



## “Endlesse Moniment”: Elizabeth Boyle, Funerary Monuments, and the Easter Message of *Amoretti*

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Age has not withered Elizabeth Boyle in poetry, but she has suffered in other ways. Her effigy, now in ruins and missing hands and a head, is featured on the tomb (1636) of her third husband, Sir Robert Tynte (d. 1643), in the Anglican church in Kilcredan, County Cork (figs. 1a–d). The tomb, which Tynte had built for himself, is placed adjacent to the (missing) altar. It features both of his wives, one (thought to be Boyle) at his head and the other (of uncertain identity) at his feet.<sup>1</sup> Remarkably, what is likely a portrait of Boyle’s face exists in an early photograph (1924) of the monument (fig. 2), where a sculpted female head sits next to the right-hand figure.<sup>2</sup> If this is a “glorious portraict of that Angels

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<sup>1</sup> The identity of Tynte’s first wife is uncertain; she has been identified as Phillipa Tynte, née Harris, or as a member of the Hyde or Power families. See Amy Louise Harris, “The Tynte Monument, Kilcredan, Co. Cork: A Reappraisal,” *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society* 104 (1999): 137–44; Andrew Hadfield, *Edmund Spenser: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 296–97; W.H. Weply, “The Spenser-Tynte Genealogy,” *Notes and Queries* 186.6 (1944): 128–29. The tomb is also pictured on the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage: <https://www.buildingsofireland.ie/buildings-search/building/20907737/kilcredan-church-of-ireland-church-kilcredan-cork>.

<sup>2</sup> P. G. Lee, “Kilcredan Church,” *Journal of the Irish Memorials Association* 12 (1926–933): 195 and figure facing 173; reproduced in Harris, “The Tynte Monument,” 139. While it is possible that either statue could be Boyle’s effigy, a report on the statues from 1903, when they were still intact, describes the one on the left as being of a younger woman who is “looking heavenwards with an expression of tender feeling.” By comparison, the “other lady is more staid and matronly.” Since the head on the ground in the 1924 photograph is looking straight ahead and *not* upwards, it likely belongs to the statue on the right, a.k.a., Elizabeth Boyle. For discussion of this earlier account of the tomb, see Philip G. Lee, “The Ruined Monuments of Sir Robert Tynte and Sir Edward Harris in Kilcredan Church, Ballycrenane, near Ladysbridge,” *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society* 22 (1927): 86–87.

## The Spenser Review

face,/ Made to amaze weake mens confused skil,”<sup>3</sup> that skill was very confused and weak indeed. The sculptor has, however, nicely captured a sense of movement in the figure, who wears an embroidered dress with a lace collar and Tudor-style rose on its back and breast (Figs. 1c–d). The head has since disappeared and (for all we know) could be in a ditch or propping open a door on a nearby farm.



Fig. 1a. Tynte Monument at Kilcredan Church, Co. Cork. (Photograph by Thomas Herron, July 14, 2023).

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<sup>3</sup> Edmund Spenser, *Amoretti and Epithalamion*, in *The Yale Edition of the Shorter Poems of Edmund Spenser*, ed. William A. Oram, Einar Bjorvand, Ronald Bond, Thomas H. Cain, Alexander Dunlop, and Richard Schell (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), *Amoretti* 17.1–2. All references to *Amoretti and Epithalamion* are cited by sonnet and line number from this edition.



Fig. 1b. Tynte Monument at Kilcredan Church, Co. Cork. The now-headless and handless statue kneeling in prayer at right is thought to be Elizabeth Boyle. The figures would originally have been polychrome. (Photograph by Thomas Herron, July 14, 2023).

## The Spenser Review



Fig. 1c. Tynte Monument at Kilcredan Church, Co. Cork. Detail of back of sculpture thought to portray Elizabeth Boyle. Boyle wears an armband and lace and kneels by her third husband, Sir Robert Tynte, whose face has worn away. (Photograph by Thomas Herron, July 14, 2023).



Fig. 1d. Tynne Monument at Kilcredan Church, Co. Cork. Detail of statue thought to portray Elizabeth Boyle. (Photograph by Thomas Herron, July 14, 2023).



Fig. 2: Close-up of sculpted head (of Elizabeth Boyle?) lying on Tynte Monument in Kilcredan Church. (Reproduction of photograph in Lee, "Kilcredan Church," figure facing 173; reproduced in Harris, "The Tynte Monument," 139.)

By contrast, despite the vagaries of time, we continue to admire the literary portrait of Elizabeth that Spenser paints in *Amoretti and Epithalamion* (1595), which famously celebrates the poet's successful wooing and wedding of Boyle, his second wife, in 1594.<sup>4</sup> The narrative arc of Spenser's volume winds towards wedded love in neo-platonic triumph and thus turns the conventional despair and pessimism of Petrarchan desire on its head. Spenser's art thereby aims to defeat death and time with its message of eternal

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<sup>4</sup> For the most recent admiration of her biographical self, as garnered from Spenser's poetry, see William A. Oram, "What Happens in the 'Amoretti,'" *Spenser Review* 50.2.3 (2020), <http://www.english.cam.ac.uk/spenseronline/review/item/50.2.3>. For a speculative and flattering recreation of her portrait, see Joyce Joines Newman, "Centering Elizabeth: Imagining Elizabeth Boyle in Art and Literature," *Centering Spenser: A Digital Resource for Kilcolman Castle*, accessed August 3, 2023, [https://core.ecu.edu/umc/munster/PDF/invented\\_portrait\\_EB.pdf](https://core.ecu.edu/umc/munster/PDF/invented_portrait_EB.pdf).

## The Spenser Review

love. In this way, as this paper will argue, Spenser's work predicts the religious and cultural messaging of the Tynte monument more than we might think: *Amoretti and Epithalamion* can be read as a kind of funerary monument, a "last" and "endlesse" "ornament" (*Amoretti* 74.9 and *Epithalamion* 433) that focuses on the archetypal symbolism of Christ's resurrection at Easter. As such, it is a triumphal monument to marriage, and Elizabeth is the quintessential trophy wife, albeit one who is Spenser's co-equal in eternity. We can better understand the celebratory tone of Spenser's volume of poems when we conceive of it as a type of grave memorial, an architectural framework infused with the spirit of the Christian church wherein the loving couple (Edmund and Elizabeth) are forever entombed.

### I

What did Easter mean to Spenser and Boyle? The Easter Sunday service of 2023 in Westminster Abbey is a good place to start. The service focused, as always, on Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. As Spenser slumbered nearby in Poet's Corner, Canon Theologian and Almoner James Hawkey eloquently proclaimed the importance of love to the meaning of the Resurrection: "Christ's love is the final truth about creation, and it emerges from a scene of devastating collapse." Hawkey recounted Mary Magdalene's visit to the empty tomb, as told in John 20:11–18. This passage immediately follows 20:1–10, the verses assigned in *The Book of Common Prayer* for the Gospel portion of the Easter service. As Hawkey preached it,

St John's Gospel sparkles with the uncreated light which comes from Christ's empty tomb. When the weeping Mary Magdalene leans over to peer into the tomb, she sees two angels sitting, we are told where the dead body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and one at the feet. Now, we have seen this image before in scripture, in the Book of Exodus, when two cherubim overshadow the Mercy Seat of the Ark of the Covenant from either end, forming a throne for the Lord Himself. These angels marked out a site of intense distilled holiness. The Ark was the physical guarantor of the Lord's presence with the Israelites as they journeyed through the wilderness. In this Gospel story... this space between the angels—a place where a corpse has lain, the space of death—is now the site of God's eternally creative faithfulness and indestructible holiness. What was only shattered decay is now the place of new life. Christ's death, in the words of the Byzantine liturgy, has trampled down death, bestowing life on those in the tombs. In a world which was made from nothing, the new

## The Spenser Review

creation emerges from amidst death itself... Love has sounded the final alarm, and those two angels hold open a space for us, for our death, for our sorrows.<sup>5</sup>

In the gospel, Mary Magdalene vainly searches the tomb for the body of Jesus, and then (as scripture relates) first a pair of angels, and then a “gardener” (Jesus himself), asks her why she is weeping. She is recognized by Jesus and recognizes him in turn.<sup>6</sup> In Hawkey’s mind, “the uncreated light which comes from Christ’s empty tomb” is a proactive force that encourages the faithful to fill the sepulchral absences before them in their lives with the promise of godly love and creation, thus frustrating death and the devil. The resurrected Christ is the embodied emblem of that creative spirit. As Hawkey notes, the spirit that fills Christ’s tomb finds its Old Testament type in the Ark of the Covenant, also surmounted by two angels. Here, we find a correspondence and symbolic emphasis on renewal between the Old and New Testaments. The resurrected Christ redeems Christians from original sin, and Christ’s living word will continue to inspire Christians after his crucifixion. The Resurrection is therefore *the* essential turning point of Christian history.

By listening to sermons on Christ’s resurrection and then taking communion, Spenser and his fellow Christians, in Westminster or any other church, would have entered a mystical unity with all those living, dead, and memorialized in the church, including those already buried in tombs and belonging allegorically and physically in the body of Christ forever. Christ’s tomb is at the center of the Easter message; there, Christians like Mary Magdalene searched for the body and praised the spirit—and hence the word—of Christ. The empty tomb, as a real and symbolic space, encourages infinite acts of devotion in memory of the resurrected Christ by the faithful, in the hope of future

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<sup>5</sup> James Hawkey, “Every broken fragment can now know healing in the light of Easter.” Easter Service, Westminster Abbey, London, April 9, 2023, <https://www.westminster-abbey.org/abbey-sermons/sermon-given-at-the-sung-eucharist-on-easter-day-2023>.

<sup>6</sup> Taken here from the Bishop’s Bible “Gospel of St. John.” *The Holie Bible* (London, 1568):

20:10 Then the disciples we[n]t away agayne vnto their owne house.

20:11 Marie stode without at the sepulchre weeping: So, as she wepte, she bowed her selfe into the sepulchre,

20:12 And seeth two angels clothed in white, sitting, the one at the head, & the other at the feete, where the body of Iesus was layde.

20:13 They saye vnto her: Woman, why weepest thou? She saith vnto the: For they haue taken away my Lorde, & I wote not where they haue layde him.

20:14 When she had thus sayde, she turned her selfe backe, and sawe Iesus standyng, and knewe not that it was Iesus.

20:15 Iesus saith vnto her: Woman, why weepest thou? Whom sekest thou? She supposing that he had ben the gardener, saith vnto him: Sir, if thou haue borne him hence, tel me where thou hast layde hym, and I wyll fet hym.

20:16 Iesus sayth vnto her, Marie. She turned her selfe, and sayde vnto hym: Rabboni, which is to say, Maister.

20:17 Iesus saith vnto her: Touche me not, for I am not yet ascended to my father: But go to my brethren, and saye vnto them, I ascende vnto my father and your father, and to my God & your God.

20:18 Marie Magdalene came and tolde the disciples that she had seene ye Lorde, and that he had spoken suche thynges vnto her.



## The Spenser Review

resurrection to join Him; this act of memory and spiritual renewal is expressed every Sunday, including Easter Sunday, in the sacrament of the Eucharist.

Since in Christian churches the space memorializing Christ's death and resurrection is the altar, where the host is raised, the entire church structure is designed to magnify the shape and purpose of that event. The church in its crucifix shape imitates the dimensions of Christ's body in its Passion, and bodies of the faithful lie in graves and sarcophagi inside the church or in the churchyard; the most prominent among them lie close to the altar. In this sense, the faithful are buried in Christ's presence, which is invoked during the service by the scripture, music, and iconography (most prominently the crucifix) that fill the reverberating void between the real walls of the temple.<sup>7</sup> This void within the church therefore becomes another type for the empty sepulcher. The eucharist service, which fills that void with the living, celebrates the Passion of Christ and thereby fills the empty sepulcher in which Christ was buried with the faithful memory of Him and His Resurrection.

Scripture thereby offers Christianity a model for how a worshiper can fill all empty space in person and in word with the memory of Christ's incarnated love, body and soul. Hawkey's sermon focuses on this message: it is about filling empty and fragmented tomb spaces, like broken and empty hearts, with faith in the resurrected Christ, and making that act of rebuilding the cornerstone of a renewed self and community. Spenser's *Amoretti and Epithalamion* does the same. The work emphasizes Christian hope through symbolic funereal imagery focused on the body and soul of Christ, who serves as the most powerful example of love for the couple (68.9–14); most importantly, the climax of the *Amoretti* sequence, sonnet 68, anchors the calendrical-patterning of the volume with an Easter poem on the Resurrection.<sup>8</sup> We should therefore look beyond the work's surface lyricism to understand the ritual and architectural dimensions of the sequence, as it is infused with Christian iconography simultaneously celebrating the love of Christ and the love between the couple who are soon to be wed. Marriage was intended to last until death, and at death, many married gentry were entombed together. Since the sonnet sequence, with *Epithalamion* appended, is an "endlesse moniment" ("Epithalamion"

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<sup>7</sup> For further discussion, including architectural analogies and ritual cruciform patterning in Shakespeare's Sonnet 73, see Thomas Herron, "Sacred Memory, Monumental Architecture, and Shakespeare's Sonnet 73," *South Atlantic Review* 83.4 (2018): 51–77.

<sup>8</sup> See Alexander Dunlop, "Introduction to *Amoretti and Epithalamion*," in *The Shorter Poems*, 595.

## The Spenser Review

433) of the love that the poet held for his bride, as well as a celebration of Christ's resurrection, we should conceive of the composite text as a kind of *funerary* monument constructed for Spenser and his second wife.

### II

*Amoretti and Epithalamion* is simultaneously a deeply personal testament of love in the face of death and a communal and political statement of enduring Christian faith. Understanding its funereal dynamics illustrates how Spenser's beloved Elizabeth Boyle is (not) the Faerie Queene in his mind. In Sonnet 74, Elizabeth I, "my sovereigne Queene most kind," gives the poet-speaker "honour and large riches" in the poem's central lines (74.7–8), but the speaker is not in love with her. Instead, Spenser better resembles Prince Arthur, *The Faerie Queene's* loving and questing suitor, in the mournful quality of his love for Boyle. Spenser and Arthur both seek to win the objects of their love with "labour and long toyle" (*Amoretti* 69.14) or "labour, and long tyne."<sup>9</sup> Arthur simultaneously mourns and desires after he sees the empty space in the grass left by Gloriana:

When I awoke, and found her place deuoyd,  
And nought but pressed gras where she had lyen,  
I sorrowed all so much, as earst I ioyd,  
And washed all her place with watry eyen.  
From that day forth I lou'd that face diuyn;  
From that day forth I cast in carefull mynd,  
To seeke her out with labor, and long tyne,  
And neuer vovd to rest, till her I fynd,  
Nyne monethes I seek in vain yet ni'll that vow vnbynd.  
(I.ix.15)

We find here an echo of the intense passions provoked by the empty space where Christ's body once lay. Arthur, in his travails and "great passion" (I.ix.16), can be read as simultaneously a Christ-figure and a type of apostle who loves and seeks a "face diuyn," as Mary Magdalene does at the holy sepulcher. Arthur will travel the earth in pursuit of his Faerie Queene (indicated, in Arthur's case, by the "Nyne monethes" period already past, as if his quest were a type of gender-bending gestation leading to his ecstatic

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<sup>9</sup> Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. A.C. Hamilton et al. (London: Routledge, 2007), I.ix.15. All references from *The Faerie Queene* are taken from this edition.

## The Spenser Review

vision).<sup>10</sup> Spenser, unlike Arthur, successfully consummates his love, but both are inspired by loving pursuit of the ideal. The strong *carpe diem* message of Sonnet 70 immediately follows the idealistic triumph of Sonnets 68–69 (discussed below). In 70, the speaker imagines Elizabeth Boyle lying in a dreaming or half-sleeping state, “in her winters bowre not well awake” (6), waiting for “Fresh spring the herald of loves mighty king” to rouse her (1). Spenser would be that cupid-like “king” acting out his natural desires so as to wake his wintery bride (and himself) into new life. In a clear sign of mutual agency, he encourages her to act in turn, to seize the “forelock” (8) of fortune and love him. Their mutual desire will turn “winters bowre” into one of blissful plenty, as they, like Arthur, will create and continually increase the “intense distilled holiness” (“Every Broken Fragment”) of the empty domestic and corporeal spaces they move towards and within.

As Hawkey notes, a key prop in the visual tableau of the empty tomb and its type in the Old Testament Ark is the pair of angels, one on either end of the tomb structure. They act as ornaments signaling “the Lord’s presence” or sanctity of the space they frame (“Every Broken Fragment”). In *Amoretti*, Spenser replicates this iconography by placing an angel and a dove in sonnets 1 and 89, the first and last poems of his sonnet sequence. The angel is a winged messenger of God and the dove is a winged symbol of the Holy Spirit.

The guiding spirit behind these mirroring book-ends (as it were) is announced even earlier, in the printer William Ponsonby’s emblem on the title page, which shows a heavenly hand holding a winged wreath over an illuminating book amid the clouds (fig. 3). The winged messengers, like the winged wreath, alert us to the textual space between and beneath them, where lie further angels, monuments, and ornaments both holy and profane.<sup>11</sup> The angel in the first sonnet calls attention specifically to the poems in the beloved’s hands, and the “Culver,” or “mournful dove” in the last sonnet (89.1, 8) is a model for the poet singing sadly in his beloved’s absence. Spanning the sequence between them, each poem is analogous to an *amoretto* or *putti* figure, a type of winged messenger or literary angel.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Hamilton, ed., *The Faerie Queene*, note to l.x.15.9.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, “angelic” references at 17.1, 71.6 and 84.8, as well as “ornament” (53.10), “temple” (22.5), and “altar” (22.8).

<sup>12</sup> See also the image of cupids fluttering about the marriage bed like “doves” in “Epithalamion” 357–63. The title of the volume, *Amoretti*, signals that the poems are to be understood as analogous to *putti*. On the “meta-textual” linkage between Sonnets 1 and 89, see Ted Brown, “Metapoetry in Edmund Spenser’s *Amoretti*,” *Philological Quarterly* 82.4 (2003): 406.

## The Spenser Review

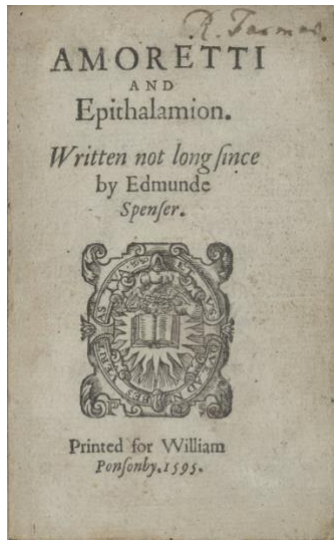


Fig. 3: Title page of *Amoretti and Epithalamion* (1595). STC 23076, title page, image 94476, Folger Shakespeare Library.

The symmetry of the wings in the frontispiece and the use of winged figures as a framing device for the sequence call attention to the centrality of the body and, within it, the heart, the seat of love. Critics have long noted (and debated) the calendrical, numerical, and topomorphic patterning of the sequence and of the overall volume (understood as a combined poetic unit).<sup>13</sup> The central sonnet of the 89-poem sequence (not counting the stanzas in “Epithalamion,” nor the intermediary “Anacreontics”),<sup>14</sup> number 45, calls attention to the beloved’s body, which is the focal point of Spenser’s lustful, loving, and artistic gaze, as well as of his creative efforts: her body (and more specifically her heart, mind, and womb) is where he will focus his energy and where he will shape his art.<sup>15</sup> In the sonnet, the speaker calls attention to a mirror or “glasse of christall clene” (45.1) in which the lady gazes at her outward shape. The conceit is emphasized by the mirroring words “christall” in lines 1 and 12, and “goodly” in 2 and 11, which provide a chiasmic double-frame for the twelve-line body of the sonnet that comes before its concluding couplet:

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<sup>13</sup> For discussion of the numerology of all the poems in the volume combined, see, for example, Alastair Fowler, *Triumphal Forms: Structural Patterns in Elizabethan Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 180–82, as well as works cited below. For skepticism of the approach, see G.K. Hunter, “‘Unity’ and Numbers in Spenser’s *Amoretti*,” *Yearbook of English Studies* 5 (1975): 39–45.

<sup>14</sup> Shohachi Fukuda, “The Numerological Patterning of *Amoretti and Epithalamion*,” *Spenser Studies* 9 (1988): 37.

<sup>15</sup> A further analogy here from *The Faerie Queene* is the Gardens of Adonis, the gynomorphic site of fertility and artistic creation that lies at the numerical center of Book III. See Michael Baybak, Paul Delany and A. Kent Hieatt, “Placement ‘in the midst’ in *The Faerie Queene*,” in *Silent Poetry: Essays in Numerological Analysis*, ed. Alastair Fowler (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1970), 142–45.

## The Spenser Review

Leave lady in your glasse of **christall** clene,  
Your **goodly** selfe for evermore to vew:  
and in my selfe, my inward selfe I meane,  
most lively lyke behold your semblant trew.  
**Within my hart**, though hardly it can shew  
thing so divine to vew of earthly eye:  
**the fayre Idea of your celestiall hew,  
and every part remains immortally:**  
And were it not that through your cruelty,  
with sorrow dimmed and deformd it were:  
the **goodly** ymage of your visnomy,  
clearer then **christall** would therein appere.  
But if your selfe in me ye playne will see,  
remove the cause by which your fayre beames darkned be.  
(*Amoretti* 45, emphasis added)

Although the lady is vain, the poet sees her through the “goodly” and holy “christall” of his verse. The poem steadily drives inward from there, with an emphasis on spiritual adoration: the true “fayre Idea of [her] celestiall hew” resides in his “heart,” where “every part [of her] remains immortally.” These lines (7–8) are themselves at the center, or heart, of the sonnet, and so of the entire sequence. This numerically central praise of the celestial “Idea” of the lady’s beauty is neo-platonic in inspiration, but it is a heavily Christianized neo-platonism: the poet’s heart is not only “astonished” and transcended by his “spirit” as the narrative of the sequence develops, as Alexander Dunlop argues,<sup>16</sup> but his heart continually powers the spirit *through* love, eventually via sex, which leads to the unshakeable Christian marital bond in life and death. The same message is conveyed in the Easter sonnet, *Amoretti* 68.<sup>17</sup> The heart cannot be divorced from the body and spirit.

In a similar sense, the body of Christ worshiped at the sacrificial altar is the spiritual center or heart of the architectural space of traditional Catholic and Anglican churches.<sup>18</sup> The altar thus functions as a monument to Christ’s tomb from which He was resurrected, an act ritually recreated in every church service. The altar also doubles in function as the site of marriage where couples are joined. In the initial stage of their

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<sup>16</sup> Alexander Dunlop, “The Unity of Spenser’s *Amoretti*,” in *Silent Poetry*, 165, 168–69. On the neo-platonic progressions in the sequence, see also Dunlop, “Introduction to *Amoretti and Epithalamion*,” 588–89.

<sup>17</sup> As Oram writes, “The Easter sonnet insists in its couplet that the love between the poet and the lady is an extension of love between man and God: ‘So let us love, deare love, lyke as we ought, / love is the lesson which the Lord us taught.’ I think that the poet means these lines to be taken straight. Eros and Agape, sexual love rightly understood and Christian love are compatible and, indeed, parallel one another because sexual love is, finally, sacred.” See: Oram, “What Happens.”

<sup>18</sup> See, by way of comparison, the centering of the word “altar” in George Herbert’s emblematic poem by that name: George Herbert, “The Altar,” in *The Temple. Sacred Poems and Private Ejaculations*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Thomas Buck and Roger Daniel, 1633), 18.

## The Spenser Review

courtship, Spenser will “sacrifise” his “heart” on an “altar” to appease his beloved’s anger (*Amoretti* 22.9–12), and, in the line that occurs in the exact center of “Epithalamion,” Spenser stresses the central function of the “high altar” (215) when describing it as the place where “endlesse matrimony” (217) is made.<sup>19</sup> The subsequent stanza (the thirteenth of twenty-four total) also focuses on the “altar” where the ceremony takes place and where “Angels... continually... about the sacred Altar do remaine” (229–30). The “Angels” here parallel the winged spirits (angel and dove) that frame and flit through the *Amoretti*.

There’s reason therefore to think of *Amoretti and Epithalamion* as a kind of funerary Easter sermon with hopeful, amatory consequences, as a type of church monument on the page that promises eternal life, love, and art for the couple. The so-called Easter sonnet (68) of *Amoretti* (fig. 4, left) is not at the numerical center of the volume but rather at the narrative climax of the sonnet sequence. Moreover, it places Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection at its own center: “we for whom thy diddest dye / *being with thy deare blood clene washt from sin/ May live forever in felicity*” (6–8, emphasis added). Lines 7–8 specify that Christ’s blood was spilt so that “we”—i.e., all Christians, including the couple—can be washed of sin and one day be resurrected into eternal happiness. The sonnet reminds us of the dual ceremonial function of the altar by conflating the speaker’s happiness at finally winning Elizabeth Boyle’s hand with the central miracle of Christ’s death and resurrection. In the Anglican marriage service, holy matrimony also signifies the mystical union between Christ and his church.

Sonnet 69 (fig. 4, right), in turn, places this miracle into the context of worldly and poetic triumph. It conjures the image of the “Trophees” to “The famous warriors of the anticke world” (69.1): in this poem, the speaker states his wish to create an “immortall moniment” (69.10) to his wife out of these wooing poems, which he has shaped with “labour and long toyle” during his life (69.14). A. Kent Hieatt notes that 69 is the “closest in wording (if not in depth of meaning) to the envoy of *Epithalamion*” in its emphasis on the poems as a trophy or “immortall moniment” of “loves conquest.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Oram et al., eds., “Epithalamion,” 670n. The central line in “Epithalamion”—“The which do endlesse matrimony make” (217)—is also “keyed to the last line, ‘And for short time an *endlesse* moniment’ [433]... the only other occurrence of the word *endless* in the poem” (“Placement ‘in the midst’” 149).

<sup>20</sup> A.K. Hieatt, *Short Time’s Endless Monument: The Symbolism of the Numbers in Edmund Spenser’s Epithalamion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), 55. See also Brown, “Metapoetry in Edmund Spenser’s *Amoretti*,” 408–09 for emphasis on the “monument” as literary and laboriously shaped.

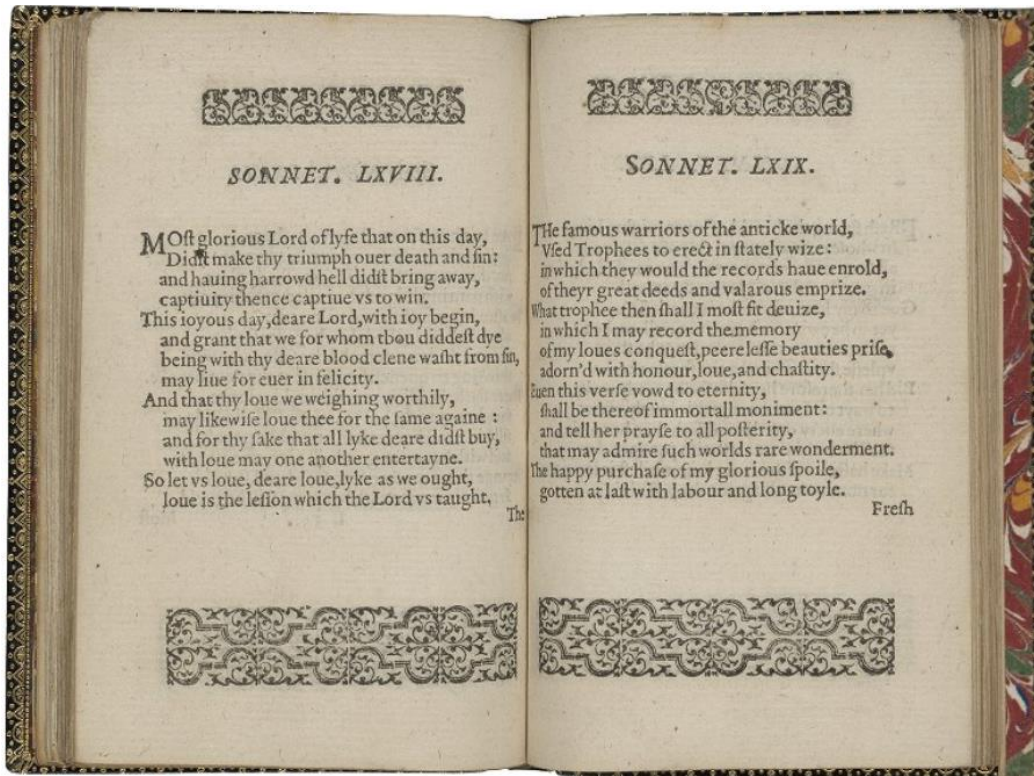


Fig. 4: Paired facing sonnets 68 and 69 of *Amoretti*. STC 23076, sig. E3v-r, image 94515, Folger Shakespeare Library.

Since the two sonnets, 68 and 69, are facing in the first edition of *Amoretti and Epithalamion*, the sacred body of Christ in 68 is thus visually juxtaposed with the self-congratulatory “moniment” (69.10) to Spenser’s romantic conquest in 69.<sup>21</sup> Spenser’s monument to Christ thereby mirrors his self-admiring poetic monument. When viewed as a pair, the poems evoke the type of grave monument or “trophee” that might be festooned with arms, like the Tynte monument described above (fig. 1): our attention turns from the “Most glorious Lord of lyfe,” or Christ, who “make[s] thy triumph” (68.1–2), to “The famous warriors of the anticke world” who “erect” “Trophees” (69.1–2). The physical and spiritual heroism of both subjects are implicitly contrasted in opening lines that are, literally, monumental. One could in turn argue that 69 is hardly Christian, but instead is a narcissistic tribute to Spenser’s own conquering ego. Nonetheless, the ambiguity of the central line of 69, wherein the speaker will “record the memory / *Of my loves conquest, peerelesse beauties prise*” (69.6–7, emphasis added), stresses the couple’s commingled togetherness at the heart of this poem: did he “conquer” his “love” and make

<sup>21</sup> On sonnet pairing in the sequence, see Fukuda, “The Numerological Patterning,” 39.

## The Spenser Review

her his “prise,” or is he *her* conquest and prize because the power of her beauty provoked his love for her? The answer is both.

Both sonnets commemorate the moment of Spenser’s betrothal to Elizabeth: on “this day” (68.1), the bride is attained at last in a flourish of Christian self-sacrifice centered on the Resurrection, thanks to the poet’s hard labor and creativity in conquering her, “gotten at last” (69.14). The glorious moment in the alpha line of Sonnet 68 is echoed in the omega line of Sonnet 69. The pair of poems thus evokes church “monuments”: they are markers of the eternal, published, and thus placed in time for the world to witness. They also occupy a crucial place in the calendrical conceit of the sequence. By explicitly using the ecclesiastical architectural language of altars and “moniments” here at the climax of his sonnet sequence, as well as by emphasizing the concept of a “sacred Altare,” “goodly ornament,” and “endlesse monument” at the center and end of “Epithalamion” (230, 432–33), Spenser creates a poetic monument out of the whole volume wherein he and his wife are paired together in the context of Christ’s resurrection, as if they were attending (by marrying in or lying at) a preeminent place in the sacred confines of church architecture. Their mutual love in marriage is a model of their love in eternity within the Christian faith, as attested by Spenser’s poetic monument.

Spenser continues his emphasis on funerary-amatory “ornaments” in Sonnet 74. Sonnet 74 parodies the Holy Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost by comparing Spenser’s mother, queen, and betrothed, who were all named Elizabeth and who all inspire the poet. The speaker’s betrothed, Elizabeth Boyle, is described as being “my love, my lives last ornament, / By whom my spirit out of dust was raised” (74.9–10). Spenser describes Boyle as his “last ornament,” which suggests that their marriage, his second, will last until death. Moreover, their love lifts his spirit upward in language that evokes God’s power to resurrect “spirit[s]” out of “dust,” including that of Christ. As such, the language reminds us of the speaker’s eroticized yearning to replace winter with spring in Sonnet 70 as well as of Arthur’s “great passion” for the absent-present Gloriana (see above).

“Epithalamion” acts as a capstone of heavenly paradise to the purgatorial pains of the sonnet sequence, which appropriately include an intervening vision of the torments of “hell” in Sonnet 86. The sequence ends with bitter notes of absence (*Amoretti* 87, 89), dark days and nights (88.3, 89.13), famine (83, 88.12–14), lust (84), envy, anger, and



## The Spenser Review

vituperation (85–86). Alistair Fowler notes that the number of sonnets, 89, was the same as the number of days in winter as calculated by many authorities at the time, and Fukuda argues in turn that the sequence ends in “darkness” with the poet “as good as dead” (*Triumphal Forms* 181–82; “Numerological” 40). Despite its many lighthearted poems, the whole sequence is associated with the pains of mortal life and finally death, out of which will spring new life in “Epithalamion.” In a way, Spenser is the Orphic poet who successfully gathers his Eurydice in *Amoretti* to bring her to the light of matrimony above (with the purgatory of the “Anacreontics” in between).<sup>22</sup>

Despite (or because) of its heavenly tones, the epithalamion celebrates life in the shadow of death. As noted, “Epithalamion” celebrates at its literal center the altar, the place of marital union and ritual resurrection. As the poem proceeds from this central event, night falls, and the couple’s mortality is counteracted by their faith in their enduring Christian union, which cannot be divorced from their creative fertility together. In its twenty-third stanza, “Epithalamion” reaches its final, prayerful state, wherein the couple are described as “wretched earthly clods”—no better than decomposed bodies—blessed (as if “raine[d]” upon) by the “heavens,” the sacred “temple of the gods”:

And ye high heavens, the temple of the gods,  
In which a thousand torches flaming bright  
Doe burne, that to us wretched earthly clods  
In dreadful darknesse lend desired light;  
[....]  
Poure out your blessings on us plenteously,  
And happy influence upon us raine,  
That we may raise a large posterity,  
Which from the earth, which they may long possesse,  
With lasting happinesse,  
Up to your haughty pallaces may mount  
("Epithalamion" 409–20)

Earlier, we read that the couple are blessed by the “religion of the faith first plight / With sacred rites” (392–93) by Juno, a stand-in for Queen Elizabeth I, Defender of the (Protestant) Faith.<sup>23</sup> The poem at this point is both an eulogy in its sharp awareness of

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<sup>22</sup> See Elizabeth Heale, “Spenser as Orpheus,” in *Autobiography and Authorship in Renaissance Verse* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 92–124.

<sup>23</sup> “The centre of the poem with its marriage service is Christian, but Spenser surrounds it with a gathering of pagan deities native to the classical form” (Oram, “What Happens”).

## The Spenser Review

the couple's mortality and also a celebration of their imperially and divinely sanctioned fertility. Spenser and Boyle will thrive in a terrestrial, architectural, ecclesiastical, and cosmic context, as the "temple of the gods" above provides the celestial pattern for the temples below in which they were married and will be buried.<sup>24</sup> The couple's bedchamber there is infused with the spirit of love and procreativity sealed earlier that day at the altar of the church. Their love, so joined, will continue on into eternity as a reflection of the resurrected body of Christ, as seen through Spenser's verse, which is a "moniment" or "ornament" dedicated to their love. The "endlesse moniment" cut off in haste, and the volume of poems—referred to by the speaker at the end of "Epithalamion" as a gift to his bride (433)—can therefore be understood as analogous to a monument for the couple. Through print, Spenser publishes this monument to the world and keeps the memory of their love alive: he has embalmed them both in loving embrace in a literary tomb.

### III

Elizabeth Boyle must have understood this optimistic vision of a couple united in love in death.<sup>25</sup> Medieval and early modern monuments featuring spouses lying together in so-called "altar tombs" due to their rectangular, elevated shapes resembling altars were well known in England and Ireland.<sup>26</sup> In Ireland's particularly ruinous landscape, tomb sculpture is a vital reminder of the florid artistic culture of its old churches, both Catholic and Anglican.<sup>27</sup> Two extraordinary tombs contemporary with Spenser's later career still stand in the Dublin Pale: the Dillon tomb at Newtown Trim, Co. Meath (mid-1590s), and a highly similar tomb in Lusk, Co. Dublin (1589). The former shows Attorney General of Ireland and Chief Baron of the Exchequer Sir Lucas Dillon of Moymet (d. 1595), a pro-government Old English administrator lying in armor next to his first wife, Lady Jane Bathe, with a sword (of justice?) between them; the latter tomb, also commissioned by

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<sup>24</sup> The speaker of the sonnets describes the couple's home, presumably at Kilcolman, as a combination of "brasen towre" and "sacred bowre" (*Amoretti* 65.14); it thus reflects the type of that heavenly "temple." In reality, we do not know where Elizabeth Boyle was ultimately buried; she died in 1622, after Spenser (1599) but before the Kilcredan monument was constructed. We also don't know the location of Spenser and Boyle's wedding; a good candidate would be Kilmallock, a medieval walled town with professional choristers within a few hours' ride of Kilcolman and much closer than Cork city or Youghal, which would have been impossible to travel to and from in the time frame suggested by the poem. See discussion by the author: Herron, "Trade and Travel: Roads," *Centering Spenser: A Digital Resource for Kilcolman Castle*, accessed August 3, 2023, [https://core.ecu.edu/umc/munster/tt\\_roads.html](https://core.ecu.edu/umc/munster/tt_roads.html).

<sup>25</sup> For discussion of the character of Elizabeth in the sequence, see Oram, "What Happens."

<sup>26</sup> The term dates from the seventeenth century; see *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "altar tomb, n.," July 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/4192073805>.

<sup>27</sup> Rachel Moss, "Permanent Expressions of Piety: The Secular and the Sacred in Later Medieval Stone Sculpture," in *Art and Devotion in Late Medieval Ireland*, ed. Rachel Moss, Colmán Ó Clabaigh, and Salvador Ryan (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2006), 97.

## The Spenser Review

Dillon, shows his second wife, Marion Sharle (d. 1607), and her first husband, Sir Christopher Barnwall of Turvey (d. 1575).<sup>28</sup> Both tombs commemorate couples. The Dillon tomb follows provincial southern English precedent but departs from the “medieval Irish” tradition by depicting an entire family kneeling and praying, sculpted into the base at one end.<sup>29</sup> The symmetrically balanced ceremony takes place with a Bible at the center and the words “*DEUS GOD*” inscribed in an aureola above (figs. 5a–c).



Fig. 5a. The Dillon tomb (mid-1590s) at Newtown Trim, Co. Meath. (Photograph by Thomas Herron, July 18, 2023).

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<sup>28</sup> James Jocelyn, “The Renaissance tombs of Lusk and Newton Trim,” *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 103 (1973): 161, 163–64.

<sup>29</sup> Jocelyn suggests the end panel depicts the wedding ceremony of Sir Lucas and Lady Bathe, but that is unlikely (“The Renaissance tombs” 159, 162). Husbands and wives praying opposite each other across a faldstool was a common motif in early modern English tombs. See Nigel Llewellyn, *Funeral Monuments in Post-Reformation England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000): 43–44 and *passim*.



**2. The Tomb of Sir Lucas Dillon, at Newtown, near Trim.**

Fig. 5b. Nineteenth-century illustration with caption of the Dillon tomb at Newtown Trim, with end panel showing Sir Lucas Dillon and Lady Jane Bathe in prayer, flanked by their children. (Reproduction of image in Eugene A. Conwell, "A Ramble Round Trim," *Journal of the Royal and Archaeological Association of Ireland* 2.2 (1873), 368.)



Fig. 5c. End panel of Dillon tomb at Newtown Trim, showing Sir Lucas Dillon and Lady Jane Bathe in prayer, flanked by their children. The words “*DEUS GOD*” are carved in the aureola above. (Photograph by Thomas Herron, July 18, 2023.)

The Barnwall tomb shows the effigy of Sir Christopher recumbent in Italianate armor and holding an open book, almost certainly a prayer book, and an inscription on the pillow reads “*SOLI LAUDES DEO / SI DEUS NOBISCUM QUIS CONTRA NOS*” (“Praise the Lord alone, if the Lord is with us who can be against us”). Another inscription on the chest base indicates that the couple (Christopher and Marion) had twenty children (their names are listed on another side of the base), and that Sir Lucas and Marion were “married heerr 3 yere after the death of the said ser Christopher.”<sup>30</sup> Sir Lucas celebrates the erection of the tomb in the same place, both literary and spatial, as he commemorates his marriage to Sir Christopher’s widow.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Jocelyn, “The Renaissance tombs,” 155, 157, 162. It is possible that “heerr” in the inscription should be read as “her,” i.e., Marion Sharl, who was married by Sir Robert, but that reading goes against the spelling of the word and twists the immediate grammatical sense of the inscription. See also <https://www.archaeology.ie/monument-of-the-month/archive/barnewall-effigial-tomb> for description and images of the Barnwall tomb. For a review of New English tombs in Dublin, see Amy Harris, “Tombs of the new English in late-sixteenth and early seventeenth century Dublin,” *Journal of the Church Monuments Society* 11 (1996): 25–41.

<sup>31</sup> We don’t know if Spenser saw these tombs, but he would have known of Sir Lucas Dillon, whom he likely met mid-career when both were present at the trial of Nicholas Nugent, Chief Justice of the Common Pleas, at Trim in 1582 (letters by Lord Grey from that trial are written

## The Spenser Review

Both tombs carry the message of a loving couple united in death. Both tombs also highlight the couples' offspring, which brings to mind another funerary dimension of *Amoretti and Epithalamion*: that of (filial) legacy. Amoretti, or *putti*, were commonly found on ancient Roman sarcophagi that called attention to deceased children and mothers who died in childbirth. *Putti* were, accordingly, "in the Renaissance and after, often used in the design of commemorative works across Europe," including on early modern tomb monuments in England and Ireland.<sup>32</sup> For example, a winged cherub's head is prominently displayed above the central inscription of the impressive memorial (1620) in St Mary's Collegiate Church in Youghal, County Cork (not far from Kilcredan), dedicated to Elizabeth's kinsman Richard Boyle, baron of Youghal (1616) and first earl of Cork (1620).<sup>33</sup> The monument shows Boyle recumbent between his two wives, who face each other in prayer. Joan Apsley, Boyle's first wife, died giving birth to their stillborn child in December, 1599, so she is sculpted with the infant beside her. *Amoretti and Epithalamion*, by virtue of its title alone, could have put Elizabeth Boyle in mind of love, lineage, and, logically, of the death that threatened her and any children that might result from her marriage to Spenser. Spenser's "Anacreontics," which lie between the wooing of the sonnets and the marriage song of "Epithalamion," prominently feature a wounded Cupid whose mother, Venus, "tooke him streight full piteously lamenting, / And wrapped him in her smock."<sup>34</sup> In consolation for the pains of physical love, Spenser promises his bride in *Amoretti and Epithalamion* a spiritual love that can conquer death.

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in Spenser's hand). Also present at the trial was Sir Robert Dillon of Riverston (d. 1597), a cousin of Sir Lucas; Sir Robert is portrayed in conversation with Spenser near Dublin in Lodowick Bryskett's *A Discourse of Ciuill Life* (1606). For recent discussion of Bryskett's treatment of Dillon, including various clarifications of previous confusions, see Andrew Zurcher, "Plantation, Contagion, and Containment in Spenser and Bryskett," *Explorations in Renaissance Culture* 47 (2021): 129–32.

<sup>32</sup> Elaine Hoysted, "Visualising the Privileged Status of Motherhood: The Commemoration of Women in Irish Funerary Monuments, c. 1600–c. 1650," in *Irish Fine Art in the Early Modern Period: New Perspectives on Artistic Practice, 1620–1820*, ed. Jane Fenlon, Ruth Kenny, Caroline Pegum, and Brendan Rooney (Newbridge, Co. Kildare: Irish Academic Press, 2016), 225, citing Charles Dempsey, *Inventing the Renaissance Putto* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press Books, 2001), 10–12. For an example of a cupid-figure on a child's tomb in the ancient Roman world, see the Kline Monument (A.D. 120–140) at the Getty Museum: <https://www.getty.edu/art/collection/object/1035XK> (accessed August 4, 2023). Stuart Kinsella discusses a tomb (1614) in Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin, with cupids on it that reveal the dead infant son of Arthur Chichester, Lord Deputy of Ireland. See: Kinsella, "'All gorgeously wrought': Renaissance influence at Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin," in *Dublin and the Pale in the Renaissance, c. 1540–1660*, ed. Michael Potterton and Thomas Herron (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2011), 238–39.

<sup>33</sup> Hoysted, "Visualising," 222–28, 236. A second large monument for Richard Boyle that foregrounds his second wife (not him) is in St Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin. Hoysted states that Apsley died in "1598" but the date 1599 is given in Toby Barnard, "Boyle, Richard, first earl of Cork (1566–1643)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), <https://doi-org.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/10.1093/ref:odnb/3133>. Apsley was first buried (without a memorial) in Buttevant, whose dissolved friary Spenser had leased in 1597 (Apsley's body was later transferred to St Mary's in Youghal). An image of the tomb in Youghal can be found here, although the sculpture of the infant is not in view: <http://www.megalithicireland.com/St%20Mary%27s%20Collegiate%20Church,%20Youghal.html> (accessed August 4, 2023).

<sup>34</sup> "Anacreontics," in *The Shorter Poems*, lines 63–64.

## The Spenser Review

Whereas the Dillon and Barnwall tombs show their couples side-by-side, as if coequal in death, the Boyle and Tynte monuments foreground their male subjects. The wives on both tombs are shown kneeling on opposite sides of their husbands, praying for their souls. This composition evokes the two angels hovering over the tomb of Christ in the Gospel of John (20:12). On the base of Tynte's tomb are sculpted weapons in bas-relief, a testament to his career as a soldier (also noted in the inscription).<sup>35</sup> Here, we see Spenser's vision of funerary love and militaristic triumph from *Amoretti* fulfilled, at least in part: the main difference is that the man who replaced Spenser in Elizabeth's bed, Robert Tynte, casts only himself as the "wretched earthly clod" on his monument. Elizabeth, although angelic, is reduced to a supporting role in eternity. She was Spenser's, but apparently not Tynte's, fairy queen.

### Conclusion

Shohachi Fukuda, in the conclusion to his impressive analysis of number-structures in *Amoretti and Epithalamion*, suggests that Spenser's loving art provides a refuge for the couple from the pressures surrounding their "remote countryside home in savage Ireland" ("Numerological" 46). While such dangers are clearly alluded to in stanzas 18–19 of "Epithalamion" and, more obliquely, in *Amoretti*, such a reductive view skews our perspective on Spenser's place in Ireland.<sup>36</sup> Through his artful numbers and subject matter, Spenser does create in his work a holy space of intense Christian love for the couple at Kilcolman that opposes mortal change and transcends *all* worldly cares. At the same time, the imagined nymphs of Mulla aid the couple in their homebuilding efforts ("Epithalamion" stanzas 3–4), the local townspeople (real or imagined) celebrate their wedding in a church that was presumably standing long before Spenser arrived ("Epithalamion" stanzas 8–15), and Spenser taps into a highly familiar artform

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<sup>35</sup> Harris, "Tynte Monument," 140, 143. The weapons echo the iconography of the instruments of the Passion, including a spear, which was commonly found on Catholic funerary monuments of the later medieval period. Protestant tombs avoided most medieval Christian iconography, and after the Reformation, many Catholic tombs in the Pale, including the Barnwall and Dillon tombs, increasingly used secular iconography that "place[d] their emphasis on family and lineage, altering the tombs' function as a channel for intercessory prayers to a monument of commemoration and status." See Rachel Moss, "Continuity and Change: the material setting of public worship in the sixteenth-century Pale," in *Dublin and the Pale*, 202–03. See also Moss' discussion of the Protestant Agard-Harrington tomb (c. 1584) in Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin, with its "focus... on family, status and inheritance." Moss, ed., *Art and Architecture of Ireland. Vol. 1: Medieval, c. 400–c. 1600*, 5 vols. (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 2014), 473.

<sup>36</sup> For an emphasis on violence in the sequence that reflects topical conflict, see James Fleming, "A View from the Bridge: Ireland and Violence in Spenser's *Amoretti*," *Spenser Studies* 15.1 (2001): 135–64.

## The Spenser Review

commonplace in Anglo-Norman churches in England and Ireland—the funerary monument—when he shapes the fundamental message of his volume.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> See Germaine Warkentin's comment that its "world of contexts" makes "Epithalamion" Spenser's "best poem." Warkentin, "Amoretti and Epithalamion," in *The Spenser Encyclopedia*, ed. A.C. Hamilton et al. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 38.