

Leaena and Amoret

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Interpretations of the House of Busyrane in Spenser's *Faerie Queene III* are almost as varied as its critics, but most center on the question of how the character Amoret, who is "th'ensample of true loue alone," could have been taken prisoner by a sadist like Busyrane. Critics like A. C. Hamilton and Thomas Roche view Amoret's inability to escape, or even to speak out, as evidence of problems within her, and they assume that she must be flawed to be caught in this situation.¹ Such arguments, however, see Amoret's silence as a kind of capitulation, and I don't think we need do so. At least one contemporary emblem suggests that Spenser is emphasizing Amoret's heroic strength.

Busyrane wants Amoret to renounce her love for the knight Scudamour; in resisting him, she displays loyalty commensurate with her title of "true loue alone." Loyalty in love, at its most heroic, was traditionally associated with resistance to torture. Alciati's emblem 13 depicts the Athenian monument to Leaena, who is reputed to have bitten her own tongue out under torture rather than betray her lover Harmodius's role in the assassination of Hipparchus (a son of Peisistratus). The picture shows a statue of a tongueless lioness sitting in the doorway of a tower. Over her head is a bas relief of an owl. The owl is a symbol of Athena, and hence of Athens, and the lion refers to "Leaena." The motto is "Nec quaestioni quidem cedendum" (One should not yield, even when put to the torture). The tonguelessness

1 A. C. Hamilton, *The Structure of Allegory in the Faerie Queene* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), pp. 157-63. Thomas P. Roche Jr., "The Challenge to Chastity: Britomart at the House of Busyrane," *PMLA* 76 (1961): 340-43.

of Leaena figures female heroism as silence, a notion supported by the highly ambiguous nature of female silence in early-modern England. What makes it more likely that this particular emblem is relevant to *The Faerie Queene* is that the lion and the owl show up elsewhere in Book III. The heroine, Britomart, bears a lion on her shield, and her nurse companion is Glauce, or "owl." Alciati's emblem helps us see that Britomart and Amoret are connected by a bond of shared strength rather than by a "wavering" woman's need to be rescued.