as the knight of justice, “executes not the merciful justice of ladies... but the rigorous, righteously wrathful justice which typically emanates from Jove’s judgment seat” (20). Aptekar recognizes the legitimacy of this justice, but she argues that it is “oversevere” and needs to be balanced with equity (54). For Aptekar, this is Britomart’s main function in the text. She represents equity, and her eventual marriage to Artegall will represent the union of rigorous justice and equity. Indicating that Britomart, inasmuch as she represents equity, is also equated with Mercilla, Aptekar argues Britomart’s union with Artegall partially illustrates justice’s relationship to God.
Justice's relationship with fraud, according to Aptekar, is evident in, and confused by, Artegall's relationship with Radigund. Aptekar argues that Radigund represents guile because she sets "legal traps for the unwary and honorable" and "vanquishes [Artegall] through a woman's unfair ruse, disarming him with her beauty" (131). Aptekar indicates that guile opposes justice, yet she argues that Artegall, the knight of justice, employs fraud after his imprisonment by Radigund: "From the point of his entrapment by Radigund, however, a number of dubious shades appear in his character. He uses methods and engages in activities which do not at all befit an ideal judge or king" (119).

Whereas Aptekar interprets Britomart's relationship with Artegall as the union of equity and rigorous justice, she argues that Radigund's relationship with Artegall confuses his role as an executor of justice. Aptekar equates Britomart with equity, a powerful and positive complement to justice, and she equates Radigund with guile, saying her association with the knight of justice obscures his identification as such. Here again, Aptekar forces contrasting abstractions upon the two women. Whether she argues Britomart and Radigund represent virtue and vice or equity and fraud, her argument is limited, like Dunseath's, because it constricts our understanding of Spenser's woman warriors.

Agreeing with elements found in Dunseath and Aptekar, Angus Fletcher, in *The Prophetic Moment: An Essay on Spenser*, argues that "Spenser involves Artegall in an ongoing evolution of justice" (158). Fletcher agrees with Dunseath that Artegall's character develops as he is involved in the varying episodes
which delay the fulfillment of his quest. And Fletcher agrees with Aptekar that Artegall’s marriage to Britomart partially represents the union of justice and equity. He argues that Spenser’s one-sided characters are often prematurely united and that that union “must be undone, destroyed, or transcended so that they [these unions] may be re-enacted in more adequate form in a later, more appropriate phase of relationship” (87). Thus, Fletcher argues, when Artegall first agrees to marry Britomart his promise is premature because he has not fully developed as the knight of justice. This development, according to Fletcher, is completed during the Radigund episode. As the knight of justice, Artegall must obey the laws dictated by nature. Since Radigund has “shaken off the shamefast band, / With which wise Nature did her strongly bynd” (V, v, 25), Fletcher says she is a tyrant, enforcing laws that suit her pleasure and contradict the dictates of nature. Fletcher continues by arguing that when Artegall agrees to fight Radigund according to her rules and when he submits to her, preferring to live in slavery as a woman rather than kill an opponent of nature’s law, he ceases to fulfill his role as the knight of justice. Fletcher explains: “When [Artegall] submits to Radigund. . . . he is being tested in another Stoic framework, in that Radigund has laws which as pure command must be obeyed, which yet defy the larger dictates of wisdom and reason and in that sense are inequitable” (175). Fletcher interprets Radigund’s function in the poem as instructional. By succumbing to her, Artegall learns that not all laws should be obeyed; only those dictated by a proper lawmaker, who possesses genuine god-
given authority, should be upheld. Fletcher thus diminishes Radigund, arguing that she represents unnatural law, and he fails to see Spenser's approval of her.

For Fletcher, Britomart represents the “right use” of power when she reestablishes order at Radegone (174). Fletcher agrees with Aptekar that Britomart represents equity, and he argues that the “rule of peace can only succeed a formative period when social banditry, then law, then equity create a climate for abundance.” Fletcher believes that “the hero able to go beyond law and justice is a culture bringer” (193). United with Britomart, Artegall is united with equity, enabling him to create culture. For Fletcher, the union of these two knights represents creation because their union will produce children and because, united with equity, Artegall will be a “culture bringer, a Theseus, a Hercules, an Osiris” (193). As does Aptekar, Fletcher equates Britomart with equity, a complement to justice. Having labeled each of Spenser's women with an abstraction, Fletcher, like Dunseath and Aptekar, reduces the two women, oversimplifying their characters, ignoring their internal complexity, and failing to see that Spenser sympathizes with Radigund.

For Fletcher, Dunseath, and Aptekar, Britomart represents the right choice for Artegall, Radigund the wrong. Although they highlight varying aspects of the relationships among these three characters, these critics agree on one crucial point: when Britomart bears arms, she acts with permission, but when Radigund does the same, she commits a crime against nature. By portraying Britomart as a figure of Elizabeth, critics argue, Spenser gives her
permission to act in a male world, which he denies Radigund. In “The
Construction of Gender and the Cultural and Political Other in The Faerie
Queene 5 and A View of the Present State of Ireland,” Clare Carroll observes,
“Britomart as a figure of Elizabeth is unlike other women. The chastity of
Elizabeth and Britomart is distinguished from Radigund’s ‘licentious libertie.’
Elizabeth and Britomart are capable of lawful rule because ‘the heavens them lift
to lawful soueraintie’ (5.5.25.9)” (184). As the knight of justice, critics conclude,
Artegall has no other choice but to choose Britomart.

Critics fail to see that Spenser approves of both Britomart and Radigund
and that both women exhibit both masculine and feminine characteristics, in
part, because they do not adequately consider Spenser’s source. Spenser
derives both Britomart and Radigund from Ariosto’s Bradamante. Fearing that
his readers may be uncomfortable with a strong, domineering heroine, Spenser
portrays a Britomart who appears less masculine than Bradamante, and he
creates Radigund to depict her more “questionable” characteristics. But while
this separation, at least in theory, lends itself to the type of interpretations
promoted by Dunseath, Aptekar, and Fletcher, these interpretations ultimately
fail because Spenser infuses both women with Bradamante’s questionable as
well as her laudable characteristics.

The connections between Bradamante and Britomart are many and
obvious. First, the magician Merlin tells both of them that they are descended
from Trojan blood, that they will soon marry, and that their children will be great.
In canto 3 of *Orlando Furioso*, Merlin tells Bradamante, “From your womb shall spring the fruitful issue destined to bring honour to Italy and to all mankind” (22). In the *Faerie Queene*, Merlin tells Britomart, “From thy wombe a famous Progenie shall spring” (III, iii, 22). This progeny, Merlin continues, will defend Britain (III, iii, 23). Both Bradamante and Britomart will be mothers to great dynasties that will be important to their nations. In addition, Merlin tells both women that fortune favors them and that nothing will prevent their ensuing marriages. Ariosto’s Merlin says, “To give effect, therefore, to Heaven’s will which has from all time appointed you to be Ruggiero’s wife, pursue your way with courage - for nothing shall intervene to upset this decree” (22). Spenser borrows this same encouragement; his Merlin tells Britomart that God will effect her marriage:

It was not, Britomart, thy wandring eye,  
Glauncing vnwares, in charmed looking glas,  
But the streight course of heauenly destiny,  
Led with eternall prouidence, that has  
Guided thy glaunce, to bring his will to pas:  
Ne is thy fate, ne is thy fortune ill,  
To loue the prowest knight, that euer was.  
Therefore submit thy wayes vnto his will,  
And do by all dew meanes thy destiny fulfill.  
(III, iii, 24)

To Ariosto’s words of encouragement, Spenser adds an admonition. In the last two lines, Merlin tells Britomart to submit to “his will,” but the antecedent for the possessive pronoun is vague. The closest possible antecedent is “the prowest knight,” Artegall, but Spenser may be telling Britomart to submit to “heauenly destiny.” While Spenser clearly imitates Ariosto to connect Britomart with
Bradamante, he alters the original scene. His lady is not told to go “with courage”; rather, she is told to be submissive. By having Merlin tell Britomart to be submissive, Spenser pacifies his audience, but by using a vague possessive pronoun, Spenser surreptitiously has Merlin tell Britomart to submit to destiny, but not necessarily to Artegall.

Second, both Bradamante and Britomart exhibit fits of jealousy. When Ruggiero does not return as promised, Bradamante fears that he has forsaken her for Marfisa. She meets a knight who, falsely believing rumors he has heard, confirms her fear. Bradamante, immediately “bursting with furious rage and jealousy,” returns to her home, falls upon her bed, and stuffs her mouth with bedding to muffle her cries of sorrow (387). Like Bradamante, Britomart is suspicious of Artegall when he fails to rendezvous with her, and like Bradamante, Britomart hears that her lover is bound by another woman. But Spenser comments that Britomart did not “lament with loude alew, / As women wont, but with deepe sighes, and singulfs few” (V, vi, 13). Spenser seems to here distinguish between Bradamante and Britomart, but the distinction is thin: Britomart, he says, “kicks, and squals, and shriekes for fell despight” (V, vi, 14).

The women again act similarly, but not identically, when they contemplate action against their “false” lovers. Bradamante considers committing suicide but decides that she would prefer to “go into battle where [she] might die with greater honour” (388). Britomart, in contrast, never considers suicide, and while she considers seeking Artegall to fight him, she chooses against this action; she
leaves only because she learns that Artegall, unlike Ruggiero, is in captivity and needs her assistance. By assuming the role of rescuer, Britomart is reactive. In contrast, Bradamante is an active seeker of honor and glory. Spenser distinguishes Britomart from Bradamante to alleviate his readers’ concerns about strong women, but as we shall see, he later supplies Britomart with masculine characteristics.

The most important connections between Bradamante and Britomart, however, are derived from Ariosto’s castle of Tristan episode. The law of Tristan demands that only the strongest knight and the most attractive lady may lodge therein; the lord of the castle refuses safety to lesser knights and less beautiful ladies. Multiple knights and multiple women may be admitted only when they arrive together and if they can prove their superiority over any who may have arrived earlier. By categorizing knights only in terms of prowess and ladies only in terms of appearance, the law of the castle enforces stereo-typed gender roles. When Bradamante arrives at Tristan, she fights three kings, thereby winning a night’s lodging. After securing this lodging and entering the castle, Bradamante removes her helmet, and her hair falls down, revealing her beauty and causing her host to guess her identity. Ariosto emphasizes Bradamante’s beauty by describing her with celestial imagery: “As when...the Sun shows his face, clear and serene, through the clouds: so the damsel, lifting the helmet from her face, showed as it were a glimpse of paradise” (392). Bradamante’s beauty concerns her host because he deems Bradamante to be more beautiful than Ullania, a
woman who arrived earlier. He orders that Ullania must leave, but Bradamante argues that Ullania should not be forced to leave since she, Bradamante, asked for and won lodging on the basis of her combat skills, not her beauty. Bradamante argues: “Why do you want to attribute the female sex to me when all my actions have been a man’s?” (395). Bradamante contests that her merit should be determined by her actions, not her appearance. Bradamante secured lodging by combat, and the lodging of Ullania, she argues, should not be a matter of debate. During this scene Bradamante shows her contempt for traditional gender roles by refusing to allow her host to label her as female. In the castle of Tristan episode, Bradamante exhibits excellence in fighting and excellence in debate. Here, she is at her strongest; by demonstrating skill in combat and persuasion in speech, Bradamante fills a traditionally masculine role and refuses to be defined by her gender. Ironically, she depicts this strong masculinity in one of the few scenes where she unveils, simultaneously revealing her femininity.

This portrait of Bradamante intrigues Spenser. Fascinated by her appearance at Tristan, he repeatedly imitates this episode, and these imitations are crucial to an understanding of both Britomart and Radigund. Yes, Britomart and Bradamante both learn from Merlin whom they will marry, and both become exceedingly jealous, of Radigund and Marfisa, respectively. But these similarities are incidental to the more significant ones derived from the Tristan episode. Spenser continually comes back to this scene, but while he is attracted
to Bradamante, he fears his readers will reject a heroine as assertive as Ariosto's, so he creates Britomart, who appears less strong and assertive than Bradamante, and Radigund, to whom he shows only ostensible disapproval.

Crucial to an understanding of Britomart and Radigund is an analysis of how Spenser imitates Ariosto. The Italian author's castle of Tristan episode provides the basis for five scenes in Spenser, found in Book III, canto i; Book III, canto ix; Book IV, canto i; Book IV, canto vi; and, finally, in Book V, canto v. Spenser first imitates the castle of Tristan episode when Britomart travels to Castle Joyous in Book III, canto i. When Britomart arrives at Castle Joyous, she sees six knights battling against one. Questioning the cause of their dissension, Britomart learns that a law dictates that every knight traveling near must pay service to the lady who lives within the castle. If the knight already has a lady, he must forsake her in favor of the lady of the castle, Malecasta, or he must prove in combat against six knights that his lady is fairer. If he defeats the six knights, he wins the favors of Malecasta as a reward. Hearing this, Britomart declares that she will not pay service to the lady of the castle, though she defeats the six knights. Having lost the battle, the knights "[Britomart] besought, well as they might, / To enter in, and reape the dew reward: / She graunted, and then in they all together far'd" (III, i, 29). This battle scene connects the episode with Orlando Furioso, for like Bradamante, Britomart earns entrance into the castle by success in combat. And while the law of Castle Joyous does not prohibit multiple groups of guests, the law does deem it necessary to judge
between the beauty of Malecasta and the ladies of knights who travel there. Once inside Castle Joyous, Britomart, like Bradamante before her, unveils but does not reveal her gender. Here Spenser echoes Ariosto, using celestial imagery to describe Britomart's beauty as Ariosto did to describe Bradamante's beauty:

As when faire Cynthia, in darkesome night,  
Is in a noyous cloud enueleoped,  
Where she may find the substaunce thin and light,  
Breakes forth her siluer beames, and her bright hed  
Discouers to the world discomfited;  
Of the poore traueller, that went astray,  
With thousand blessings she is heried;  
Such was the beautie and the shining ray,  
With which faire Britomart gaue light vnto the day. (Ill, I, 43)

While Spenser uses moon imagery rather than sun imagery, the imitation of Ariosto is unquestionable. Spenser compares Britomart's beauty to the moon coming out from behind a cloud; Ariosto compares Bradamante's beauty to the sun showing "his face, clear and serene, through the clouds" (392).

Having connected Castle Joyous with the castle of Tristan, Spenser imitates another scene from Orlando Furioso to indicate that Britomart is more chaste than her Italian predecessor. Fearing his English readers may be uncomfortable with the strong Bradamante of the Tristan episode, Spenser imitates a different scene from Ariosto where he feels Bradamante exhibits moral laxity. In canto 25, Bradamante falls asleep dressed in armor, but without her helmet, which she has lost. A Spanish princess named Fiordispina finds Bradamante and, assuming that she is male, falls in love with her. When
 Bradamante awakens, she explains to Fiordispina that she is female. Her passion unrelieved by the knowledge of Bradamante’s gender, Fiordispina invites the lady knight to visit her castle. Bradamante agrees, and during her stay there, she sleeps in the same bed with her hostess. Spenser imitates this episode with important changes in the Castle Joyous episode. When Britomart enters Castle Joyous she does not reveal her gender, and Malecasta, like Fiordispina, assumes Britomart to be male and lusts after her. After Britomart retires, Malecasta sneaks into the former’s room and climbs into her bed. Feeling someone next to her, Britomart jumps out of bed and grabs her weapon. Malecasta screams, and her knights rush into the room. Slightly injured in the ensuing fight, Britomart and Redcrosse defeat Malecasta’s knights and immediately leave Castle Joyous (III, i, 59-65).

Having connected Britomart with Bradamante by the battle episode and the unveiling scene at Castle Joyous, Spenser distinguishes between the two, for Britomart will not willingly lie next to Malecasta as Bradamante lies next to Fiordispina. Spenser’s knight of chastity is, in fact, so repulsed by the situation that she fights and flees rather than humor Malecasta. While Spenser intends his readers to see a connection between his lady knight and Ariosto’s, he also intends his readers to see a distinction between them. Although she does not engage in sexual behavior with Fiordispina, Bradamante agrees to sleep next to her. Britomart, in contrast, is repulsed by such an arrangement.
Spenser imitates Ariosto’s castle of Tristan episode a second time in Book III when Britomart travels in canto ix to the castle of Malbecco, a man who refuses guests because he does not want anyone to see the beauty of his lady. Malbecco initially refuses lodging to Britomart and two other knights but admits them after they decide to force entry. As in Ariosto’s castle of Tristan where Bradamante wins lodging by force, Britomart gains admittance through prowess. And again, beauty is a reason used to deny admittance. Moreover, Spenser imitates Ariosto’s unveiling scene when Britomart removes her helmet inside Malbecco’s castle:

Tho whenas vailed was her loftie crest,
Her golden locks, that were in tramels gay
Vpbounden, did them selues adowne display,
And raught vnto her heeles; like sunny beames,
That in a cloud their light did long time stay,
Their vapour vaded, shew their golden gleames,
And through the persant aire shoote forth their azure streames.
(III, ix, 20)

This time, Britomart’s beauty is compared to the sun moving out from behind a cloud, the very imagery Ariosto uses to describe Bradamante.

Spenser continues this scene by using a simile to compare Britomart to Minerva recently returned from battle with the Giants. Alarmed by Britomart’s appearance, the guests at Malbecco’s castle

Stood gazing, as if suddein great affright
Had them surprised. At last auizing right,
Her goodly personage and glorious hew,
Which they so much mistooke, they tooke delight
In their first errour, and yet still anew
With wonder of her beauty fed their hungry vew. (III, ix, 23).
By showing the guests reconsidering their fear, this stanza both undercuts Britomart's association with Minerva and emphasizes her appearance. Spenser includes these cantos to distance himself from Ariosto, whose Bradamante insists that the guests of Tristan's castle focus on her prowess, not her beauty. While the passage continues to say that the guests marvel at Britomart's chivalry and prowess, their wonder seems less powerful than the "hunger" with which the guests view her beauty. Spenser distinguishes himself from Ariosto by commenting that "euery one [Britomart] likte, and euery one her loued" (III, ix, 24). Spenser creates a scene where Britomart, like her predecessor, forces entry to a castle and unveils therein but, unlike Bradamante, does not insist her merit be evaluated by her skills rather than her appearance. By allowing the guests to judge her merit based on her beauty, Britomart permits traditional gender definition. Spenser's Britomart is here less assertive and more acceptable to a conservative audience than Ariosto's Bradamante.

In Book IV, canto i, Spenser uses the castle of Tristan scene a third time when Britomart, accompanying Amoret, arrives at a castle where the custom dictates that no knight without a lady may lodge. A knight wishing entry there challenges Britomart for Amoret. Britomart promptly defeats him but, attributing valor to the knight, desires to help him and so declares that Amoret will be her lady and that she will be a lady to the stranger knight:

The Seneschall was cal'd to deeme the right,  
Whom she requir'd, that first fayre Amoret  
Might be to her allow'd, as to a Knight,  
That did her win and free from chalenge set:  
Then since that strange Knights loue from him was quitted,
She claim'd that to her selfe, as Ladies det,  
He as a Knight might iustly be admitted;  
So none should be outshut, sith all of loues were fitted. (IV, I, 12)

Britomart's graciousness and desire that none should lack comfortable lodging connect her with Bradamante, who convinced the lord of the castle of Tristan that Ullania should not be ousted because she was less beautiful than Bradamante since Bradamante had won her lodging based on her prowess, not her appearance. As a knight to Amoret and a lady to the knight, however, Britomart simultaneously assumes male and female roles. Spenser may at times portray Britomart as exhibiting fewer "questionable" characteristics than her Italian predecessor, but in this scene, he shows her assuming a male role.

Spenser imitates Ariosto's castle of Tristan episode a fourth time when Britomart battles Artegall in Book IV, canto vi. While Britomart takes the initial advantage, Artegall has an important edge, endurance. Britomart grows tired, and Artegall, with renewed energy, strikes her helmet, inadvertently revealing her "angels face, vnseene afore, / Like to the ruddie morne" and her hair "like to a golden border" (19-20). Impressed by Britomart's beauty, Artegall is "powrelesse" to harm her. Instead he falls to the ground to worship her (22), as if "some heauenly goddesse he did see." Artegall decides he should show obedience "to so diuine a beauties excellence" (21-22). Like Ariosto, who compares Bradamante's beauty to the "Sun show[ing] his face, clear, and serene, through the clouds" (392), Spenser uses the image of the sun to describe his lady knight. Having connected Britomart with Bradamante, Spenser
shows Britomart to be submissive. Once Britomart has discovered that the knight she has been fighting is the same knight she saw in the magic mirror, her actions change. She “brought forth speeches myld” (IV, vi, 27), and as Artegall speaks to her, “she to his speeches was content / To lend an eare, and softly to relent” (IV, vi, 41). Here, Britomart’s formerly aggressive behavior changes into a submissive attitude toward her future husband. Once her quest to find Artegall is complete, Spenser’s lady knight resumes her natural gender role, exhibiting the characteristics of a “proper” woman. Spenser portrays Britomart as submissive to pacify his readers, who may be concerned that, as a knight, she is too aggressive.

In Book V, canto v Spenser imitates Ariosto a fifth time when Radigund fights Artegall. The battle scene between Radigund and Artegall closely parallels the battle between Britomart and Artegall. Like Britomart, Radigund has an initial advantage over Artegall yet eventually succumbs to Artegall’s endurance. However, as Artegall readies himself to behead the Amazon, he removes Radigund’s helmet, revealing her beauty. Spenser, as he does with Britomart and as Ariosto does with Bradamante, describes Radigund using celestial imagery. Her face is “like as the Moone in foggie winters night” (V, v, 12). And Artegall, who succumbed to Britomart’s beauty, is so overwhelmed by Radigund’s beauty that he places himself in servitude to her rather than kill her. Ambivalent toward the two women, Artegall is attracted to Britomart but so fascinated by Radigund that he submits to her, thereby destroying his ability to
return to Britomart at the agreed time. The imitation in this scene is two-fold. First, Spenser imitates Ariosto by deriving the unveiling of Radigund and Britomart from *Orlando Furioso*; by doing so, Spenser links both the knight of chastity and the Amazon queen with Bradamante. Second, Spenser imitates the earlier scene in Book IV, canto vi where Artegaill fights Britomart.

Spenser models Britomart and Radigund on Bradamante but at times portrays Britomart as less assertive and less masculine than Bradamante and Radigund because he fears his readers would reject a strong heroine. Britomart is a knight, but her chivalrous activities result from her love for Artegaill; they are not a quest for glory or honor as are Bradamante's activities: "[Bradamante] was in quest of glory at arms, like Hippolyta and Camilla of old" (Ariosto 299). While Bradamante has a reputation as a knight before she falls in love with Ruggiero, Britomart puts on arms only to seek Artegaill. Bradamante and Ruggiero travel together as companions in arms, albeit for a short time, but once Britomart and Artegaill meet, Britomart reverts to a passive role, returning to her father's castle to wait for Artegaill. When she eventually rearms, she does so only to free Artegaill from his imprisonment in Radegone, and after she completes this task, she again returns to her father's castle. Having accomplished her engagement with the knight of justice and having freed him from Radigund's entanglements, Britomart remains at home. However, Spenser differentiates Britomart from Bradamante only for his readers. As we shall later see, he surreptitiously supplies Britomart with strong characteristics, and he
drops her character after she has freed Artegall because she assumes such strong characteristics in the Radegone episode that he can no longer continue to disguise her aggressiveness.

Recognizing the strong, vibrant quality of Bradamante, Lillian Robinson, in Monstrous Regiment: the Lady Knight in Sixteenth Century Epic, argues that Ariosto, unlike Spenser, pictures the progressive spirit as feminine, not masculine. Ruggiero, she argues, is limited by his loyalty to chivalric tradition, whereas Ariosto’s female knights are permitted “a greater degree of moral innovation” and “become the exemplars of that innovation, and hence of the political concepts and values of the Renaissance period” (117). Robinson is correct when she argues that for Ariosto the progressive spirit is feminine. But she is wrong when she argues that Spenser prefers “the negative or ‘froward’ aspects of womanly comportment over the more active ones” (319). Spenser favors an active, aggressive woman, but he disguises his opinion to avoid contempt and rejection from his conservative readers.

Another critic, Peter Wiggins, argues that Spenser imitates Ariosto to closely connect himself with the earlier poet, but as he does so, Wiggins argues, Spenser also digresses from Ariosto to portray his work as more important and more didactic: “[Spenser] presents himself as transforming a mere lascivious tale, an Italian toy, into a moral lesson of transcendent import” (“Spenser’s Anxiety” 83). Wiggins is correct to assume that Spenser is concerned with his audience and his image as a poet. Spenser divides Bradamante into two
separate women so his readers will believe he supports their culturally accepted, conservative morality. It may seem that Britomart represents chastity and appropriate love, and Radigund represents the seductress that diverts the knight of justice’s attention, thereby jeopardizing his quest. But actually, Spenser’s attraction to Bradamante forces him to surreptitiously infuse Britomart with Bradamante’s strong characteristics and show sympathy for Radigund. The disapproval he ostensibly shows toward Radigund is intended only to please his audience; it is not real. That both Britomart and Radigund are strong, assertive females and that Spenser approves of both elude many critics, who, by insisting that the two women represent opposing abstractions, fail to realize the two are so similar.

The similarities of the two women become apparent upon close comparison of the two battle episodes. As indicated earlier, these scenes parallel each other: both women fight Artegall, both succumb to his endurance, and both are unveiled, revealing beauty that Artegall either cannot or will not harm. In addition, both respond similarly after Artegall sees their beauty. Susanne Woods, in “Spenser and the Problem of Women’s Rule,” argues that Britomart and Radigund respond to Artegall in opposite ways, Britomart passively and Radigund militantly (153), but Woods overstates this distinction. While Britomart submits to Artegall, her initial reaction is very similar to that of the Amazon queen, who places Artegall in servitude when her beauty causes his submission. After Artegall throws his weapon aside, Britomart lifts her weapon
against him: “Yet she it [her weapon] forst to haue againe vpheld, / As fayning choler, which was turn’d to cold” (IV, vi, 27). While Britomart does put her weapon down, her initial reaction is like Radigund’s. Derived from Bradamante, both of Spenser’s women exhibit her tendency towards aggressiveness.

Spenser’s fascination with Bradamante induces him to portray an attractive Britomart and an even more attractive Radigund. When Britomart’s helmet is rent away, Spenser describes her beauty, her fatigue, and her golden hair:

The wicked stroke vpon her helmet chaunst,  
And with the force, which in it selfe it bore,  
Her ventayle shard away, and thence forth glaunst  
A downe in vaine, ne harm’d her any more.  
With that her angels face, vnseene afore,  
Like to the ruddie morne appeard in sight,  
Deawed with siluer drops, through sweating sore,  
But somewhat redder, then beseem’d aright,  
Through toylesome heate and labour of her weary fight.

And round about the same, her yellow heare  
Hauing through stirring loosd their wonted band,  
Like to a golden border did appear,  
Framed in goldsmithes forge with cunning hand:  
Yet goldsmithes cunning could not vnderstand  
To frame such subtile wire, so shinie cleare.  
For it did glister like the golden sand. (IV, vi, 19-20)

Spenser compares Britomart’s beauty to the morning sun, red as it rises in the eastern sky, and he compares her hair to the gold from a smith’s forge.

Spenser repeats this simile when Artegall fights Radigund, but with an important distinction. Spenser names Artegall the smith and indicates that Radigund refuses to be worked upon as if she were a piece of metal:
Like as a Smith that to his cunning feat
The stubborne mettall seeketh to subdew,
Soone as he feeles it mollifide with heat,
With his great yron fledge doth strongly on it beat.

So did Sir Artegall vpon her lay,
As if she had an yron anduile beene,
That flakes of fire, bright as the sunny ray,
Out of her steely armes were flashing seene,
That all on fire ye would her surely weene.
But with her shield so well her selfe she warded,
From the dread daunger of his weapon keene,
That all that while her life she safely garded. (V, v, 7-8)

While Spenser compares Radigund to iron, the metal associated with the most barbaric age of man, and Britomart's hair to gold, the imagery is related. However, Radigund is not Britomart, nor is she the "ruddie morne." She defends herself well, at least at this stage of the battle, prohibiting Artegall from completing his work as a smith. Standing strong against the knight of justice, Radigund denies that she is a piece of metal to be shaped by a smith. This imagery remains only for Britomart, whose hair is golden wire.

Spenser differentiates a second time between the imagery used to describe Radigund and Britomart as the battle scene continues and Artegall removes her "sunshynie helmet" (V, v, 11). Golden like the sun, Radigund's helmet is reminiscent of Britomart's hair, but her helmet is separate from, not essential to, her beauty. And Radigund is indeed beautiful, as Artegall discovers when he removes her helmet:

But when as he discovered had her face,
He saw his senses straunge astonishment,
A miracle of natures goodly grace,
In her faire visage voide of ornament,
But bath'd in bloud and sweat together ment;
As he did with Britomart, Spenser describes Radigund’s sweat and blood, but rather than embellish Radigund’s condition with a simile comparing her to the “ruddie morne . . . deawed with siluer drops,” Spenser depicts Radigund’s beauty as “voide of ornament” and as “a miracle of natures goodly grace,” exhibiting “signes of feature excellent.” While the images describing Britomart are beautiful as vehicles of simile, they upstage her beauty. Although Spenser uses simile to compare Radigund’s beauty to the moon, he does so to emphasize her self-identification; she “doth seeme to be her selfe” despite the comparison. Radigund’s beauty is more convincing and more attractive than Britomart’s because Spenser depicts it without ornamentation.

The moon simile also enforces Radigund’s association with both Britomart and Ariosto’s Bradamante, who, as we have seen, are also described with celestial imagery, especially the sun. Since, as a source of illumination, the sun metaphorically describes monarchs, both Ariosto and Spenser employ sun imagery to enforce the identification of Bradamante and Britomart, respectively, as progenitors of great dynasties. Spenser thus uses sun imagery positively, but this does not mean that he uses moon imagery negatively. In fact, Spenser also compares Britomart to the moon when she unveils at Malecasta’s castle:

As when faire Cynthia, in darkesome night,
Is in a noyous cloud enueloped,
Where she may find the substaunce thin and light,
Breakes forth her siluer beames, and her bright hed
Discouers to the world discomfited;  
Of the poore traueller, that went astray,  
With thousand blessings she is heried;  
Such was the beautie and the shining ray,  
With which faire Britomart gaue light vnto the day. (III, I, 43)

Whereas Spenser emphasizes that the moon is a source of light when he compares it to Britomart, he emphasizes the obscurity of the night sky by describing the darkened light of the moon “in foggie winters night” when he compares it to Radigund. While some may construe this darkness as an indication of immorality that supports the interpretation of Britomart and Radigund as representations of binary oppositions, such an interpretation fails because when Spenser compares Radigund to the moon, he does not stress the surrounding darkness. Instead, he emphasizes that the moon “doth seeme to be her selfe.” The fog may conceal Radigund’s beauty, but her beauty remains intact. This image lends an aura of mystery to Radigund. Moreover, Spenser may have been familiar with 1 Corinthians 15:41 in the Bible: “The sun has a splendour of its own, the moon another splendour, and the stars another, for star differs from star in brightness.” This verse associates the moon with splendour, and albeit the splendour of the moon differs from that of the sun, both manifest splendour. By comparing Radigund to the moon, Spenser creates a mysterious, yet glorious, image that equals, or perhaps even surpasses, his image of Britomart.

Spenser pictures such beauty in both Britomart and Radigund because he approves of both. As derivations of Ariosto’s Bradamante, they illustrate his
attraction to her. While Spenser splits Bradamante into two women, he remains so fascinated with her that he supplies Britomart with Radigund’s strong characteristics and Radigund with Britomart’s submissiveness. Both Britomart and Radigund fight in combat, exhibit leadership qualities, and see merit in the knight of justice.

First, both women are warriors, and both assume this role as a result of love. After Britomart sees Artegaill’s image in the magic mirror, she is so enamored of it that Glauce takes her to Merlin, who tells Britomart that she has seen her future husband and that their union will produce a lineage of rulers. When Merlin finishes telling Britomart about her future, she begins a literal quest to find the knight of justice; she dons armor and seeks Artegaill, performing acts of chivalry as she searches for her would-be spouse. Radigund also initiates warlike behavior as a result of love, albeit scorned love:

The cause, they say of this her [Radigund’s] cruell hate,
Is for the sake of Bellodant the bold,
To whom she bore most feruent loue of late,
And wooed him by all the waies she could:
But when she saw at last, that he ne would
For ought or nought be wonne vnto her will,
She turn’d her loue to hatred manifold,
And for his sake vow’d to doe all the ill
Which she could doe to Knights, which now she doth fulfill.
(V, iv, 30)

After her would-be lover refuses her advances, Radigund changes; she subdues all knights by “force or guile” (V, iv, 31). Like Britomart, Radigund initiates warlike actions because of love.
Second, both Britomart and Radigund exhibit leadership. The only daughter and heir to Ryence, king of the land which will later become South Wales (III, ii, 18 & 22), Britomart is born into royalty and will succeed to the throne. As foretold by the magician Merlin, she will marry Artegall, and they will be the progenitors of a great dynasty that includes “renowmed kings,” “sacred Emperours,” “braue Captaines, and most mighty warriours” (III, iii, 23). As the mother of this great dynasty, Britomart is endowed with leadership abilities. Like Britomart, Radigund is a queen, and as the queen of the Amazons, she demonstrates leadership when her women warriors battle with Artegall, Turpine, and Talus. When she sees Sir Turpine inflicting serious wounds on her warriors, she comes to their aid, defeating him in battle (V, iv, 39). At the end of the first day of battle, she remains outside the walls of Radegone until all of her people, the wounded and the weak, are safely escorted within (V, iv, 45). And after she discerns the extent of the wounds received by her associates, she

resolu’d her selfe in single fight
To try her Fortune, and [Artegall’s] force assay,
Rather then see her people spoiled quight,
As she had seene that day a disauenterous sight. (V, iv, 47)

Radigund is a good leader. She has trained a group of female warriors who have successfully conquered many knights, forcing them to live in bondage as women. And when these warriors are endangered, Radigund displays true concern for them by negotiating an agreement with Artegall to fight him in single combat rather than further imperil the lives of those women who fight by her side. While Spenser attributes leadership to both Britomart and Radigund, he vividly
portrays only Radigund's leadership; Britomart's is simply implied. By showing Radigund's leadership and her real concern for her subordinates, Spenser shows his approval of the Amazon.

In addition to being warriors and leaders, both Britomart and Radigund are attracted to Artegall. Britomart first sees Artegall's image when she looks at her father's magic mirror. Love immediately strikes her, and she sulks around the castle, enamored of the knight she has seen. After Merlin reveals that the knight lives and is moreover destined to be her future husband, Britomart seeks Artegall, but, as Dunseath observes, she is initially attracted to Artegall's natural beauty, not to the "inward eye of the spirit, the intellective soul" (177). Radigund, on the other hand, is not smitten by Cupid's arrow upon her first vision of Artegall. Unaffected by his natural beauty, Radigund takes advantage of Artegall's attraction to her and imprisons the knight. Radigund, however, is sensitive to the "inward eye of the spirit." As she observes the knight in her captivity, she recognizes the merit of his character:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Clarin (sayd she) thou seest yond Fayry Knight,} \\
\text{Whom not my valour, but his owne braue mind} \\
\text{Subiected hath to my unequall might;} \\
\text{What right is it, that he should thraldome find,} \\
\text{For lending life to me a wretch vnkind;} \\
\text{That for such good him recompence with ill?} \quad (V, v, 32)
\end{align*}
\]

Radigund's appreciation of Artegall increases, and she wishes to bind Artegall to her not with violence, "but with sweet loue and sure beneuolence, / Voide of malitious mind, or foule offence" (V, v, 33). This attraction may not be the love that demands Radigund defer to Artegall as a proper woman should, but J. C.
Gray believes that it has the potential to become such: “Had [Clarin] negotiated in good faith, one is tempted to ask if [Radigund] might eventually have gained enough self mastery to submit herself to her beloved [Artegall]” (11). Like Britomart, Radigund is attracted to Artegall, but unlike Britomart, Radigund is attracted to Artegall’s merit, not his physique. Spenser thus portrays in Radigund an attraction more appropriate than Britomart’s. By describing Radigund’s attraction to Artegall’s merit, Spenser shows his approval of Radigund.

Failing to recognize this approval of Radigund, some critics argue that Radigund represents for Britomart an aspect of her personality that she must suppress in order to fulfill her role as a proper lady knight and the wife of the knight of justice. According to Anne Shaver: “Radigund is selfish, tyrannical, lustful, and castrating; by keeping Artegall in prison she acts out Britomart’s basest fantasy” (“Artegall Tamed too Far: A Response to Carol E. Dooley,” 146). In “She There as Princess Rained’: Spenser’s Figure of Elizabeth,” Mary Bowman argues that Britomart displays an essential willingness to relinquish power when she beheads Radigund and renders the rulership of Radegone to Artegall. Bowman argues that Britomart must perform these actions in order to gain the trust of Artegall: “By reversing Radigund’s social hierarchy Britomart asserts her difference from Radigund in a way that even Artegall can recognize” (512). Like Shaver and Bowman, Fletcher believes that Britomart could conceivably become like Radigund but that Britomart rejects this violence: “The
allegory must show [Britomart’s] relation to her own violence, namely the potential Radigund in her, so that she may experience this violence and reject it for her ultimate marriage to an Osirian lover” (248). These three critics, among others, argue that Radigund functions to show the alternate character of Spenser’s lady knight, the aspect of Ariosto’s Bradamante that Spenser dislikes. By killing Radigund and restoring proper male dominance, critics argue, Britomart illustrates a willingness to relinquish her desire for power.

Or does she? In the Temple of Isis, Britomart sees the goddess Isis standing with one foot on a crocodile (V, vii, 6). Later in the scene, Britomart has a vision which equates her with the goddess, or equity, and Artegaell with the crocodile, or untempered justice. As indicated earlier, critics believe that the union between Britomart and Artegaell is necessary because justice mitigated by equity is preferable to justice alone. But if Artegaell is better when he is joined with Britomart, and if Britomart, who represents the goddess, is literally stepping on the crocodile, which represents justice, has Britomart truly submitted herself to her male counterpart? The answer is no. Woods argues that “by the legalities of English inheritance, the terms of love vassalage, and Spenser’s allegory of equity in the Temple of Isis, Britomart may be seen to continue female rule over the land of the Amazons” (“Spenser and the Problem of Women’s Rule” 153). As evident in her vision in the Temple of Isis, Britomart sees herself above Artegaell. She must free him, and she must restore order in Radegone. Britomart does not submit. She acts when Artegaell cannot,
executing justice where Artegall would not. Lillian Robinson recognizes that Britomart is aggressive, but she fails to see Spenser’s approval of aggressiveness in all women: “That proper balance, as we have seen, is one that takes all power away from women and restores it to men, its ‘rightful’ possessors. Yet this happens through the aggressive action of the female and the enforced passivity of the male” (386). Robinson refuses to see that, for Spenser, the “proper balance” gives women power, that Artegall is better when he is joined with Britomart than he is alone.

Britomart’s execution of Radigund and her consequent placement of Artegall as ruler of Radegone may appear to manifest a willingness to place men above women, but they do not. In “A Midsummer Night’s Dream and the Shaping Fantasies of Elizabethan Culture: Gender, Power, Form,” Louis Montrose observes: “Spenser’s Britomart, the woman who has the prerogative of a goddess, who is authorized to be out of place, can best justify her authority by putting other women in their places” (78-9). But Montrose is wrong; Britomart is not “authorized to be out of place.” As an aggressive woman, she is in her place. Interestingly enough, Spenser describes the attentions the citizens of Radegone give to Britomart, not to Artegall. Spenser says that Britomart ruled as a princess and that “all they as a Goddesse her adoring, / Her wisedome did admire, and hearkned to her loring” (V, vii, 42). Britomart thus establishes herself as the ruler of Radegone. Because they worship Britomart as a goddess, the citizens swear fealty to Artegall upon her request, but their true fidelity is to
her, their new queen. By usurping the throne from Radigund, Britomart continues the female rule. Spenser has surreptitiously supplied Britomart with Radigund’s masculine characteristics.

Therefore, Britomart does not suppress the Radigund within herself. Both women exhibit culturally questionable characteristics. For example, in the Temple of Isis, Britomart sees transfigured

Her linnen stole to robe of scarlet red,  
And Moone-like Mitre to a Crowne of gold,  
That euen she her selfe much wondered  
At such a chaunge, and ioyed to behold  
Her selfe, adorn’d with gems and iewels manifold. (V, vii, 13)

Here, Britomart rejoices to see herself dressed in regal attire, a reaction deemed characteristic of women, but inappropriate. This reaction is similar to Radigund’s when she battles Artegall, Talus, and Turpine. Spenser devotes two stanzas to the description of Radigund’s splendid battle attire. Brilliantly dressed, Radigund emerges from Radegone’s city gate, “with stately port and proud magnificence” (V, v, 4). The episode in the temple is one scene where Britomart lets the Radigund in her show. Like the Amazon, she is proud to wear grand clothing, the trappings of power.

In addition, Britomart exhibits questionable characteristics when she is separated from Artegall. After seeing the knight’s reflection in her father’s magic mirror, Britomart mopes around the castle, and after she learns that the image pictures a real person, she departs to seek him. Upon finding Artegaill and negotiating their engagement, Britomart pouts to see him resume his quest, not
very appropriate behavior for a lady who is supposed to encourage good
custom in her lover. She returns to her castle, waits for Artegaill to return, and
when he fails to arrive at the appointed time, imagines that he is cheating on her
as Bradamante imagines Ruggiero is cheating. Shaver describes Britomart as
“a lovesick woman who follows [Artegaill] like a sad puppy and who, when she
can’t do that, lies around the house and worries herself ripe for a degrading fit of
jealousy” (145). When Talus arrives, Britomart is so upset that Artegaill does not
accompany him that she immediately assumes that her jealous imaginations are
fact and refuses to speak to the iron man. One must question how Britomart
would have acted if Artegaill had in fact rejected her for another woman. Would
she have suppressed the Radigund within her, or would she have, like the
Amazon, reacted wildly when a lover scorned her?

Britomart and Radigund share strong characteristics derived from
Bradamante, but Radigund is a victim. In “Amazon Tyranny: Spenser’s
Radigund and Diachronic Mimeses,” Susanne Woods argues that “Spenser
presents Radigund as a victim, and as someone who must use indirection and
the power of her sexuality to find authority in a cruel world of male power” (54).
Yes, Radigund is a victim; she is a victim because she lives in a male dominated
world where an unsympathetic man refuses to love her. And since she has the
ability to fight back, she does so, using force to retaliate against an unfeeling
society. Britomart, in contrast, is given permission to act in the male world
where both she and Radigund live, but this permission does not result because
Britomart is superior to the Amazon. Robinson observes: "Politically, however, there is no implication that the Britomart's of the world have a more legitimate claim to rule than the Radigund's" (335-36). Spenser openly portrays Radigund's aggressiveness and her subsequent destruction to alleviate his readers' concerns about strong women. Then he replaces Radigund with Britomart, in whom he has surreptitiously infused Radigund's questionable traits.

If the roles were reversed, if providence had ordained Radigund to marry the knight of justice, Britomart might have usurped authority to enact revenge. Since Spenser integrates masculine characteristics into Britomart, she has the same battle skills and leadership skills that enabled Radigund to take control of Radegone, imprisoning knights in women's clothing, and both have the same tendencies to vanity and jealousy. But, luckily for Britomart, and to the destruction of Radigund, providence chose the former, granting Britomart the only two things that Radigund lacks: permission to act violently in a man's world and a man to return her love.

Britomart and Radigund share so many characteristics because they are both imitations of Ariosto's Bradamante. Strong, assertive, and defiant of traditional gender roles, Bradamante attracts Spenser, but writing for a conservative readership, he cannot appear to embrace her masculine qualities, so he splits her into two different women. Because he is attracted to Bradamante, however, he surreptitiously supplies Britomart with Radigund's strong characteristics and shows only ostensible disapproval toward the Amazon
queen. He attributes to both prowess in combat, leadership qualities, vanity, jealousy, and beauty, beauty comparable to celestial bodies, beauty that inspires awe in the knight of justice.

Although he responds to Ariosto's Bradamante with humor, Calvino, like Spenser, imitates Bradamante by creating a periwinkle knight with combat skill and beauty. Ariosto's use of celestial imagery and his portrayal of instantaneous love during unveiling episodes provides Calvino ample material for parody. So Raimbaut discovers the true gender of the periwinkle knight and is immediately enamored of her when he sees her "harmonious moons" unveiled as she urinates in a stream. The truth about Calvino's Bradamante is revealed when she unveils, just as the truth about her Renaissance predecessors is unveiled in similar episodes. Whether dealt with seriously or humorously, the use of the unveiling motif produces scenes revealing a reality contradictory to expectations. After all, how could Spenser more contradict his readers' expectations than by surreptitiously yielding in them praise of the very thing they feared: a strong, aggressive female whose relationship with a man improves him?
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