

COMPLETENESS IN SPENSER'S THE FAERIE QUEENE

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A Thesis  
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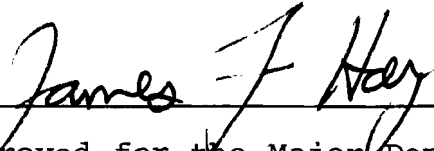
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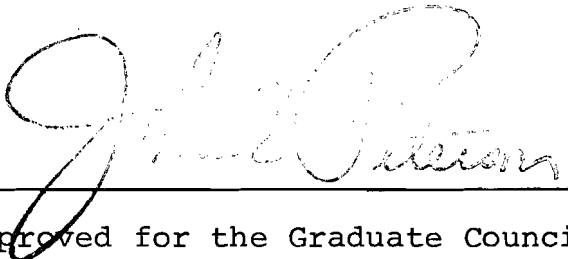
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## PREFACE

My first reading of The Faerie Queene convinced me, impressionistically, that Books I-VI are a complete poem and that the part of the Letter to Raleigh implying that Spenser's great poem is but half what it should be is fallacious evidence. The following study, consequently, is the result of an attempt to find out if there is any scholarly basis for my impression. I believe there is, and I try to present as many kinds of evidence from as many perspectives as possible within the limits of reasonable size.

Special thanks are due Amy Marshall and Professors James F. Hoy and Charles E. Walton for their direction, encouragement, and critical assistance.

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## CHAPTER 1

### COMPLETENESS AND INTENTION

Opinions about the completeness or incompleteness of Edmund Spenser's The Faerie Queene are often derivative, based upon the demands of a certain critical method rather than upon the results of an independent approach to the question. In other words, the poem's completeness (or incompleteness) is often assumed as a necessary premise for an ensuing commentary. Historical-textual critics, to use a convenient category, think The Faerie Queene incomplete, and use its incompleteness as a premise in their studies of and apologies for its apparent inconsistencies. By contrast, archetypal-formalist critics, another convenient grouping, assume the poem to be complete, because the validity of their observations depends upon such an assumption. Surely, the question of completeness, so central to the study of The Faerie Queene, deserves consideration for its own sake, not merely as a by-product of a scholarly method. To approach this problem independently requires, in effect, something of a reconciliation between the

opinions of the two groups of critics: an hypothesis is advanced, and supported, that The Faerie Queene is complete in six books, the archetypal-formalist position; but this hypothesis is, and must be, formulated according to an historical-textual method of criticism, in this instance an attempt to reconstruct Edmund Spenser's intentions with regard to the 1596 edition of his poem. This task is hardly simple, for it involves not only the necessity of handling various kinds of evidence, but also requires the assessment of the pertinence of that evidence, as well as careful definition of the question being addressed.

Northrop Frye illustrates the necessity for defining the problem in this comment about The Faerie Queene:

If merely uncompleted, then it still may be a unity like a torso in sculpture; if unfinished, then, as in Dickens' Mystery of Edwin Drood, certain essential clues to the total meaning are forever withheld from us.<sup>1</sup>

Frye's solution to the question he has posed also illustrates, as well as can any citation, the archetypal-formalist position regarding the completeness or incompleteness of The Faerie Queene: "I shall assume, as a working hypothesis, that the six books we have form a

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<sup>1</sup>Northrop Frye, Fables of Identity, p. 69. Subsequent quotations of Frye in this chapter are from the same source and are identified parenthetically in the text by page number.

unified epic structure, regardless of how much might have been added that wasn't" (p. 70). Frye's reputation as a leading archetypal critic is secure enough, and the reliance of archetypal criticism on formalistic premises heavy enough, that his position can safely be taken to represent that of a substantial group of critics.<sup>2</sup> The derivative nature of this opinion about the completeness of The Faerie Queene can be shown by quoting Frye, yet again:

The unity of a work of art, the basis of structural analysis, has not been produced solely by the unconditioned will of the artist, for the artist is only its efficient cause: it has form, and consequently a formal cause. (p. 11)

Moreover, it is clear from this portion of Frye's theoretical criticism that his commentary, like that of formalist critics, depends for its validity on the fact that the work being analyzed is a complete work. Otherwise, in Frye's terms, it will have no form, nor any formal cause. Thus, Frye's assumption that The Faerie Queene is complete in six books is necessary if he is to deal with the poem at all; his opinion is, in other words, derived from the premises of his critical method.

The opposite tendency can be illustrated, more briefly, from the criticism of C. S. Lewis. Lewis's

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<sup>2</sup>Rudolph B. Gottfried, "Our New Poet: Archetypal Criticism and The Faerie Queene," PMLA, LXXXIII (1968), 1369.

opinion about the completeness of The Faerie Queene, the derivative nature of that opinion, and his critical method are all evident in one short passage:

Spenser did not live to complete the great poem which was his life's work. It would be salutary if instead of talking about the Faerie Queene we sometimes talked about Fragment A (I-III), Fragment B (IV-VI) and Fragment C (Mutabilitie). This would help to remind us that the inconsistencies we find in it are those of a partially written work.<sup>3</sup>

The prominence of Lewis's great historical work, The Allegory of Love, and his obvious concern with textual matters in the passage cited, qualify him as a suitable representative of what can be called an historical-textual school of critics. Lewis himself explicitly reveals the connection between his opinion regarding the completeness of The Faerie Queene and his critical method: he is using the fact of incompleteness to apologize for "inconsistencies." His position, then, is not independently arrived at, but is, like Frye's, derived from the assumptions he brings to the poem.

It should be emphasized at this point that holding what may be termed a derivative opinion about the completeness of The Faerie Queene does injury to neither Frye nor Lewis. Their commentary on Spenser's great work is illuminating and useful, and the notations above should

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<sup>3</sup>C. S. Lewis, English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, Excluding Drama, p. 378-379.



imply absolutely no derogation of their work, nor should it be inferred that they are in basic disagreement about the poem. On the contrary, the essential similarity of their commentary on The Faerie Queene, despite their holding opposite opinions about the poem's completeness, only reinforces the need for an independent approach to this problem in Spenserian criticism. Such an independent approach does, in fact, lead to something of a synthesis. The approach, then, is useful insofar as it effects a sort of critical reconciliation.

Before the problem of The Faerie Queene's completeness or incompleteness can be addressed, however, the matter in question should be precisely defined, with boundaries of the inquiry drawn, and a method of procedure established. The question to be addressed can be put rather simply: did Edmund Spenser, in 1596, intend that The Faerie Queene be complete in the six books published then, or did he intend that the existing six books be only a stage in the preparation of a larger work, just as the three books published in 1590 were a preliminary for the six published in 1596? Put another way, the problem is whether Books I-VI are what Spenser, in 1596, intended to be his complete The Faerie Queene. Cast in these terms, the question implies some of its own boundaries.

First, the "Cantos of Mutabilitie" will not be considered in the present inquiry. That they were first added to The Faerie Queene in the 1609 edition, fully thirteen years after the focus of this inquiry and ten years after Spenser's death, seems reason enough to doubt their relevance. The "Cantos" were added by the publisher, Matthew Lowmes (or Lownes), and announced as a newly discovered "parcell of some following booke of the Faerie Queene Under the Legend of Constancie never before imprinted."<sup>4</sup> Lowmes's authority for adding the "Cantos" to The Faerie Queene was not revealed, nor has it since been discovered. Arguments from the text of the "Cantos" have proved to be contradictory, and the question of whether or not to accept Lowmes's presentation of them as part of The Faerie Queene remains controversial.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>R. E. Neil Dodge, ed., The Complete Poetical Works of Spenser, p. 660. Subsequent quotations of Spenser's works are from this edition and are identified in the text.

That the "Cantos of Mutabilitie" were included in the 1609 edition probably reveals more about Lowmes, of whom very little is known, than about Spenser.

<sup>5</sup>H. S. V. Jones, A Spenser Handbook, pp. 301-302; M. Pauline Parker, The Allegory of The Faerie Queene, p. 265. Jones quotes from Sebastian Evans's argument in an 1880 Macmillan's Magazine that the "Cantos" cannot possibly have been intended as a part of The Faerie Queene. Parker illustrates the opposite position, temporally and critically, with her suggestion that the "Cantos" could have been intended for the grand climax of Book XII.

Frye and Lewis also demonstrate this controversy. Lewis obviously thinks the "Cantos" are a part, "Fragment C," of The Faerie Queene. Frye, by contrast, states flatly, "What we can see is that the Mutabilitie Cantos are certainly not a fragment" (p. 71). Since the import of the "Cantos of Mutabilitie" seems to be hopelessly ambiguous with regard to the question of the completeness of The Faerie Queene, they should in all fairness be ruled out of the present inquiry.

A second boundary involves the narrative inconsistencies that Lewis speaks of. It is by now well-known, for instance, that while the Letter to Raleigh says that the palmer brings to Gloriana's court "an infant with bloody hands," in Book II it is not until Canto i, stanza 40, that Guyon finds the baby and his mother; or, for a further example, that the time sequences in Florimell's story do not make good sense. Most arguments from these inconsistencies are, however, circular.<sup>6</sup> Certain inconsistencies are held to imply certain compositional problems and then those problems are cited in order to explain the inconsistencies. Michael Murrin makes a suggestion, seen in fuller context in Chapter III, that Spenser simply did not concern himself with narrative

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<sup>6</sup>W. J. B. Owen, "The Structure of The Faerie Queene," PMLA, LXVIII (1953), 1085.

inconsistencies because he was more concerned with the reader's response to his stories than with the stories themselves.<sup>7</sup> However this may be, attention to narrative inconsistencies seems fruitless for this inquiry.

The Letter to Raleigh, included in the back of the 1590 edition of The Faerie Queene, implies both a final boundary of the inquiry and a method of approaching the problem of completeness. The only firsthand record of Spenser's intentions regarding The Faerie Queene is found in the Letter.<sup>8</sup> These intentions, however, represent Spenser's thinking in 1589 and not in 1596. The application of the Letter to The Faerie Queene of 1596 should, then, be viewed with caution. Oftentimes, insufficient emphasis is given to the fact that the Letter

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<sup>7</sup>Michael Murrin, The Veil of Allegory, p. 73.

<sup>8</sup>Gottfried, p. 1365; Howard C. Cole, A Quest of Inquirie, pp. xi-xii; H. C. Chang, Allegory and Courtesy in Spenser, p. v. The only possible way to approach what Spenser intended in 1596 is to attempt openly and deliberately to reconstruct his intention. Gottfried points out the relevance of the author's intention to any study of Spenser. Thus, this method is essentially historical. Cole and Chang provide forceful statements of the value of historical methods to any inquiry. Chang's is remarkable for its brevity: "Historical study is the beginning of all honest inquiry."

was not published with the 1596 edition.<sup>9</sup> It seems certain that Spenser would have included it had it still been relevant to his poem, and the probability that its omission indicates abandonment, or at least thorough revision, of the twelve-book plan, is of major significance.<sup>10</sup> As a record of Spenser's intentions other than mere length, however, the Letter cannot be entirely dismissed. Spenser obviously did not write twelve books of The Faerie Queene, but he may have fulfilled other intentions stated in the Letter. By examining the extent to which Spenser accomplished these intentions of 1589, it is possible to approach the reconstruction of what he intended in 1596.

Of the other intentions in the Letter to Raleigh, only two stand out clearly enough to serve as a focus for the present inquiry. First, Spenser intended to write something like what is generally called a courtesy book: "The generall end therefore of all the booke is to fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline." What Spenser's idea of a courtesy book was, or indeed what is the modern definition of the genre, is not as clear as it might be, but an

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<sup>9</sup>Josephine Waters Bennett, The Evolution of The Faerie Queene, pp. 37, 154.

<sup>10</sup>Janet Spens, Spenser's Faerie Queene, p. 11.

illuminating examination of this intention can, nevertheless, be made. Secondly, Spenser intended to write an epic: " . . . I have followed all the antique poets historicall: first Homere . . . then Virgil . . . after him Ariosto . . . and lately Tasso." How well Spenser fulfills this intention has long been a matter for lively discussion, and a fuller treatment of this intention can be undertaken. If Spenser fulfills these intentions in the six books of his 1596 The Faerie Queene, the suggestion that the poem may be considered complete as it stands seems credible. If he does not fulfill them, then incompleteness is more likely.

In either case, Book VI should be looked to for confirmation of the suggestion made by Spenser's fulfillment or non-fulfillment of the intentions outlined in the Letter to Raleigh. Book VI is the only book composed wholly during the 1590's, the period of main interest to this inquiry.<sup>11</sup> It is, furthermore, the most plainly autobiographical book in The Faerie Queene, with the Mount Acidale episode (VI.x) as the focus of its interest. It may, therefore, provide both personal and professional evidence as to what Spenser intended

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Owen, p. 1098.

in 1596. Examining The Faerie Queene in terms of Spenser's intention to write a courtesy book, in terms of his intention to write an epic, and in terms of Book VI's relationship to the whole poem should produce an hypothesis in answer to the question of whether the poem as it stands in six books is complete or incomplete.

The hypothesis produced by the ensuing examination is, simply, that Spenser in 1596 intended that The Faerie Queene be complete in six books. Spenser's major poem turns out, upon close scrutiny, to be not a courtesy book, but rather a poetic experiment in Courtesy that ultimately assumes an anti-courtesy stance, suggesting that Spenser may have deliberately ended it. The Faerie Queene is, as it stands, complete as an epic, insofar as "epic" can be reasonably defined. Finally, Book VI is designed both to conclude the epic structure of the poem and to express Spenser's pessimism over the possibility of true Courtesy flourishing in Elizabethan England. This duality, in turn, suggests that the poet was, in 1596, both satisfied with his poem as it stood and discouraged about continuing it further. It is, therefore, not unreasonable to hypothesize that The Faerie Queene in the present six books is a complete poem.

Thus, the historical-textual critics' method (in this case reconstructing the author's intention) leads to the archetypal-formalist critics' position, that The Faerie Queene is complete. Both the present hypothesis and the method used to advance it have the virtue of being the result of an approach that is independent of a priori assumptions about the poem. They represent, moreover, something of a reconciliation or synthesis between the two critical schools, and as such are hardly without value. The hypothesis of a complete The Faerie Queene cannot, of course, be conclusive. It is, however, supported by viable evidence, and the problems it leaves will perhaps lead to new questions, which are the sole source of new answers.



## CHAPTER II

### COMPLETENESS AND COURTESY

The Letter to Raleigh clearly indicates that The Faerie Queene was intended to have the function of what is commonly called a courtesy book: "The generall end therefore of all the booke is to fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline." However, it is not known what Spenser's concept of the courtesy book was, nor does there exist a satisfactory definition of the genre, although Spenser obviously draws on the tradition of some sort of courtesy literature. The extent to which The Faerie Queene conforms to a working model of the courtesy book may, then, illuminate the question of the poem's completeness or incompleteness. The Faerie Queene, while sharing some general characteristics with the courtesy book, turns out to be something quite different from a courtesy book and might even be called, ultimately, an anti-courtesy book. The way in which Spenser finally reaches his anti-courtesy stance suggests that he may have deliberately made an end to The Faerie Queene, a possibility with

an obvious bearing on the question of the poem's completeness. In any case, it is helpful to have the relationship between The Faerie Queene and what is usually referred to as the courtesy book clarified.

John Mason's definition of the courtesy book shows the breadth to which the term must be stretched to include all the kinds of works to which it is commonly applied:

Courtesy, then, may be tentatively defined as a code of ethics, esthetics, or peculiar information for any class-conscious group, and a courtesy book is a book which sets forth such a code.<sup>12</sup>

Mason's definition, while based on thorough study, is hardly precise. Whether this definition approximates Spenser's concept of the courtesy book and its function is unknown, nor is there any evidence to suggest what Spenser's models may, in fact, have been. On the other hand, it is clear that Spenser shared the didacticism of his poetic generation.<sup>13</sup> His sensitivity to problems of didactic purpose shows in the Letter to Raleigh, when he complains of those who "delight to read, rather for variety of matter than for profite of the ensample," or those "which had rather have good discipline delivered

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<sup>12</sup>John E. Mason, Gentlefolk in the Making, p. 4.

<sup>13</sup>David M. Bergeron, English Civic Pageantry 1558-1642, p. 7; Chang, p. 115.

plainly in way of precepts . . . then . . . in allegorical devises." In view of this belief in the connection between poetry and the teaching of behavior, Spenser's intention to model The Faerie Queene at least partially after the courtesy book seems natural.<sup>14</sup> Under these conditions, lacking both a usable generic definition and any indication of Spenser's own definition of the courtesy book, perhaps the best that can be done is to identify a general group of acknowledged courtesy books against which The Faerie Queene can be compared in general terms.

It is useful, here, to distinguish between Continental, primarily Italian, courtesy books and English ones. Because, in the sixteenth century, Italian forms of behavior were roughly a century in advance of English, Italian courtesy books were influential in England.<sup>15</sup> Castiglione's The Courtier, the prototypical Italian courtesy book, was available to Spenser in Thomas Hoby's

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<sup>14</sup>Joan Grundy, The Spenserian Poets, pp. 20-21; Murrin, p. 85; Maurice Evans, Spenser's Anatomy of Heroism, p. 50.

<sup>15</sup>Joan Wildeblood and Peter Brinson, The Polite World, p. 27.

translation, and Spenser's attitudes show a broad similarity to Castiglione's.<sup>16</sup> Yet while Spenser seems to have known, or at least to have known about, the Italian courtesy books, he makes no extensive use of them, and his borrowings do not agree deeply with the originals.<sup>17</sup> At bottom, Spenser's treatment of courtesy is not Castiglione's.<sup>18</sup> More broadly, courtesy in the Italian books should be distinguished from courtesy as seen by the English.

The transmission, however accomplished, of ideas about courtesy from Italy to England occurred at a time when the well-known forces that set in motion the confluence of events loosely called the Renaissance were affecting, too, the social basis of courtesy in England, making that basis, in essence, more widely founded.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>James T. Stewart, "Renaissance Psychology and the Ladder of Love in Castiglione and Spenser," JEGP, LVI (1957), 225; Jones, p. 291.

<sup>17</sup>Graham Hough, A Preface to The Faerie Queene, p. 202; Chang, p. 174.

<sup>18</sup>Chang, p. vii.

<sup>19</sup>Ruth Kelso, "The Doctrine of the English Gentleman in the Sixteenth Century," University of Illinois Studies in Language and Literature, XIV (1929), 11.

The large numbers of courtesy books written during the sixteenth century point to the new social relationships that demanded them.<sup>20</sup> The result was that English ideas of courtesy were, in a sense, more democratic than were Italian ones. Italian courtesy operated differently for inferiors, for equals, and for superiors.<sup>21</sup> English gentlemen, on the other hand, were supposed to provide examples of conduct for all.<sup>22</sup> This is not, of course, to say that English ideas of courtesy were classless; the need for social strata was recognized and even emphasized.<sup>23</sup> This distinction between Italian and English courtesies is necessary if The Faerie Queene is to be viewed profitably in terms of the courtesy book. Spenser's problem in resolving the nature/nurture dispute over true nobility is more easily understood against the background of an English tendency to accent personal virtue more and birth less.<sup>24</sup> To cite a most pertinent example, Richard Mulcaster, Spenser's teacher at the Merchant Taylor's School, expressed in Positions (1581) the opinion that noble birth without learned virtue was worthless.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Wildeblood and Brinson, p. 27.

<sup>21</sup> Kelso, p. 87.

<sup>22</sup> Wildeblood and Brinson, p. 44.

<sup>23</sup> Mason, pp. 7-8.

<sup>24</sup> Chang, p. 177; Kelso, p. 29.

<sup>25</sup> Mason, pp. 51-52.

In Ruth Kelso's terms, Spenser might be said to hold the Christian ideal of courtesy as opposed to the Italians' aristocratic ideal:

The Christian ideal is built upon humility, abasement before God and before man, denial of self for the sake of others; the aristocratic ideal assumes inherent inequalities between men and works for the perfection of a few at the expense of many.<sup>26</sup>

The sense that Spenser is more in sympathy with courtesy that "on a lowly stalke doe bowre" (VI. Pr. 4) is reinforced by distinguishing between English and Italian ideas of courtesy.

If, then, the completeness or incompleteness of The Faerie Queene is to be suggested by the extent to which the poem draws on the tradition of the courtesy book, the acknowledged courtesy books to be used as models in this study should be English. This group of works includes Thomas Elyot's The Governour (1531), the anonymous Institucion of a Gentleman (1555), Lawrence Humphrey's The Nobles, or of Nobility (1563), and William Segar's The Booke of Honor and Armes (1590).<sup>27</sup> These works share a number of general characteristics with each other and with The Faerie Queene. It is these characteristics that underlie such casual but suggestive assertions as

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<sup>26</sup>

Kelso, p. 74.

<sup>27</sup>Jones, p. 287.

Douglas Bush's that The Faerie Queene is a "poetic book of conduct" or a "conduct book in verse."<sup>28</sup> From Bush's position, it would be but a small step to call The Faerie Queene a courtesy book.

A central characteristic that distinguishes this group of courtesy books from what might be called etiquette or manners books is a concern chiefly with the essence of nobility rather than with the smaller details of behavior.<sup>29</sup> A major theme in courtesy books, consequently, is how to identify true nobility.<sup>30</sup> Spenser's most memorable handling of this theme is perhaps the story of Pastorella, who, though apparently a mere shepherdess, is first seen in a noble setting as a "soveraine goddess" (VI. ix. 7-9) and is later discovered to be of noble birth (VI. xii. 3-22). The entire The Faerie Queene, as well, is permeated by this theme: the Duessa episodes, the case of the Florimells, and Artegall's masquerade as the Salvage Knight are examples. Braggadochio and Paridell illustrate, too, the problem of noble appearance versus noble essence, in their own comic vein. Spenser's overall concern with essences instead of details

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<sup>28</sup>Douglas Bush, English Literature in the Earlier Seventeenth Century (1600-1660), p. 26; Douglas Bush, Prefaces to Renaissance Literature, p. 98.

<sup>29</sup>Wildeblood and Brinson, p. 49.

<sup>30</sup>Mason, pp. 6-7.

may, in fact, be reflected by his consistent use of visionary rather than narrative episodes as "allegorical cores."<sup>31</sup> Colin Clout's vision on Mount Acidale, revealing the essence of Courtesy, is paralleled by the House of Holiness in Book I, the House of Temperance in Book II, the Temple of Venus in Book IV, and the Palace of Mercilla in Book V.<sup>32</sup> Spenser's poetic method is habitually consistent with a concern for essences, a belief that "Vertues seat is deep within the mynd / And not in outward shows, but inward thoughts defynd" (VI. Pr. 5).

A second major point on which Spenser is in essential agreement with courtesy book writers concerns the virtues required for a gentleman. While individual collections differ, of course, a consensus listing includes justice, prudence, liberality, temperance, fortitude, and courtesy itself.<sup>33</sup> Spenser's collection, Holiness, Temperance, Chastity, Friendship, Justice, and Courtesy, seems to be basically drawn from courtesy book convention. Spenser also follows, or expresses intent

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<sup>31</sup> C. S. Lewis, The Allegory of Love, p. 334.

<sup>32</sup> R. F. Hill, "Colin Clout's Courtesy," MLR, LVII (1962), 492.

<sup>33</sup> Kelso, p. 76.



to follow, the courtesy book practice of separating spiritual from worldly virtues. Faith, hope, and charity provide the spiritual underpinnings for prudence, justice, et al.<sup>34</sup> While the Letter to Raleigh's proposal to follow the "private morall vertues" with the "Polliticke vertues" is not carried out, Spenser at least shows himself to be aware of courtesy book tradition.

The Faerie Queene shows some other courtesy book traits. As the etymology of the word indicates, the court is usually presented as the focus of exemplary behavior.<sup>35</sup> Service at the court is the highest goal toward which the gentleman can aspire.<sup>36</sup> The entire Gloriana's court device outlined in the Letter to Raleigh and referred to intermitently in the poem manifests such a court orientation on Spenser's part. Personified vices and virtues are also common in courtesy books.<sup>37</sup> Spenser's use of personifications is inescapable; episodes like the Cave of Errour (I. i. 11-26) or the Maske of Cupid (III. xii. 3-26) come

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<sup>34</sup>Kelso, p. 74.

<sup>35</sup>Wildeblood and Brinson, p. 26.

<sup>36</sup>Mason, p. 294.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 13.

readily to mind. One of the more effective uses of personification is Malbecco's degeneration into Gelosy (III. x. 54-60). A further characteristic, one in which the English courtesy books differ from the Italian, is the importance given to marriage.<sup>38</sup> In Books III and IV of The Faerie Queene, courtly love suffers its final demise as a literary convention and is replaced by marriage.<sup>39</sup> The story of Florimell and Marinell, whose marriage is the only one properly celebrated in The Faerie Queene, ties this theme to the main concern of courtesy books, true nobility.

Spenser makes use of another tradition that calls to mind, but should be distinguished from, the courtesy book, that of the exemplum.<sup>40</sup> Exempla, small narratives with human characters, used as concrete instances relating to abstract principles, rarely occur in actual courtesy books.<sup>41</sup> In The Faerie Queene, however, their influence is obvious. Perhaps the most pertinent

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<sup>38</sup>Mason, p. 15.

<sup>39</sup>Lewis, Allegory of Love, p. 298.

<sup>40</sup>Hough, p. 202.

<sup>41</sup>Joseph Albert Mosher, The Exemplum in the Early Religious and Didactic Literature of England, p. 130.

instance, here, is the Coridon-Calidore encounter (VI. ix. 41-44) wherein Calidore illustrates courteous behavior under varying circumstances, at a dance and in a wrestling match. Although exempla are not usually found in courtesy books, the two forms are closely enough related, being both designed to teach behavior, so that Spenser's use of exempla is one more factor that makes The Faerie Queene look like a courtesy book.

Perhaps the most important factor indicating that The Faerie Queene was initially intended to function as a courtesy book arises from the broad structure of the poem as a whole. The position of Courtesy as the subject of the last existing book suggests that courtesy is the subject of the whole work, the focus toward which the preceding books move.<sup>42</sup> Courtesy, in a way, seems to include all of the other virtues, and its workings are predicated upon them.<sup>43</sup> Courtesy's representative, Sir Calidore, is already a hero at the beginning of Book VI:

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<sup>42</sup> Jones, p. 281.

<sup>43</sup> Evans, p. 225.

But mongst them all was none more courteous knight  
 Then Calidore, beloved over all:  
 In whom it seems that gentlenesse of spright  
 And manners mylde were planted naturall;  
 To which he adding comely guize withall,  
 And gracious speech, did steale mens hearts away  
 Nathlesse thereto he was full stout and tall,  
 And well approv'd in batteilous affray,  
 That him did much renowme, and far his fame display.  
 (VI. i.2)

Spenser is ready to follow the characteristic Elizabethan shift in emphasis from contemplation to action, to add in Book VI everyday application to ideal virtue.<sup>44</sup> The stage is set for Spenser to portray what C. S. Lewis calls "courtesy as the poetry of conduct" in a fashion congenial to Thomas Elyot, and perhaps to Castiglione, as well.<sup>45</sup> The way is prepared for a celebration of the gentleman aptly described by Ruth Kelso: "He is the ornament as well as the prop of states, and is himself the one best argument for an aristocracy."<sup>46</sup> Spenser the poet is ready to merge with Spenser the courtesy book writer.

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<sup>44</sup>G. K. Hunter, John Lyly: The Humanist as Courtier, pp. 6-7; Rosemary Freeman, The Faerie Queene: A Companion for Readers, p. 81.

<sup>45</sup>Lewis, Allegory of Love, p. 351.

<sup>46</sup>Kelso, p. 163.

Had Spenser accomplished this merging with the skill he was capable of, it would probably be possible to say that The Faerie Queene is complete as a courtesy book and, perhaps, that the form had been raised to a new height. What happens in Book VI, however, is not so much the celebration of the ultimate virtue of Courtesy as it is an experimental failure in some other virtue, called Courtesy, but having, ultimately, little to do with courtesy books.<sup>47</sup> Spenser's Courtesy concerns itself more with movement toward the divine possibility than with survival in the chaotic reality.<sup>48</sup> The Faerie Queene is, in a sense, a poetic experiment that tries to reconcile this higher Courtesy with the reality of Elizabethan times.<sup>49</sup> Books I and II, on their own terms, are rather successful; Book III is more complex, and in Book IV, the complexity begins to tell.<sup>50</sup> Book V is

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<sup>47</sup>Kathleen Williams, "Courtesy and Pastoral in The Faerie Queene, Book VI," RES, XIII (1962), 337.

<sup>48</sup>Donald Cheney, Spenser's Image of Nature, p. 182.

<sup>49</sup>Richard Neuse, "Book VI as Conclusion to The Faerie Queene," ELH, XXXV (1968), 333; Bennett, p. 3.

<sup>50</sup>Neuse, pp. 333-335.

harsh and ends in melancholy. Book VI, then, because of its titular virtue and because of its position as the last existing book, is the final testing ground for Spenser's idea of Courtesy.

The pastoral section (ix-xi) has long been recognized as the heart of Book VI, with Colin Clout's vision on Mount Acidale as its core.<sup>51</sup> The pastoral is especially appropriate in this situation because it represents a fusion of the real with the poetic.<sup>52</sup> The name, Colin Clout, the persona of Spenser himself, emphasizes this fusion: Colin is conventional, from the Greek romances; Clout is more homely, rooted firmly in the everyday.<sup>53</sup> As a matter of fact, the England of Spenser's time resembled somewhat a pastoral setting unidealized.<sup>54</sup> By turning, or returning, to the pastoral mode, then, Spenser is offering his comment on Faeryland from the perspective of the real world.<sup>55</sup> In the process, the values of Faeryland undergo the rigors of Elizabethan reality.

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<sup>51</sup>Lewis, Allegory of Love, p. 350.

<sup>52</sup>Chang, p. 180.

<sup>53</sup>Evans, p. 216.

<sup>54</sup>Bush, Prefaces, p. 55.

<sup>55</sup>Williams, p. 343.

Spenser's treatment of this process in Canto ix is equivocal. Calidore has abandoned his quest, yet he seems to be practicing his virtue, Courtesy.<sup>56</sup> His practice, however, is not easily interpreted. In his somewhat overly polite conversation with Meliboe, Calidore appears to have an ulterior motive, pursuit of the fair Pastorella, "the object of his vew / On which his hungry eye was alwayes bent" (VI. ix. 26). Here, Calidore's Courtesy is disingenuous.<sup>57</sup> Later, he breaches Courtesy in a rather low fashion, offering Meliboe "golden guerdon" (VI. ix. 32) in payment for his hospitality. Meliboe's wisdom in rejecting "That mucky masse, the cause of mens decay" (VI. ix. 33) highlights in Calidore a materialistic side hardly consistent with Spenser's emphasis on essences.<sup>58</sup> Again, in dealing with Coridon, Calidore does not come off as well as one might expect. He is condescending, and again the cause is Pastorella: "Another quest, another game in vew / He hath, the guerdon of his love to gaine" (VI. x. 2).

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<sup>56</sup>J. C. Maxwell, "The Truancy of Calidore," in That Soueraine Light, p. 66.

<sup>57</sup>Cheney, p. 219.

<sup>58</sup>Hill, p. 496.

Elements elsewhere in Book VI reinforce the impression that Calidore is not providing a clearly drawn picture of Courtesy in action. The Priscilla episode (VI. iii. 3-19) is slightly grotesque, with its dismemberment of corpses, but, more importantly, it is dishonest. Fabricating stories to protect even a noble maid's honor does not measure up to Spenser's idea of Courtesy.<sup>59</sup> The treatment of the Salvage Man, too, reduces the stature of courtiers. In previous Books, Salvage Men had been either frightening or comic, but this one is actually superior to Calepine in caring for Serena.<sup>60</sup> While Calepine has become lost (VI. iv. 24), the Salvage Man remains with the lady:

But he did her attend most carefully,  
 And faithfully did serve both day and night,  
 Withouten thought of shame or villeny,  
 Ne ever shewed signs of foule disloyalty.  
(VI. v. 9)

These ambiguities, where the hero of Courtesy and his surrogate are less than courteous, show Spenser more interested in portraying elements of choice than in showing the right choice being made.<sup>61</sup> The pastoral section

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<sup>59</sup>Chang, p. 186.

<sup>60</sup>Neuse, pp. 338-342.

<sup>61</sup>Paul J. Alpers, The Poetry of The Faerie Queene, p. 293.



of Book VI begins to look less like a setting for Courtesy's decisive victory and more like preparation for an anticlimax.<sup>62</sup>

That Calidore's conquest of the Blatant Beast will be anticlimactic is clearly shown in the Mount Acidale episode (VI. x. 5-30). Mount Acidale is the counterpart of Spenser's other revelatory mounts, for example, Book I's vision of Cleopolis.<sup>63</sup> It is on Acidale that Calidore should learn the essence of Courtesy. Colin Clout's vision, the "hundred naked maidens lilly white," the three Graces, "Handmaidens of Venus," and the "jolly shepherds lasse" in the center, "advaunst to be another Grace," contain the key to true Courtesy.<sup>64</sup> The three Graces suggest Christian grace, and it is they who teach Courtesy's outward forms:<sup>65</sup>

They teach us, how to each degree and kynde  
 We should ourselves demeane, to low, to hie,  
 To friends, to foes; which skill men call civility.  
(VI. x. 23)

The higher Courtesy, then, is a product of an inner vision.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Cheney, p. 217.

<sup>63</sup> Lila Geller, "The Acidalian Vision: Spenser's Graces in Book VI of The Faerie Queene," RES, XXIII (1972), 268.

<sup>64</sup> Lewis, Allegory of Love, p. 350.

<sup>65</sup> Geller, p. 267.

<sup>66</sup> Chang, p. 176; Hill, p. 492.

It is based on inward perfection of a Christian sort, and Colin Clout visualizes it in an image of perfect order.<sup>67</sup> Spenser's *Courtesy*, as revealed on Mount Acidale in a representation of the cosmic dance, expands to include not only the practical and the ethical, but also the esthetic and the metaphysical.

Calidore, however, despite his billing as the champion of *Courtesy*, cannot enter into the presence of this vision:

But soone as he appeared to their vew,  
They vanisht all away out of his sight,  
And cleane were gone, which way he never knew.  
(VI. x. 18)

This inability to make contact indicates that Calidore is not Spenser's representation of a truly courteous person.<sup>68</sup> Rather, his adventures may represent just the opposite, the impossibility of true *Courtesy* in the real world. Calidore cannot understand Colin Clout's vision; he is unfit to participate in it.<sup>69</sup> The best Knight the best court can offer (and remembering the usual identifications of Gloriana as Elizabeth I and Calidore as Sir Philip Sidney, they must be taken as the best) is simply

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<sup>67</sup>Evans, pp. 213-214; Cheney, p. 229.

<sup>68</sup>Neuse, pp. 344-345.

<sup>69</sup>Maurice Evans, "Courtesy and the Fall of Man," *ES*, XLVI (1965), 210-211.

inadequate in terms of Spenser's higher Courtesy.<sup>70</sup> If there is a truly courteous person in Book VI, it is Colin Clout, and his vision is apparently too fragile to survive the rigors of the real world. The experiment, then, has failed; Spenser cannot reconcile the values of Faeryland to the facts of life in Elizabethan England.

The remainder of Book VI reflects this failure. The Mount Acidale episode is followed immediately by the destruction of the entire pastoral world, Meliboe's death, Pastorella's capture, and Coridon's relapse into cowardice. Once more, Spenser emphasizes the fragility of large ideals in a world filled with small people.<sup>71</sup> The final stanzas of Book VI reflect a demoralized attitude. Calidore's temporary conquest of the Blatant Beast is more a sign of the demands of conventional form or of wish fulfillment than of any real victory of Courtesy over Slander.<sup>72</sup> Spenser understands that the worst in society will usually withstand the best; the Blatant Beast rages on:<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup>Harold E. Toliver, Pastoral Forms and Attitudes, p. 64.

<sup>71</sup>Hough, pp. 210-211.

<sup>72</sup>Harry Berger, Jr., "A Secret Discipline, The Faerie Queene, Book VI," in Form and Convention in the Poetry of Edmund Spenser, p. 43.

<sup>73</sup>Arnold Williams, Flower on a Lowly Stalk, pp. 60-61; Hough, pp. 211-212.

He growen is so great and strong of late,  
 Barking and biting all that him doe bate,  
 Albe they worthy of blame, or cleare of crime,  
 Ne spareth he most learned wits to rate,  
 Ne spareth he the gentle poets rime,  
 But rends without regard of person or of time.  
 (VI. xii. 40)

The conclusion of Spenser's experiment in The Faerie Queene is that graceful values are untenable and cannot solve real, contemporary problems.<sup>74</sup> Spenser, in short, has given up on Courtesy.

In this sense, The Faerie Queene is an anti-courtesy book. Where a courtesy book lays out codes and principles for civilized behavior, The Faerie Queene strives for perfected Courtesy based on inward virtue and shows the ultimate impossibility of such perfection. Spenser's anti-courtesy conclusion is, perhaps, the result of an inability to dissociate courtesy from the court and courtiers. The shepherd-poet's view of the court is always critical, and the differentiation between the courtly and the good appears often in the later parts of The Faerie Queene.<sup>75</sup> Spenser finally finds the ideal of the court to be antithetical to its actuality.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup>Cheney, pp. 230-231; Geller, p. 277.

<sup>75</sup>Toliver, p. 64; C. S. Lewis, Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Literature, p. 126.

<sup>76</sup>Hough, p. 203.

Those passages of The Faerie Queene expressing his distrust of the courtly ring deeply true.<sup>77</sup>

The Faerie Queene is a failure as a poetic experiment in Courtesy. Because of this failure, and the resulting anti-courtesy stance of Book VI, the poem should not be called a courtesy book. No real conclusion, therefore, can be drawn about the completeness or incompleteness of The Faerie Queene in terms of Spenser's intention that the poem have the function of a courtesy book, that it define exhaustively the "vertuous and gentle discipline" (Letter to Raleigh). The failure of Spenser's experiment does, however, provide a suggestion that could bear on the question of the completeness of The Faerie Queene.

The possibility that Spenser deliberately truncated his experiment cannot be ignored. The omission of the Letter to Raleigh from the 1596 printing of The Faerie Queene suggests some change in his plan for the poem.<sup>78</sup> By the 1590's, the confusion of emotions and values brought on by Protestantism and neo-classicism was widely felt.<sup>79</sup> Spenser may have seen that the courtiers of his time were not facing these issues, but were retreating from them, making any exercise of true Courtesy

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<sup>77</sup>Lewis, English Literature, p. 357; Lewis, Allegory of Love, p. 317.

<sup>78</sup>Bennett, p. 37.

<sup>79</sup>Spens, p. 102.

impossible, and thus, decided that he, the lone poet, was bound to fail in his original didactic intention.<sup>80</sup> Under these conditions, a decision arbitrarily to end his work would not have been unlikely.

If Spenser did make such a decision, and, in fact, did truncate The Faerie Queene, then the poem is complete. Such completeness would be of another order, however, in terms not of an intention to write a certain kind of poem, a courtesy book, but of a complex of personal, professional, and even coincidental factors that may have little if anything to do with courtesy books, factors to be discussed in Chapter IV. No hard determination, then, can be made on the basis of the courtesy book model, of whether Spenser deliberately ended his poem. Such a possibility, seen by viewing The Faerie Queene as a poetic experiment in Courtesy, is suggestive and illuminating, but not conclusive.

It is at least helpful to have the relationship between The Faerie Queene and the courtesy book clarified. Although Spenser deals with Courtesy, his poem is not a courtesy book. He draws upon the courtesy book tradition, but turns against it. The question of the completeness or incompleteness of The Faerie Queene is, therefore,

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<sup>80</sup>Neuse, pp. 337-338.

left hanging. Only ambiguous suggestions are derived from examining Spenser's intention to model his poem at least partially after the courtesy book. This ambiguity may be inevitable, corresponding as it does to Spenser's own ambiguous position as a mediator between medieval and modern, concerning himself deeply with human virtue, while sensing its ultimate worthlessness.<sup>81</sup> Spenser's final comment on the courtesy book might be that it is easier to know a gentleman when you see one than to say with much precision what he is.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup>Evans, Spenser's Anatomy of Heroism, p. 22.

<sup>82</sup>Kelso, p. 18.

### CHAPTER III

#### EPIC COMPLETENESS

The second of Spenser's two clear-cut intentions was to write an epic. In the Letter to Raleigh, he declares, ". . . I have followed all the antique poets historicall: first Homere . . . then Virgil . . . after him Ariosto . . . and lately Tasso." Spenser is more successful in fulfilling this second intention than he was in writing a courtesy book. Since The Faerie Queene meets the most sensible group of epic characteristics so far outlined (those of E. M. W. Tillyard) and does so in such a way as to infuse the well-worn Spenserian clichés with new meaning, it may be considered complete as an epic. Viewing The Faerie Queene as an epic offers a partial solution to the question of its completeness or incompleteness by suggesting one way in which the poem is, indeed, complete.

Spenser was so consciously the poet and so untiringly strove towards what he believed to be the ideal poetic life that his epic ambition seems inevitable.<sup>83</sup> By

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<sup>83</sup>Grundy, p. 19.



celebrating England as third Troy, he places himself in the line of his greatest predecessors, and by assuming the mantle of the New Poet, he takes upon himself the responsibility for subsuming all poetic tradition, from Homer, Virgil, Ariosto, Tasso, and more, so that his successors recognize him as the poets' poet.<sup>84</sup> The very first stanza of The Faerie Queene (I. Pr. 1) shows that Spenser takes this responsibility seriously. He draws upon Homer's "sacred Muse," is obliged, like Virgil, "For trumpets sterne to chaunge mine oaten reeds," echoes Virgil's "arms and the man" with "Fierce warres and faithfull loves," and forms the whole from the materials of the Italian epics, "knights and ladies gentle deeds." Spenser's desire to be an English Homer or Virgil reveals a thorough understanding of the vocation of the poet and of his highest calling, the epic.<sup>85</sup>

The flowering of Spenser's desire came at a propitious time, coinciding with events that encouraged epic success.<sup>86</sup> The Tudors had brought what began to look like lasting stability, twenty years of Elizabeth's

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<sup>84</sup>Evans, Spenser's Anatomy of Heroism, p. 11; Hough, pp. 86-87; Spens, p. 71.

<sup>85</sup>Murrin, p. 74; Geoffrey H. Hartman, Beyond Formalism, pp. 380-381.

<sup>86</sup>E. M. W. Tillyard, The English Epic and Its Background, p. 208.

reign had removed doubts about the strength of a Queen as opposed to a King, and Drake's successful return in 1580, followed by the defeat of the Spanish Armada and the execution of Mary, Queen of Scots, provided confirmation for ideas of national greatness.<sup>87</sup> The English language was approaching the magical point wherein freshness is balanced by maturity, wherein it is standard enough to be a unifying force, yet not so rigid as to discourage innovation.<sup>88</sup> Political, social, scientific, and philosophical changes had built up a body of new intellectual forms.<sup>89</sup> Spenser had the advantages of the best of two worlds, and, in retrospect, it can be seen that England was ready for an epic when Spenser was ready to write one.

The body of materials available for epic composition was large and varied, but Spenser's use of them is uniquely Elizabethan. His sources range from the contemporary to the ancient, from philosophical to romantic to heroic.<sup>90</sup> He models his writing at one time on Ariosto, at another on Virgil.<sup>91</sup> The publication of Gerusalemme

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<sup>87</sup>Bennett, pp. 71, 88.

<sup>88</sup>Bush, Prefaces, p. 27.

<sup>89</sup>Roger Sale, "Spenser's Undramatic Poetry," in Elizabethan Poetry, p. 425; E. M. W. Tillyard, The Elizabethan World Picture, p. 8.

<sup>90</sup>Bush, Prefaces, p. 27.

<sup>91</sup>William Nelson, The Poetry of Edmund Spenser, p. 117.

Liberata was a timely influence, and Spenser is able to accommodate Tasso, as well, to his overall plan.<sup>92</sup> This accommodation is a hallmark of Spenser's thinking. His ability to find and exploit common elements among seemingly diverse systems of thought and poetic methods places him firmly within the Elizabethan tradition of syncretism.<sup>93</sup> That one poem should attempt to reconcile poets of such diverse tendency to each other, and to Christianity, too, may appear strange, but this faith in an ultimate discoverable order permeates Elizabethan literature, Sidney and Shakespeare along with Spenser.<sup>94</sup> Enlightened opinion of the time demanded Spenser's effort; how well he succeeds is suggestive of one way in which The Faerie Queene may be considered complete.

If the completeness of The Faerie Queene in terms of the epic is to be shown, a generic model of the epic is necessary. The freeness with which "epic" is used as an honorific term has served to drain the word itself of most of its precision. On the other hand, narrower

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<sup>92</sup>Kenneth Muir, Introduction to Elizabethan Literature, p. 22; Parker, p. 292.

<sup>93</sup>Lewis, English Literature, p. 387.

<sup>94</sup>Hough, pp. 86-87; Lewis, English Literature, p. 10.

definitions, some of which seem to describe Paradise Lost exclusively, rob "epic" of legitimate connotations and exclude legitimate works from the category. The most sensible model of the epic available, it would seem, is E. M. W. Tillyard's, whose four characteristics of the epic are rigorous enough give the concept substance, but flexible enough to allow the word its resonance.<sup>95</sup> The first characteristic is that the work be of "high quality and of high seriousness," that it "use words in a very distinguished way" and for an equally distinguished purpose. Secondly, the work must be large in scope; it must have "amplitude, breadth, inclusiveness." Third, the artist must form his work carefully; he must exercise "control commensurate with the amount [of material] included." Finally, the work must be what Tillyard calls "choric;" that is, it must "express the feelings of a large group of people living in or near his [the author's] own time." It must speak for someone. Spenser's accomplishment in terms of these four characteristics measures his success as an epic poet.

There should be little dispute that The Faerie Queene meets Tillyard's first requirement, quality and seriousness. Spenser is one of the few poets whose reputation has suffered no eclipses, but rather has

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<sup>95</sup>See E. M. W. Tillyard, The English Epic and Its Background, pp. 5-12. Quotations in this paragraph are from these pages.

remained uniformly high.<sup>96</sup> Historically, The Faerie Queene is a landmark, a massive achievement of a sort not seen since Dante, matched perhaps in quality by Tasso, but not in scope.<sup>97</sup> During his own time, Spenser's poetry was more popular than most, and modern commentary often emphasizes the magnitude of his accomplishment, taking its quality as a self-evident premise.<sup>98</sup> Of his poetic gifts, his narrative technique and the Spenserian stanza stand out especially.<sup>99</sup> Spenser is a sure-handed and innovative narrator, and he has brilliantly adapted the stanza to his purpose. Book VI (to be given special attention in Chapter IV) is singled out by some as being the showpiece of his poetry.<sup>100</sup> Whatever the emphasis, the high quality of Spenser's poetry is not in doubt.

As for seriousness of purpose, John Milton's reference to "sage and serious Spenser" has persisted even into recent commentary, and, by and large, deservedly

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<sup>96</sup>Lewis, English Literature, p. 393.

<sup>97</sup>Murrin, p. 167.

<sup>98</sup>J. W. Saunders, "The Facade of Morality," in That Soueraine Light, p. 4; Alpers, p. 330; Freeman, p. 31.

<sup>99</sup>Lewis, English Literature, p. 389; A. Williams, pp. 88-89; Muir, p. 30.

<sup>100</sup>A. C. Hamilton, The Structure of Allegory in The Faerie Queene, p. 191; Hill, p. 492.

so.<sup>101</sup> Something of Spenser's purpose has already been discussed in connection with The Faerie Queene as a courtesy book, in the preceding chapter. Implied there, but not emphasized, is that The Faerie Queene is a Christian poem at heart.<sup>102</sup> As such, it is fundamentally and seriously concerned with grace and redemption, with seeing a new order of Nature, based on Old Testament law and working toward New Testament mercy.<sup>103</sup> Book I is explicitly religious, but it should not be forgotten that religious imagery occurs frequently throughout the poem and that the final allegorical core, the Mount Acidale episode, is as much Christian as it is anything.<sup>104</sup> Beyond this Christian orientation is the little remarked, but inescapable, fact that apart from Spenser's purpose, with its reliance on the reader's reaction, many sections of The Faerie Queene simply do not exist save as dead artifact; they are poetry only when read responsively. Spenser's allegorical method depends almost exclusively

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<sup>101</sup>Cole, p. 3.

<sup>102</sup>Parker, p. 3.

<sup>103</sup>Evans, Spenser's Anatomy of Heroism, p. 227.

<sup>104</sup>Geller, pp. 267-268.

on a reader's perception of and response to the poet's purpose.<sup>105</sup> Thus, high quality and distinguished purpose become at times inseparable. In any event, Spenser's excellence and seriousness are such that he quite obviously meets the first epic requirement in The Faerie Queene.

Similarly, Tillyard's second epic characteristic, inclusiveness and breadth of scope, is certainly found in The Faerie Queene. The virtue inhering in the poem's very size, seventy-two long cantos, seems obvious evidence for this contention, yet is sometimes left unnoticed by modern commentators.<sup>106</sup> Modern critics are, however, becoming aware that The Faerie Queene is so various as to render any single critical approach inadequate.<sup>107</sup> Spenser's concern with variety and with different levels of experience is manifested in his easy ranging from the fantastic to the realistic, the familiar to the strange, the physical to the moral, the simple to the complex.<sup>108</sup> The landscape of Faeryland is

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<sup>105</sup>Murrin, p. 54.

<sup>106</sup>Bush, English Literature, p. 76.

<sup>107</sup>A. C. Hamilton, "Spenser and the Common Reader," ELH, XXXV (1968), 624.

<sup>108</sup>Hunter, p. 8; Grundy, pp. 39-40; Cheney, p. 247.

as good an example as any of the poem's breadth, combining the England and Ireland of Spenser's own experience with the England of Chaucer, Langland, and Malory, along with the classical world of Virgil and Homer.<sup>109</sup> From a different perspective, the encyclopedic sequences, such as the reading of Briton Moniments and the Antiquitee of Faery Lond (II. x) or the Marriage of the Thames and Medway (IV. xi) are equally graphic examples of the poem's epic scope. Ultimately, Spenser is so inclusive in The Faerie Queene that he takes all of creation for his subject in one way or another, as C. S. Lewis notes in remarking upon ". . . the Divine order in the Universe -- the concord, the health, the justice, the harmony, the Life, which, under many names, is the real heroine of the whole poem."<sup>110</sup> It is this concern with large relationships, as well as with smaller commonplaces, that marks The Faerie Queene as a work of epic scope.

The third of Tillyard's epic characteristics, artistic control, is a point of much confusion about the epic character of The Faerie Queene. For example, Tillyard himself contends, "The Faerie Queene fails of the full heroic impression in spite of its chivalrous setting. And it does so because its organization is rather loose."<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Grundy, pp. 26-27.

<sup>110</sup> Lewis, Allegory of Love, p. 354.

<sup>111</sup> Tillyard, English Epic, p. 11.



Later, however, he allows the poem "a genuine if loose totality."<sup>112</sup> Both the genuineness and the looseness of The Faerie Queene arise from the variety of methods that Spenser uses to control his material. In a sense, then, the first three epic characteristics, purpose and quality, scope and variety, and methods of control, are interrelated in The Faerie Queene. The range of Spenser's technique will become evident, and no single discussion can hope to do more than suggest its breadth.

The seriousness of Spenser's purpose has been shown, and it is easy to see how this purpose functions as a controlling factor in The Faerie Queene. Spenser's aim was rhetorical; he wanted The Faerie Queene to encourage and help develop the readers' moral vision.<sup>113</sup> Involvement of the reader is essential. In Book II, for example, the Bower of Bliss (II. xii) is likely to be taken as an unwitting poetic tribute to sensual desire and delight, unless the intended psychological impact of the tension between the rational dictates of Temperance and the emotional attraction of the Bower is recognized.<sup>114</sup> The

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<sup>112</sup>Tillyard, English Epic, p. 292.

<sup>113</sup>Alpers, p. 5; Murrin, pp. 95-96.

<sup>114</sup>Arlene N. Okerlund, "Spenser's Wanton Maidens: Reader Psychology and the Bower of Bliss," PMLA, LXXXVIII (1973), 64.

reader shares Guyon's "secret pleasaunce" and "secrete signes of kindled lust" (II. xii. 65, 68) in the presence of the "Two naked damzelles" (II. xii. 63) and, thereby, prepares himself to appreciate more fully the relief of Acrasia's defeat. The reader controls the material in accordance with Spenser's purpose, and in this way the narrative loose ends that have so plagued critics like Lewis become unimportant: Spenser does not "tie up" his stories because they are not the focus of his concern; the reader is.<sup>115</sup> Thus, uncertainties about the poem may reflect the reader's uncertainty about himself, as the Elizabethan poet in this case holds a mirror up to the reader as well as nature.<sup>116</sup> Spenser's skill as a poet is such that his purpose induces the reader to be, to a degree, his own controlling force in The Faerie Queene.

When a reader does this, he participates in one of Spenser's more successful techniques of control, Faeryland.<sup>117</sup> In Faeryland, Spenser provides a seamless poetic world, sufficient unto itself, yet able to relate directly to experience and the concrete.<sup>118</sup> It represents, at once, the world of the mind, as well as the world of

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<sup>115</sup>Murrin, p. 73.

<sup>116</sup>Alpers, p. 178.

<sup>117</sup>Lewis, English Literature, p. 380.

<sup>118</sup>Evans, Spenser's Anatomy of Heroism, p. 58; Freeman, p. 305.

social dealings.<sup>119</sup> Spenser's diction is a key element in his creation of Faeryland: insofar as it is strange, archaic or exotic, it sets the poetry apart in its own sphere; where it is, at the same time, familiar, it connects with the everyday and makes Faeryland tangible.<sup>120</sup> Faeryland's successful illusion depends also on Spenser's allegorical method, his decision to present his poem "clowdily enwrapped in allegoricall devises" (Letter to Raleigh). What Michael Murrin calls "the veil of allegory" shadows a world, in this case Faeryland, to which the poet is privy and the reader seeks entrance. In Murrin's words, it "creates the value truth needs by setting up difficulties for the understanding."<sup>121</sup> In other words, allegory almost forces the reader to participate, just as the veiled beauty of Colin Clout's vision on Mount Acidale compels Calidore's inquisitiveness. Once the reader has entered and accepted Faeryland, Spenser's task of ordering and controlling The Faerie Queene is far advanced.

An aspect of Faeryland that is easily sensed but not often made explicit is its essentially pastoral

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<sup>119</sup>Spens, p. 52; Thomas P. Roche, Jr., The Kindly Flame, p. 45.

<sup>120</sup>Parker, p. 13.

<sup>121</sup>Murrin, p. 11.

character.<sup>122</sup> While Spenser openly rejects his "lowly shepherds weeds" (I. Pr. 1) for epic apparatus, it is well to remember that the two personas are most often the same man, that the epic poet starts from where the pastoral poet leaves off.<sup>123</sup> That Spenser, for all his epic similes and fabulous castles, never strays far from his pastoral beginnings well suits both the man and his time. The strength of Spenser's poetry, and of Faeryland, inheres in communion with simple nature, the wood and the plain ever-present in The Faerie Queene.<sup>124</sup> The Elizabethans' simple nature, in turn, was to them "alive," infused with meaning; their natural world represented other worlds, psychic, civil, or metaphysical.<sup>125</sup> So it is in Faeryland, and so it is that the pastoral section of Book VI does not seem out of place, but rather functions naturally as a Faeryland in small.<sup>126</sup> If the figure

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<sup>122</sup>A. C. Hamilton, "Spenser's Pastoral," ELH, XXXIII (1966), 518-519.

<sup>123</sup>Donald Cheney, "Plowman and Knight: The Hero's Dual Identity," in Spenser, pp. 63-64.

<sup>124</sup>John Arthos, On the Poetry of Spenser and the Form of Romances, p. 200.

<sup>125</sup>Bush, Prefaces, p. 62; Lewis, English Literature, p. 4.

<sup>126</sup>K. Williams, p. 343.

of the pastoral poet sums up much of Spenser's career, then Faeryland, that figure's natural habitat, accounts for much of his works' unity.<sup>127</sup>

Faeryland's inward-looking, reflective quality is closely associated with the most famous of all of Spenser's methods of controlling his material, the Spenserian stanza. The stanza is so constructed as to encourage elaboration or widening rather than forward motion.<sup>128</sup> Its three rhymes converge toward the middle, creating a sort of centripetal force that focuses attention on the stanza as a unit in itself.<sup>129</sup> The final alexandrine supports this tendency by stopping the flow of the meter.<sup>130</sup> Despite these tendencies, however, Spenser's stanzas are not monotonous, but rather engage the reader, demanding his involvement. William Empson understands this characteristic of the Spenserian stanza quite well:

The size, the possible variety, and the fixity of this unit give something of the blankness that comes from fixing your eyes on a bright spot; you have to yield yourself to it very completely to take in the variety of its movements, and, at the same time, there is no

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<sup>127</sup>Grundy, p. 26.

<sup>128</sup>A. Williams, p. 90.

<sup>129</sup>Hamilton, Structure of Allegory, p. 14.

<sup>130</sup>Evans, Spenser's Anatomy of Heroism, p. 84.

need to concentrate the elements of the situation into a judgement as if for action.<sup>131</sup>

This fine tension between fixity and movement is characteristic of The Faerie Queene as a whole and is evidence of Spenser's success in using his own stanza to control his material.

The next larger unit of control in The Faerie Queene is the canto. Unlike, for example, Ariosto (or Ezra Pound), Spenser does not arrange his cantos capriciously, but rather uses them to form patterns within the larger work. The importance of Canto x as the allegorical core in five of the six books has been noted.<sup>132</sup> That the House of Holiness, House of Temperance, Temple of Venus, Castle of Mercilla, and Mount Acidale episodes present parallel experiences, and that the reader is expected to compare and contrast these is hardly to be doubted. What is less often noticed is that Canto iii seems to occupy a place of some importance in each book.<sup>133</sup> In Books I and VI, the narrative switches to a secondary character; in I, Una begins her travels alone, while in VI, Calepine is introduced as Calidore's surrogate. In Books II and V, Braggadochio begins and ends his masquerade as a true Knight. Also in Book V, Florimell and Marinell are

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<sup>131</sup>William Empson, Seven Types of Ambiguity, p. 34.

<sup>132</sup>Hill, p. 492.

<sup>133</sup>Roche, p. 201.

married. In Book III, Merlin delivers his prophecy about Artegall to Britomart and Glauce, and in Book IV, Cambina brings concord after Priamond, Diamond, and Triamond fight with Cambell. Although not so well defined as the pattern in the tenth cantos, a significance, nonetheless, begins to emerge: Books I and VI have parallel third cantos, as do Books II and V. The import of this parallelism will become clear when the book as a method of control is discussed later in this chapter.

A further significance for the canto as a controlling factor is suggested by its reasonably uniform length. It was yet possible for Elizabethan poets to conceive of their art as an oral form, and it is possible that Spenser anticipated The Faerie Queene being "performed," with the canto as a convenient unit of presentation.<sup>134</sup> Spenser's echoing or reiteration of the poet's invocation at the beginning of many cantos reinforces this possibility. However this may be, The Faerie Queene is surely controlled and shaped by the canto.

The book is the most obvious, and at the same time the most suggestive, unit of control in The Faerie Queene. A work the size of The Faerie Queene needs not only a

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<sup>134</sup>Murrin, p. 69.

unifying atmosphere, such as Faeryland, or precise execution in small, found in the stanza, but a grand design, or an overall plan, as well.<sup>135</sup> Since only the rudiments of a single narrative action, the story of Arthur and Gloriana, is present, the design must inhere in the relationships among the books, the grouping and juxtaposition of book to book or group to group.

A kind of progressive relationship, with one hero building upon the achievements of the last, has been suggested in Chapter III.<sup>136</sup> This plan involves a cumulative effect, with each part of the poem contributing to an understanding of each subsequent part.<sup>137</sup> Thus, the Cave of the Brigands in Book VI, horrible enough on its own, reverberates with echoes of other caves in Faeryland, the Cave of Errour, the Cave of Mammon, Busirane's Cave, the Den of Proteus, and so on.<sup>138</sup> This plan, too, notes a movement from the private, or personal, virtues (Holiness, Temperance, and Chastity) to the public, or "politicke," virtues (Friendship, Justice, and Courtesy).<sup>139</sup> Calidore's rescue of Pastorella, then,

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<sup>135</sup>Hough, pp. 90-91.

<sup>136</sup>Evans, Spenser's Anatomy of Heroism, p. 225.

<sup>137</sup>Hamilton, "Spenser and the Common Reader," p. 627.

<sup>138</sup>Evans, "Courtesy," pp. 218-219.

<sup>139</sup>Frye, p. 75.



takes on the quality of a redemption, a social regeneration that fulfills the potential of the Red Cross Knight's personal regeneration at the Well of Life in Book I. The Book of Courtesy, the perfect love of man, appropriately completes a cycle begun by the Book of Holiness, the perfect love of God.<sup>140</sup> In the context of such a progressive relationship among the books, the Christian content of Mount Acidale fits in with a larger conception of The Faerie Queene as a Christian poem: the power of God moves from the individual soul (Holiness) through ever-enlarging relationships with the world (Temperance), other souls (Chastity, Friendship), societies (Justice), and finally all mankind (Courtesy). Much of the nobility of The Faerie Queene is revealed through such a design.

Variations on the progressive design are obtained by pairing the books. Book I contrasts instructively with Book II, as the Red Cross Knight operates within a framework of divine grace, while Guyon's adventures occur on a different level of experience, that of Nature.<sup>141</sup> The situation is reversed in the case of Book V and Book VI. Artegall deals with Justice in terms of Old

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<sup>140</sup>Evans, "Courtesy," p. 218.

<sup>141</sup>A. S. P. Woodhouse, "Nature and Grace in The Faerie Queene," ELH, XVI (1949), 204.

Testament law, while Calidore seeks the higher plane represented by New Testament gospel.<sup>142</sup> Comparisons rather than contrasts are apparent between Books III and IV. They appear to be composed from the same Ariostan materials, they deal with similar, perhaps inseparable, themes, and they are similarly structured, being "framed," in a sense, by great pageants of life, the Garden of Adonis and the Marriage of the Thames and Medway.<sup>143</sup> These pairs are also progressive, moving again toward the public. Books I and II are primarily concerned with poetically illuminating a given subject, Books III and IV deal with the workings of the imagination itself, and Books V and VI consider the role of the poet and his poetry in the world.<sup>144</sup> This opening out from narrower conventional matters toward larger contexts is indicative of the experimental character of The Faerie Queene, alluded to in Chapter II.<sup>145</sup> Spenser's experiment proceeds, as well, by a dialectical movement, in which the interplay of the Holiness of Book I and the Temperance of Book II yields the Chastity of Book III;

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<sup>142</sup>Evans, Spenser's Anatomy of Heroism, p. 227.

<sup>143</sup>Roche, p. vii; Owen, pp. 1096-1097.

<sup>144</sup>Berger, pp. 35-36.

<sup>145</sup>Bennett, p. 3; Neuse, p. 333.

similarly, Courtesy is the resolution of Friendship with Justice.<sup>146</sup> By grouping books and exploring the ways in which Spenser juxtaposes them, an overall plan for The Faerie Queene emerges, one of progression, with each book depending on and being enriched by the previous ones.

While it is true that describing the skeletal plan of The Faerie Queene does not account for its power and beauty, such descriptions do suggest the foundations upon which Spenser builds his epic unity.<sup>147</sup> There is a second kind of design discernible, which may be even more suggestive than the progressive design. This design proceeds from the fact that all commentary, no matter what its approach, seems to agree that Books III and IV belong together.<sup>148</sup> With Books III and IV as a starting point, a mirror relationship becomes apparent between the two halves of the poem, the "private" half and the "public" half: Courtesy is the outward expression of the inner virtue Holiness, Justice the manifestation of Temperance, and Friendship that of Chastity.<sup>149</sup> It is

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<sup>146</sup>Frye, p. 75.

<sup>147</sup>Bush, Prefaces, p. 81.

<sup>148</sup>Spens, p. 99.

<sup>149</sup>Roche, p. 200.

as if the poem were composed folded in half and then unfolded into its present shape. Books III and IV are the "hinge," or focal point for the poem. The opening out, noted in connection with the progressive plan, proceeds from the middle of the poem in two directions at once. The parallelism among cantos comes into play, here, emphasizing the symmetry of this unfolding. The correspondences between II. iii and V. iii, in which Braggadochio begins and ends his masquerade as a knight, or between I. x and VI. x, in which heroes see visions of essential truth, or between II. x and V. x, in which fervor is tempered by reality in the Castles of Alma and Mercilla, make clear the care with which Spenser structures The Faerie Queene from the middle outward.

To be sure, this structuring is not as mathematically precise as it would have been had Spenser established correspondences between, for example, II. x and V. ii or between I. ii and VI. x, but this imprecision suggests that Spenser may, in The Faerie Queene, have been combining features of both a progressive and a center-focus structure. Each book proceeds as did the last, but certain cantos are juxtaposed by means of parallel episodes. If this supposition is correct, it is an indication that Spenser probably changed his mind about his poem's overall design in midstream. After composing three books according

to a progressive design, he decided to compose the second three in such a way as to produce in the present six books a balanced, center-focus structure. The implications of this possibility are treated more fully in the following chapter, but at this point, it can be seen that Spenser uses the book and the canto effectively in constructing an overall design for The Faerie Queene. The poem, then, is constructed in a way as the stanza is constructed, and this similarity may bear on the remarkable sense of harmony that prevails despite the variousness of single episodes.<sup>150</sup>

The center-focus, or unfolding, structure is similar to that found by Glynne Wickham in early medieval drama, in which each part of each play is designed to illuminate a central divine miracle, for example, the Virgin Birth or the Resurrection.<sup>151</sup> This construction is also similar to that of a cathedral, which is built so as to enhance the altar and the Host, to direct attention toward the center. It is probably not an accident that The Faerie Queene has been compared structurally to a cathedral, nor that this kind of structure is essentially medieval.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>150</sup>Lewis, English Literature, p. 380.

<sup>151</sup>Glynne Wickham, Early English Stages, I, i, 315.

<sup>152</sup>Grundy, pp. 29-30.

Spenser is as medieval as he is modern, and he worked at a time when medieval patterns of thought were still vital.<sup>153</sup> The central miracle of The Faerie Queene, then, is the subject of Books III and IV, the miracle of Love, and it is toward the brilliant illumination and extensive definition of this miracle that the rest of the poem moves.<sup>154</sup> When the plan of The Faerie Queene is compared to that of a cathedral, the poem's labyrinthine meanderings no longer appear confusing, but rather conscious and deliberate, because the movement is not forward, but inward.

Similar comparisons can be made. C. S. Lewis calls The Faerie Queene's narrative "interwoven" or "polyphonic" and compares it to a fugue.<sup>155</sup> When, in a fugue, two melodies are juxtaposed in various ways, the real center of interest is not the melodies themselves, but the relationships between them. Similarly, in The Faerie Queene, the real focus is not the two readily-definable halves of the poem, but rather their relationship, which occurs at first hand in Books III and IV. To further the point, the subject of Books III and IV, Love, consists, in a sense, of the relationship between the inner being,

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<sup>153</sup>Lewis, Studies, p. 117; Lewis, English Literature, p. 5; Spens, p. 71.

<sup>154</sup>Roche, p. vii.

<sup>155</sup>Lewis, English Literature, p. 133.

explored in Books I and II, and the outer experience of Books V and VI. The Faerie Queene has been compared, as well, to a medieval stained-glass window, which has a unity of plan, rather than of movement.<sup>156</sup> Significantly, this kind of unity has been independently observed in medieval romance.<sup>157</sup> In terms of comparisons like these, Spenser's use of the book as a method of control is seen to be purposeful and effective.

One final comparison will, perhaps, shed additional light on the unity of The Faerie Queene as it inheres in a center-focused, unfolding structure. Richard Hurd, an eighteenth-century Churchman, saw the same kind of unity in The Faerie Queene, and called it ". . . an unity of design, and not of action."<sup>158</sup> Hurd illustrates his point in terms of Gothicism and compares the poem to a garden:

This Gothic method of design in poetry may be, in some sort, illustrated by what is called the Gothic method of design in Gardening. A wood or grove cut out into many separate avenues or glades was amongst the most favourite of the works of art, which our fathers attempted in this species of cultivation. These walks were distinct from each

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<sup>156</sup>Bennett, pp. 106-107.

<sup>157</sup>See Arthos, pp. 189-192.

<sup>158</sup>Richard Hurd, "Gothic Unity in The Faerie Queene," in The Prince of Poets, p. 191.

other, had, each, their several destinations, and terminated on their own proper objects. Yet the whole was brought together and considered under one view by the relation which these various openings had, not to each other, but to their common and concurrent center.<sup>159</sup>

It is this often unperceived center that allows Spenser to deal with such varieties of experience without having his poem fly off in all directions. In its inclusiveness and breadth, The Faerie Queene is no doubt Gothic.<sup>160</sup>

Its Gothicism, however, is that of Hurd's garden or of Wickham's cathedral. The poem's central miracle is the Love treated in Books III and IV. Sexuality, in the broadest sense, is of importance in these Books as a representation of Love's unifying and dynamic power.<sup>161</sup>

The entire poem is focused on this power, illuminating it and deriving strength from it, a direct result of Spenser's skill in using the book as a technique of controlling his materials. Faeryland, the stanza, the canto, and the book are used in mutually reinforcing ways to control The Faerie Queene.

Of Spenser's other method of control in The Faerie Queene, perhaps the most misvalued has been the allegory.

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<sup>159</sup>Hurd, p. 191.

<sup>160</sup>Hunter, p. 8.

<sup>161</sup>Gottfried, p. 1372; Spens, p. 99.



Its strictness or rigor is susceptible to either over- or underestimation; it can be searched for where it is not, or glossed over where it is of obvious importance.<sup>162</sup> Spenser's allegorical method is, in fact, quite different from that of a morality play or a Pilgrim's Progress.<sup>163</sup> It is flexible and cannot be read reductively.<sup>164</sup> In general, the story controls the allegory, rather than the other way round, and to read Spenser looking for the allegory would, indeed, be simple-minded, impoverishing, and probably ultimately futile.<sup>165</sup> On the other hand, there is allegory in The Faerie Queene, and it does contribute to the poem's success.<sup>166</sup>

Allegorical thought was congenial to Elizabethans, who habitually made easy and nearly automatic connections between the abstract and the concrete.<sup>167</sup> Spenser, accordingly, is, at times, consciously and clearly allegorical and, at other times, more vaguely so.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>162</sup>William V. Nestruck, "The Virtuous and Gentle Discipline of Gentlemen and Poets," in Spenser, p. 134; Spens, p. 80. Although he does not force his reading of Spenser, Nestruck's concept of allegory seems too strict. Spens, on the other hand, seems too willing to slight the importance of FQ's allegory altogether.

<sup>163</sup>Murrin, p. 14.

<sup>164</sup>Roche, p. 31; Bennett, p. 138.

<sup>165</sup>Hartman, p. 180; Cheney, "Plowman," p. 64, fn. 3.

<sup>166</sup>Evans, Spenser's Anatomy of Heroism, p. 48.

<sup>167</sup>Tillyard, Elizabethan, p. 106.

<sup>168</sup>Hough, p. 114.

The Temple of Venus illustrates these differing intensities of allegory. Dame Concord and her progeny, Love, Hate, Peace, and Friendship, are clearly allegorical characters, and the significance of their department is obvious (IV. x. 32-34). Venus herself, however, while she probably stands for ideal Love or something similar in this particular context, is not given such a precise allegorical definition. Finally, the relationship of this episode to the whole Scudamore-Amoret story has nothing at all to do with allegory. As this rudimentary look at one passage shows, Spenser's allegory makes itself clear; the poet can be trusted to lead the way to allegorical depths if the reader will be attentive to the poem's surface.<sup>169</sup> The Faerie Queene is controlled in part by allegory, but its limitations are recognized by the poet, and it is not allowed to interfere with other effects.<sup>170</sup>

One of the more interesting effects in The Faerie Queene and one of Spenser's more effective methods of control is to be found in his handling of mythology. Mythological references are, of course, pervasive, and there is no doubt that Spenser unselfconsciously helped himself to these materials.<sup>171</sup> However, instead of

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<sup>169</sup>Lewis, English Literature, p. 388; Alpers, p. 157.

<sup>170</sup>Okerlund, p. 65; Arthos, p. 196.

<sup>171</sup>Spens, p. 72.

merely borrowing, which is no particular vice in itself, Spenser rejuvenates mythological materials. In the Paridell-Hellenore-Malbecco story, for example, he retells the myth of Helen of Troy, but in such a parodic vein as to show that he considers the myth worn out and stale, stereotyped to the extent that it is no longer a suitable vehicle for a serious treatment of love (III. ix-x).<sup>172</sup> Having disposed of the stereotypical Hellenore by leaving her among the satyrs, Spenser is able to treat the myth in fresh terms in the story of Florimell.<sup>173</sup> Likewise, after Malbecco, the worn-out jealousy figure, is comically degenerated into a personification, the theme of possessive love can be re-animated in the Busirane episode.<sup>174</sup> With a sure hand, Spenser not only places his poem in the tradition of one of the great myths, but also rejuvenates that myth for future generations of poets.

A similar process occurs in Book IV with the Temple of Venus and the Marriage of the Thames and Medway (IV. x-xi). The Temple of Venus, for all its appropriateness and suggestive value, is a place of artifice, always a danger sign in The Faerie Queene: ". . . all that

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<sup>172</sup>Harry Berger, Jr., "The Discarding of Malbecco: Conspicuous Allusion and Cultural Exhaustion in The Faerie Queene III. ix-x," SP, LXVI (1969), 138.

<sup>173</sup>Roche, pp. 132-135.

<sup>174</sup>Berger, "Discarding," pp. 140-141.

Nature did omit / Art, playing second Natures part,  
 supplied it" (IV. x. 21). Venus's throne is described  
 in almost harsh terms: ". . . like to christall glasse  
 . . . being faire and brickle" (IV. x. 39). She is sur-  
 rounded by a somewhat decadent spectacle:

Great sorts of lovers, piteously complaying,  
 Some of their losse, some of their loves delay,  
 Some of their pride, some paragons disdayning,  
 Some fearing fraud, some fraudulently fayning,  
 As every one had cause of good or ill.

(IV. x. 43)

These unflattering implications are reinforced by com-  
 paring the Temple to the Marriage of the Thames and Medway.  
 Surely, Spenser is more at home with the rivers he knows:  
 "The chaulky Kenet, and the Thetis gray / The morish  
 Cole, and the soft sliding Breane" (IV. xi. 29). There  
 is nothing "soft sliding" about the Temple of Venus, and,  
 again, the point is that Spenser wants to supersede an  
 over-used myth with fresh material treating the same  
 theme, reproductive love.<sup>175</sup> In this instance, he not  
 only places his poem in a mythological tradition, but  
 also places himself among mythmakers. The Marriage of  
 the Thames and Medway is Spenser's great celebration of  
 Love in The Faerie Queene, and it is perhaps more than  
 coincidental that his beautiful Prothalamion is also a

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<sup>175</sup>Harry Berger, Jr., "Two Spenserian Retrospects:  
 The Antique Temple of Venus and the Primitive Marriage of  
 Rivers," TSL, X (1968), 12-13.

river poem.<sup>176</sup> The Faerie Queene, permeated with myth, is at once traditional and fresh, and again infuses with new meaning the identity of the New Poet with the poet's poet. Spenser's use of myth is an effective technique of control in The Faerie Queene.

A final aspect of Spenser's control of his materials in The Faerie Queene is the poem's balance. This virtue Spenser has in common with poets quite unlike him in other ways, metaphysical and medieval alike, and it is hard to say whether, at bottom, it is one of the methods of control or a result of those methods. A series of dualities, almost a sort of poetic schizophrenia, runs through The Faerie Queene, yet Spenser always has control of them and keeps them balanced.<sup>177</sup> He is writing for two audiences, the middle class and the courtly, whose poetics are rather unlike, and he satisfies them both.<sup>178</sup> The overall plot of The Faerie Queene has two centers, making it inadequate as a unifying device, but Arthur's quest and Gloriana's court are mutually supportive rather than destructive.<sup>179</sup> The voice of the poet is never far from the surface, and there is a consistent

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<sup>176</sup>Jack B. Oruch, "Spenser, Camden, and the Poetic Marriages of Rivers," SP, LXIV (1967), 616.

<sup>177</sup>A. Williams, p. 97. Lewis, Allegory of Love, pp. 320-321.

<sup>178</sup>Saunders, p. 13.

<sup>179</sup>Bennett, pp. 28-29; Hurd, p. 194.

tension between the artist's freedom to create and the discipline required to control his creation.<sup>180</sup> Spenser's competence on either of these counts should be obvious: he creates freely from the most diverse of materials, Christian, classical, and chivalric, and balances them rather precisely into a well-controlled whole.<sup>181</sup>

The lasting effect of this controlled balance is a sense of dealing with a single mind. Spenser's habits of thought are in control of the poem as much as is anything, rewarding the reader no matter what particular technique the poem employs.<sup>182</sup> Methods and materials alike are accommodated into a unified poetic world.<sup>183</sup> Faeryland, the Spenserian stanza, the canto, the book, allegory, and mythology are representative of the ways in which Spenser controls his poem. Control, combined with breadth and quality, points toward The Faerie Queene as a complete epic.

If The Faerie Queene is to be seen as a complete epic, it remains only for Tillyard's fourth epic characteristic, that the poem be choric (or speak for a group of people), to be satisfied. That The Faerie Queene

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<sup>180</sup>Berger, "Secret," pp. 74-75; Nestruck, p. 138.

<sup>181</sup>Empson, p. 34.

<sup>182</sup>Arthos, p. 196.

<sup>183</sup>Parker, p. 305.

is choric is nearly self-evident; it is, like the Aeneid, a national epic.<sup>184</sup> In the history of English poetry, The Faerie Queene is a watershed, standing between the medieval and the modern, looking backward to the chivalrous knight and forward to the solid English gentleman.<sup>185</sup> It is, in a sense, the literary landmark of the emergence of the modern English state. The New Troy legend, or the Tudor myth, was instrumental in developing a peculiarly English consciousness, and Spenser's use of it is a good example of his turning medieval materials to modern effect, just as the Tudors themselves, Henry VII and VIII and Elizabeth I, turned what amounted to a feudal kingdom into a modern state.<sup>186</sup> Arthur, whose spirit informs the poem, though his presence does not control it, is revived by Spenser as a symbol of English greatness, an Aeneas-like founder of a nation, and is linked to Gloriana, a representation of the contemporary, goddess-like ruler of the same nation.<sup>187</sup> The Faerie Queene is choric, then, in its attention to the development of England as a cultural entity

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<sup>184</sup>Grundy, p. 31.

<sup>185</sup>Lewis, Allegory of Love, p. 360; Jones, p. 285.

<sup>186</sup>Bush, Prefaces, p. 9; Bergeron, pp. 142-143.

<sup>187</sup>Bennett, pp. 98-99; Evans, Spenser's Anatomy of Heroism, p. 13; Parker, p. 289.

While Spenser's political chauvinism is readily recognized, his literary debt to his English predecessors is less emphasized. He professes Chaucer as his poetic "father" and The Faerie Queene, while epic in design, is, at the same time, colloquial much as Chaucer is colloquial.<sup>188</sup> The "eloquent commonness" of a Wordsworth or a Yeats owes much to Spenser, for he seldom strays far from the world of ordinary English experience.<sup>189</sup> The Faerie Queene owes at least as much to local English mythology and folklore and to English religious tradition as to the classical or the Italian.<sup>190</sup> Spenser's heritage is that of Chaucer and Langland; he is to them as Virgil is to Homer, refining and restructuring earlier materials into an explicitly choric form.<sup>191</sup>

Spenser's historical allegory, sometimes maligned, is an aspect of The Faerie Queene that solidifies the poem's choric nature. While historical identifications are not definitive, they do contribute to a sense of the poem as peculiarly English.<sup>192</sup> Spenser's topical allegories are too specific to be of interest for their own

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<sup>188</sup>A. Williams, p. 89.

<sup>189</sup>Grundy, pp. 39-40.

<sup>190</sup>Parker, p. 277.

<sup>191</sup>A. C. Hamilton, "Spenser and Langland," SP, LV (1958), 548.

<sup>192</sup>Gottfried, p. 1370.



sake, but they lend a choric identity to The Faerie Queene, a feeling of place and time that an epic needs.<sup>193</sup> To see Queen Elizabeth I as the center of things or to feel the threat of unfavorable reaction to the poem by King James VI or Lord Burleigh is to participate in an English experience.<sup>194</sup> Historical parallels act, then, as another kind of metaphor, functioning in specific contexts to tie the poem concretely to the nation.<sup>195</sup> Historical allegory, English literary tradition, and enlightened chauvinism combine to make The Faerie Queene speak for its age, better, most likely, than does Paradise Lost for a later age.<sup>196</sup> Spenser, thus, fulfills Tillyard's fourth epic requirement, the choric voice.

The Faerie Queene, then, is an epic, according to a model that is definitive but not confining, that of Tillyard's four epic characteristics. The high quality of Spenser's poetry is a critical commonplace, as is its high seriousness. The breadth and inclusiveness of The Faerie Queene are almost self-evident. Spenser's control of his materials, while unlike that

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<sup>193</sup>Hunter, pp. 150-152.

<sup>194</sup>Murrin, pp. 117-119.

<sup>195</sup>Spens, p. 53.

<sup>196</sup>Bush, Prefaces, p. 99.

of Milton or Virgil, is nevertheless sure. The Faerie Queene is focused toward its middle, illuminating and drawing strength from the miraculous Love central to Spenser's vision. That vision is cast in distinctively English terms, thus making the poem choric. The epic quality of The Faerie Queene is substantial yet suggestive; it is clearly within the tradition of Homer, Virgil, Dante, Ariosto, Tasso, and Milton; and, at the same time, it is unique.

The Faerie Queene, viewed as an epic, is complete. Spenser clearly intended to write an epic, but perception of the existing artistic value of The Faerie Queene is sometimes obscured in much the same way as is that of The Canterbury Tales.<sup>197</sup> What is, in fact, in either poem is colored by expectation of what more could be there. Such expectation is ultimately futile, and is especially unrewarding with Spenser: The Faerie Queene, unfolding as it does from its middle outward, is not held in suspension awaiting some hypothetical conclusion, but rather is unified in the six present books.<sup>198</sup> This

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<sup>197</sup>Neuse, p. 329.

<sup>198</sup>Kathleen Williams, "'Eterne in Mutabilitie': The Unified World of The Faerie Queene," in That Soueraine Light, p. 35.

unity, finally, is the best argument for completeness; in these terms, the poem provides its own solution to the question of completeness or incompleteness.

The sense of the completeness of The Faerie Queene is enhanced by its ironic position in literary history: it was already outdated by the time of its final publication. While Spenser was writing, the legitimacy of his poetic methods was being severely challenged.<sup>199</sup> As with Paradise Lost, there is no definable line of roughly contemporary development out of which The Faerie Queene grew, nor is there any very significant development from it. It is complete, not only poetically, but historically, as well.

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<sup>199</sup>Lewis, Allegory of Love, p. 359; Murrin, p. 167.

## CHAPTER IV

### BOOK VI, SPENSER'S CAREER, AND THE

#### COMPLETED FAERIE QUEENE

Thus far it has been shown that The Faerie Queene is complete as an epic, while the courtesy book is not a suitable model for suggesting its completeness or incompleteness. Thus, the result of examining the extent to which Spenser accomplished the two clear-cut intentions found in the 1589 Letter to Raleigh is ambiguous with regard to his intention in 1596. Book VI is a key to resolving this ambiguity. If Spenser intended in 1596 that the six present books constitute a complete The Faerie Queene, then he must have designed the second half of the poem to form the unity that has been shown, and he must have, specifically, written Book VI to conclude such a unity. There are signs both in Book VI and in what is known of Spenser's career that Spenser did, in fact, intend that Book VI be the final book of a complete poem. This evidence cannot, of course, be conclusive, and there are problems left unsolved by this hypothesis. Nevertheless, the

importance of Book VI both to the poem's anti-courtesy resolution and to its epic unity suggests that whatever argument is made for a complete poem be firmly grounded in the evidence Book VI supplies.

The Mount Acidale episode (VI. x. 5-30) is central both to the anti-courtesy stance arrived at in Book VI and to the contribution Book VI makes to the epic unity of The Faerie Queene. The disappearance of Colin Clout's vision when Calidore approaches confirms suggestions elsewhere in the book that Calidore does not, in fact, represent Spenser's higher Courtesy.<sup>200</sup> Even the best Knight Gloriana's court can offer is inadequate to the task of realizing Courtesy in the world, and Calidore, in this sense, represents not Courtesy's essence, but but rather its impossibility. Calidore is unfit to enter into the presence of Colin's vision of perfect Courtesy, derived from divine grace and based on perfect order.<sup>201</sup> The anti-climactic and, finally, ineffectual conquest of the Blatant Beast reinforces what has become an anti-courtesy stance.<sup>202</sup>

In Book VI, if The Faerie Queene were a courtesy book, Courtesy should triumphally subsume the previous

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<sup>200</sup> Neuse, pp. 344-345.

<sup>201</sup> Toliver, p. 64.

<sup>202</sup> Cheney, Spenser's Image of Nature, p. 217; Berger, "Secret," p. 43; A. Williams, p. 60.

five virtues in a decisive test against the world of ordinary experience.<sup>203</sup> The Mount Acidale episode, however, epitomizes a reversal. The Faerie Queene becomes not a courtesy book, although it shares several characteristics with the courtesy book, and, as suggested in Chapter II, it might more appropriately be viewed as an anti-courtesy book. The question of its completeness is, then, unsolved in these terms. Spenser, however, may have deliberately truncated his poem, having realized the impossibility of fulfilling his intention to write a courtesy book. If so, The Faerie Queene is complete, but in a different way, depending on evidence unrelated to courtesy books, evidence to be dealt with later in this chapter.

The completeness of The Faerie Queene as an epic depends on no evidence other than the poem itself, and, again, the Mount Acidale episode is important, whether in terms of a progressive structure or of an unfolding, center-focus structure. In either way, Colin Clout's vision functions as a microcosm of the whole, a Faeryland in miniature.<sup>204</sup> What Spenser shows in Faeryland is chaos transformed into a self-sustaining order through the power of Love. The concentric rings of dancing

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<sup>203</sup>Freeman, p. 81; Jones, p. 281.

<sup>204</sup>K. Williams, "'Eterne'," p. 48.

maidens that Colin has created are a perfected image of such an order, a representation of the cosmic dance that was the Elizabethan universe.<sup>205</sup> Mount Acidale's combination of classical Graces, Christian overtones, English landscape, epic convention, and pastoral poet suggests something of the breadth and inclusiveness of The Faerie Queene.<sup>206</sup>

The Mount Acidale microcosm, in terms of a progressive structure, where each book builds on the last, acts as a recapitulation in small, not only of the poem's quests for order, but also of the poet's creative act.<sup>207</sup> The allegorical cores of the preceding books, the House of Holiness, the House of Temperance, the Garden of Adonis, the Marriage of the Thames and Medway, and the Castle of Mercilla, are reflected and echoed by the Mount Acidale episode.<sup>208</sup> The Faerie Queene, in a sense, comes full circle, returning to the religious context of Book I.<sup>209</sup> Mount Acidale's function in an unfolding structure is similar. Its Christian orientation balances and completes, in nearly a typological sense, the

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<sup>205</sup>Alpers, p. 14; Geller, p. 270; Berger, "Secret," p. 67; Lewis, English Literature, p. 4; Tillyard, Elizabethan, p. 101.

<sup>206</sup>Grundy, pp. 26-27.

<sup>207</sup>Berger, "Secret," p. 68.

<sup>208</sup>Hill, p. 492; Geller, p. 272.

<sup>209</sup>Parker, p. 230.

spiritual quest of the Red Cross Knight.<sup>210</sup> Colin's vision represents the source and, at the same time, the goal of the poem's pursuit of the essence of sustaining Love. The Mount Acidale episode, then, is central to the fulfillment in Book VI of The Faerie Queene's epic design, and to the frustration, in Book VI, of Spenser's intention to write a courtesy book. Consequently, Book VI is characterized by this duality: it expresses, on the one hand, satisfaction with an achievement, but on the other, pessimism over its continuance.

This duality is apparent from the beginning, as the "delightful land of Faery" with its "sweet variety / of all that pleasant is to eare or eye" contrasts with "my weary steps," "My tedious travell," and "my dulled spright," all in the first stanza of the Proem.<sup>211</sup> Here, the poles of Spenser's Christian humanism are made explicit. He shares Milton's belief that the purpose of learning (and poetry is a branch of learning) is to regain the perfect knowledge of God lost by Adam and Eve.<sup>212</sup> This view is at once optimistic enough to acknowledge positive accomplishment and pessimistic enough to know that human

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<sup>210</sup>Evans, "Courtesy," pp. 218-219.

<sup>211</sup>Nestrick, pp. 138-139. Berger, "Secret," pp. 74-75.

<sup>212</sup>Tillyard, Elizabethan, p. 21.



accomplishment alone is finally inadequate. In Book VI, Spenser views The Faerie Queene in much the same light: he is satisfied that his work is a substantial achievement of "Golden" poetry, but he knows, simultaneously, that a Golden age cannot last very long.<sup>213</sup> He is satisfied with the power of his hero, Calidore, to defeat the Blatant Beast in the poem, but he has found that poetry is ineffective in checking the equivalent Beasts of Elizabethan reality.<sup>214</sup> This kind of duality suggests that Spenser, while writing Book VI, is ready to end The Faerie Queene. He has become pessimistic about his chances for achieving the plan of 1589, outlined in the Letter to Raleigh, and about his possibilities for court preferment, but he is satisfied, at the same time, that the six books, as they stand, are poetically viable.<sup>215</sup> He is, in other words, making an end to The Faerie Queene with Book VI.

Spenser's duality of attitude is evident in several aspects of Book VI. His choice of Courtesy as a controlling virtue is one source of duality. Courtesy's source is inward, but its manifestation must be outward.<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>213</sup>Lewis, English Literature, pp. 64-65.

<sup>214</sup>Cole, p. 459; Berger, "Secret," p. 41.

<sup>215</sup>Parker, p. 229; Tillyard, English Epic, p. 287.

<sup>216</sup>Berger, "Secret," p. 44.

The relationship of "natural men" to Courtesy is also ambiguous; one Salvage Man is a natural aristocrat, while his people, the Salvage Nation, are villainous "brigants."<sup>217</sup> Even the book's central villain, the Blatant Beast, is two-sided: he is at once the easiest and the most difficult antagonist to overcome.<sup>218</sup> The most explicit examples, however, of Book VI's duality are Spenser's use of the pastoral, the Mount Acidale episode, and the book's conclusion.

The pastoral section of Book VI, Cantos ix-xi, reflects Spenser's awareness of the resurgent popularity of the pastoral mode, begun by his own Shepherds Calendar and revived by Sidney's Arcadia, which appeared shortly after the first three books of The Faerie Queene.<sup>219</sup> Spenser draws on pastoral tradition, but, as in his use of mythology, gives back as much as he takes.<sup>220</sup> He makes clear his debt to Sidney by imitating the story of the hero's rescue of the lady from a wild animal (VI. x. 34-36) and by interjecting his autobiographical persona, Colin Clout, just as Sidney interjects his, Philisides.<sup>221</sup> Spenser's adoption of the fashionable

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<sup>217</sup>Lewis, English Literature, p. 17.

<sup>218</sup>Cheney, Spenser's Image of Nature, p. 183.

<sup>219</sup>Bennett, p. 207.

<sup>220</sup>Hamilton, Structure of Allegory, p. 191.

<sup>221</sup>Bennett, pp. 213-214.

pastoral mode and his tribute to Sidney are evidence of his developing satisfaction with the poetic discipline.

Despite the pastoral surface, however, Cantos ix-xi of Book VI are not, in fact, optimistic in the usual romantic sense. Spenser's imitative Arcadia is not a world of innocence and peace, but rather one about to be violently destroyed.<sup>222</sup> Meliboe and his clan are traditional in the pastoral, but their slaughter is a sharp departure from convention.<sup>223</sup> In fact, Spenser has inverted pastoral convention, producing what might be called a mock-pastoral. Pastoral concerns usually include a healthy measure of the marvelous, but Spenser's pastoral figures are firmly tied to the real world.<sup>224</sup> In the typical three-part action of a pastoral romance, as outlined by Walter Davis, the hero first suffers a "disintegration," where he flees from the pressures of the real world to the refuge of the pastoral, then receives an "education," by contemplating those around him in relation to himself, and finally achieves, with the aid of a god, or someone else with supernatural powers, a "reintegration," which allows

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<sup>222</sup>Hough, p. 201; Cheney, Spenser's Image of Nature, p. 238.

<sup>223</sup>Chang, p. 135.

<sup>224</sup>Toliver, p. vii; A. Williams, p. 29; Arthos, p. 134.

him to return effectively to the real world.<sup>225</sup> Spenser turns this process on its head. Calidore happens upon the pastoral world in the course of his quest: "There on a day, as he pursew'd the chace / He chaunst to spy a sort of shepheard groomes" (VI ix. 5). Calidore is not himself educated, but rather educates Coridon, however superficially. His only reintegrative opportunity is with Colin Clout on Mount Acidale, and from it he learns nothing. He is able, finally, to perform effectively only in the pastoral world, rescuing Pastorella from the brigands, while his conquest of the Blatant Beast in the real world is ineffectual. Spenser's use of the pastoral, then, is ambivalent: on the one hand, his adoption of the pastoral fashion suggests satisfaction with the poetic discipline, while, on the other, his inversion of the convention reveals an underlying pessimism.

This duality is matched, and perhaps epitomized, in the Mount Acidale episode. Colin Clout's vision is an image of final satisfaction, of perfect poetic order.<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>225</sup>Walter R. Davis, "A Map of Arcadia: Sidney's Romance in Its Tradition," in Sidney's Arcadia, p. 38.

<sup>226</sup>Evans, Spenser's Anatomy of Heroism, p. 213; Cheney, Spenser's Image of Nature, p. 229; Geller, p. 270; Berger, "Secret," p. 72; Frye, p. 87.

The fourth Grace, rising from among her three counterparts as if a goddess from among prophetesses, is the final, pure female form in Spenser's creation.<sup>227</sup> She is unnamed and probably unnamable, yet is at the same time, paradoxically, a simple "country lasse," the beloved of Colin Clout, who is, in this sense, the real hero of Book VI.<sup>228</sup> The poet, here appearing in his generic yet personal persona, has created an ultimately satisfying vision.

His satisfaction, however, is shortlived, as Calidore's intrusion causes the vision to disappear. The same undercurrent of bitterness evident in Spenser's inversion of the pastoral is shown in Colin's reaction to the destruction of his vision, as all flee:

All save the shepheard, who, for fell despite  
 Of that displeasure, broke his bag-pipe quight,  
 And made great mone for that unhappy turne.  
 (VI. x. 18)

This tone is continued in Colin's sharp-tongued, sarcastic answer to Calidore's innocent query about the nature of the vision:

'Not I so happy,' answered then that swaine,  
 'As thou unhappy, which them thence did chace,  
 Whom by no means thou canst recall againe;  
 For being gone, none can them bring in place,  
 But whom they of them selves list so to grace.'  
 (VI. x. 20)

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<sup>227</sup>Berger, "Secret," pp. 72-73; Geller, p. 270.

<sup>228</sup>Evans, Spenser's Anatomy of Heroism, p. 18.

The finality and sense of loss of control that Colin expresses in these lines at least counterbalance the satisfying impact of the vision itself. It is Spenser's poetic experiment that has been interrupted.<sup>229</sup> Duality of attitude clearly inheres in Colin Clout's perfect vision and the destruction of it on Mount Acidale.

A similar duality is evident in the concluding stanzas of Book VI. The plot's demand for a successful conclusion is met as Calidore muzzles and leashes the Blatant Beast (VI. xii. 34). Calidore's procession through Faeryland is triumphal; the people "much admyr'd the beast, but more admyr'd the knight" (VI. xii. 37). At this point, the end of Book VI looks much like that of the other books: the hero has triumphed, but there are still plots that may be continued if desired, such as the Timias-Belphoebe or Calepine-Serena stories.<sup>230</sup> Spenser has apparently rounded out Book VI so satisfactorily that it is called the height of his poetic achievement.<sup>231</sup>

What follows, however, is remarkable, both as a departure from precedent and as an expression of pessimism. The Blatant Beast escapes, causing more injury than before, and Spenser prophesies that no one will ever again

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<sup>229</sup>Spens, p. 97.

<sup>230</sup>A. Williams, p. 13.

<sup>231</sup>Hamilton, Structure of Allegory, p. 191.

be able to defeat him. Calidore's success is neutralized and so, to some extent, is the poet's. The last stanza of Book VI is one of the sharpest parting shots in poetry:<sup>232</sup>

Ne may this homely verse, of many meanest,  
 Hope to escape his venomous despite,  
 More then my former writs, all they were cleanest  
 From blamefull blot, and free from all that wite,  
 With which some wicked tongues did it backebite,  
 And bring into a mighty peres displeasure,  
 That never so deserved to endite.  
 Therefore do you, my rimes, keep better measure,  
 And seeke to please, that now is counted wisemens  
 threasure.

(VI. xii.41)

This bitter sarcasm, no doubt aimed at those whom Spenser considered the Blatant Beasts of Elizabethan England, is tantamount to a renunciation of poetry, once and for all.<sup>233</sup> Thus, Calidore's triumph is matched by the poet's scorn, and the duality that pervades Book VI appears in its conclusion, as well as in the Mount Acidale episode and Spenser's use of pastoral.

Book VI is simultaneously optimistic and pessimistic; it expresses both satisfaction and discouragement. This duality suggests that Spenser intended Book VI to complete The Faerie Queene: he recognized and valued his achievement, but, at the same time, realized the

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<sup>232</sup>Hamilton, Structure of Allegory, p. 206; Nelson, p. 295.

<sup>233</sup>Nelson, p. 16.

improbability of continuing the poem further. Book VI, then, is designed both to complete The Faerie Queene as a poetically viable whole and to express Spenser's discouragement over his lack of success in court circles and over the truncation of the plan outlined in the Letter to Raleigh. These suggestions are reinforced by the plainly autobiographical nature of the Colin Clout persona. Colin's dilemma is Spenser's, and the destruction of Colin's vision signifies the ending, perhaps involuntary but, nevertheless, deliberate, of Spenser's poetic project.<sup>234</sup>

The plethora of realistic detail in Book VI emphasizes its autobiographical significance, and, in fact, the whole last half of The Faerie Queene, the part composed between 1591 and 1595, becomes increasingly personal in tone.<sup>235</sup> The poet's voice is strong in the Thames-Medway episode of Book IV, and the Proem to Book V shows a self-conscious Spenser undertaking the problem of redefining popular ideas:<sup>236</sup>

Let none then blame me, if in discipline  
Of vertue and of civill uses lore,  
I doe not forme them to the common line.  
(V. Pr. 3)

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<sup>234</sup>Toliver, p. 80; Chang, p. 123.

<sup>235</sup>Berger, "Secret," p. 40.

<sup>236</sup>Judith H. Anderson, "Whatever Happened to Amoret? The Poet's Role in Book IV of 'The Faerie Queene'," Criticism, XIII (1971), 198-199; Berger, "Secret," p. 37.



This consciousness of the poet's role in the real world reflects a central theme in Books IV-VI, the contrast between romantic, often shallow, resolutions in poetry and real, obstinate problems in life.<sup>237</sup> Book VI, the only book composed mainly of post-1591 materials, has a uniquely personal tone, epitomized by the introduction of Colin Clout.<sup>238</sup> It is as if Spenser is inviting the reader to look into the poet's life and see why The Faerie Queene is comprised of six books instead of twelve as announced in 1589. Such a firsthand view is, of course, now impossible, but there are elements in what is known about Spenser's career that suggest that he decided sometime between 1591 and 1595, for whatever reasons, to complete The Faerie Queene in six books.

The first of these elements is how little of The Faerie Queene Spenser actually wrote during the 1590's. Book IV is quite clearly made from previously existing materials, what Josephine Bennett calls "leftovers from Book III," although it may have been revised as late as 1594.<sup>239</sup> The topical material in Book V was necessarily

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<sup>237</sup>Harry Berger, Jr., "Busirane and the War Between the Sexes: An Interpretation of The Faerie Queene III. xi-xii," ELR, I (1971), 115.

<sup>238</sup>Owen, pp. 1096-1098; Nestruck, pp. 135-136.

<sup>239</sup>Bennett, p. 155; J. R. Brink, "The Masque of the Nine Muses: Sir John Davies's Unpublished 'Epithalamion' and the 'Belphoebe-Ruby' Episode in The Faerie Queene," RES, XXIII (1972), 445-447.

written after 1591, some of it perhaps as late as 1595, but about half of Book V is comprised of earlier materials.<sup>240</sup> Book VI alone is mostly new material, perhaps written immediately upon Spenser's return to Ireland in 1591, while the intellectual stimulation of his London visit was still fresh.<sup>241</sup> Given the shorter length of Books V and VI, then, it appears that less than one-half of the second three books of The Faerie Queene was actually written between 1591 and 1595.

Lack of time or opportunity for composition is most probably not the reason that Spenser wrote little of The Faerie Queene in the 1590's. He found time to write much other poetry during those years, including Amoretti and Epithalamion, Colin Clouts Come Home Againe, Prothalamion, at least half of Fowre Hymnes, and perhaps some of the prose View of the Present State of Ireland.<sup>242</sup> Nor could failing skills have induced him to drop The Faerie Queene: these works, along with Book VI, contain some of his best poetry and are of uniformly high quality. During the 1580's, Spenser appears to have adapted everything he could for inclusion in The Faerie Queene, but in the 1590's, he seems more desirous of publishing

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<sup>240</sup>Bennett, pp. 186, 204; Owen, p. 1097.

<sup>241</sup>Bennett, pp. 207, 243.

<sup>242</sup>Frederick Ives Carpenter, A Reference Guide to Edmund Spenser. See pp. 19-21 for a useful chronology of these years.

his works under separate titles.<sup>243</sup> The nature of his 1591-1595 works is such that they surely could have been included in a larger Faerie Queene had Spenser so intended. Prothalamion, especially, seems a well-suited outline for the supposed eventual marriage of Arthur and Gloriana, or at least that of Artegall and Britomart.

Such possibilities are, of course, purely conjectural. The point to be emphasized is that Spenser did not choose to adapt any of these materials to The Faerie Queene or to work on the larger poem instead of on them. He surely realized the magnitude of the task he had set for himself in the Letter to Raleigh and reached, at some point, the knowledge that he would not fulfill that task.<sup>244</sup> In view of this knowledge, it is not unreasonable to suppose that he decided, by around 1592 deliberately to truncate The Faerie Queene and to complete it in six books. Given his relative neglect of the poem during the 1590's, except for Book VI, and the character of Book VI as both a final unit in a complete epic and an expression of pessimism about poetry's didactic efficacy, such a decision by Spenser seems natural.

In the context of his career, Spenser's pessimism also seems natural. No major English poet, except perhaps

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<sup>243</sup>Spens, p. 10.

<sup>244</sup>Tillyard, English Epic, p. 287; Parker, p. 229. Bennett, p. 37; Muir, p. 30.

Chaucer, has had to write under more difficult circumstances than did Spenser.<sup>245</sup> The practical hardships of his career were compounded by his being slightly out of touch with sophisticated society: many in his audience had abandoned the virtues he wanted to teach and did not wish to relearn them.<sup>246</sup> Yet Spenser seemingly had the poetic resources to overcome these difficulties, even to turn them to his advantage, and so remained dedicated to poetry. The persistence of the Colin Clout persona emphasizes his continuing view of himself as "the rustick poet."<sup>247</sup> Thus, a duality similar to that in Book VI of The Faerie Queene appears in Spenser's life: he loves poetry, but he must also survive under hard circumstances; his hero can defeat the Blatant Beast in the poem, but the Beasts of real life make it improbable that he can fulfill his twelve-book plan.<sup>248</sup>

What is known about the composition of Books IV-VI reinforces the possibility that Spenser, in lieu of the twelve books projected in 1589, decided to complete The Faerie Queene in six books. If Book VI was, indeed, Spenser's first writing upon returning to Ireland in 1591, he must have realized the compositional problem he had

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<sup>245</sup>Parker, p. 228;

<sup>246</sup>Murrin, p. 86.

<sup>247</sup>Grundy, p. 25.

<sup>248</sup>Neuse, p. 336; Berger, "Secret," pp. 44-45.

created: Book VI would simply be unsuitable to follow Book III.<sup>249</sup> On the other hand, his predilection for symmetry and balance, discussed in the preceding chapter, would tend to lead him to discover that Book VI is nearly perfectly suited to be a social fulfillment of the personal vision of Book I, a relationship admirably described by Maurice Evans:

The Faerie Queene turns upon an axis of which faith and poetry are the two poles, the vision which God sends to man and the vision which man attains of God: these define the code through which the man may grow into the hero.<sup>250</sup>

Spenser, a religious poet, was well-equipped to see that Colin's vision completes the Red Cross Knight's vision in a nearly typological sense: one is not quite complete without the other. The problem, then, was how to position Book VI vis-a-vis Book I.

This problem was, no doubt, simplified by the availability of the materials that became Book IV to provide a fitting and almost necessary sequel to Book III.<sup>251</sup> Since the desirability of a three-book second half for the poem is overwhelmingly obvious, Spenser then needed one more book to complete his work. That his mind was working a topical vein during the 1590's is amply evident from Colin Clouts Come Home Again, Amoretti, Epithalamion,

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<sup>249</sup>Bennett, p. 243.

<sup>250</sup>Evans, Spenser's Anatomy of Heroism, pp. 18-19.

<sup>251</sup>Spens, p. 99; Bennett, p. 155; Owen, p. 1096.

and probably Prothalamion. It would be natural for him to use topical materials, the political allegory of Book V, to fill out the remaining book of The Faerie Queene. Book V, in fact, appears to be the last part of The Faerie Queene to have been finished.<sup>252</sup> It is plausible, then, that Spenser matched Book VI against Book I to bring his poem full circle and "filled in" the remainder of the poem's second half, and that he thus intended that The Faerie Queene be complete in six books.

The supposition that Spenser intended Book VI to complete The Faerie Queene is supported by the nature of the topical allegory in Books V and VI. To say the least, Spenser's political commentary is not designed to please those influential in court circles in 1596; in fact, it may have been dangerous to him.<sup>253</sup> It is well known that William Cecil, Lord Burleigh, disapproved of Spenser because of the poet's continuing loyalty to the Earl of Leicester, and that King James VI of Scotland protested Spenser's portrayal of Mary, Queen of Scots, in the character of Duessa.<sup>254</sup> Spenser appears to be almost flaunting his approval of Raleigh through the figure of Timias, although Raleigh was by that time

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<sup>252</sup>Bennett, pp. 204-205.

<sup>253</sup>Spens, p. 113.

<sup>254</sup>Murrin, p. 117; Nelson, p. 16.

disgraced and in retirement.<sup>255</sup> Poetic reference to court business was permitted by Elizabeth I, and perhaps even encouraged as a useful political device, so long as it did not get out of hand.<sup>256</sup> Spenser would seem to have been coming close to getting out of hand, but if he were intending to end his poetic career and complete The Faerie Queene in six books, he may have come to regard court favor as superfluous. It would not have been unreasonable for him to conclude that, so long as he stayed on the good side of the Queen, he would be allowed to live, unmolested, in Ireland. Indeed, he makes a special apology for not having celebrated her Majesty in Colin Clout's vision:

Great Gloriana, greatest Majesty,  
Pardon thy shepheard, mongst so many layes  
As he hath sung thee in all his dayes,  
To make one minime of thy poore handmayde.  
(VI. x. 28)

Despite his continuing profession of admiration for Elizabeth I, Spenser in Books V and VI does not sound like a poet who intends to continue seeking courtly patronage for his writing.

What Spenser did intend in 1596 is, of course, the main question; and, equally obvious, enough evidence does not exist to permit any absolute conclusion. There are, however, strong suggestions that the hypothesis that

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<sup>255</sup>Bennett, pp. 209-210.

<sup>256</sup>Hunter, p. 150.

Spenser intended the 1596 edition of The Faerie Queene to be complete in six books is tenable. The poem is complete as an epic, and the truncation of its poetic experiment in *Courtesy* suggests, as well, another kind of completeness. The duality of Book VI indicates that it is designed as the final book of a complete poem. What is known of the circumstances of Spenser's career in the 1590's reinforces the import of Book VI, objectifying in Spenser's life the opposing elements of satisfaction and discouragement. It is, then, on the basis of these suggestions, reasonable to hypothesize that The Faerie Queene is complete in the six existing books and that Spenser intended it to be so.

There are, inevitably, problems left unsolved by this hypothesis; in particular, two pieces of evidence that cannot be accommodated. The first of these is Sonnet LXXX of Amoretti:

After so long a race as I have run  
 Through Faery Land, which those six books compile,  
 Give leave to rest me, being halfe fordonne,  
 And gather to my selfe new breath awhile.  
 Then, as a steed refreshed after toyle,  
 Out of my prison I will breake anew:  
 And stoutly will that second worke assoyle,  
 With strong endeavour and attention dew.  
 Till then give leave to me, in pleasant mew  
 To sport my muse, and sing my loves sweet praise:  
 The contemplation of whose heavenly hew  
 My spirit to an higher pitch will rayse.  
 But let her prayeses yet be low and meane,  
 Fit for the handmayde of the Faery Queene.



The obvious problem posed by this sonnet is that Spenser seems to have been thinking still in terms of twelve books, "being halfe fordonne" after six. He has completed six books, or at least their bulk, by 1594, when Amoretti was entered in the Stationers' Register for publication.<sup>257</sup> The finality connoted by "compile" and the separateness suggested by "second worke," however, may indicate that Spenser has changed his plan from twelve books, perhaps followed by twelve more, to six books, possibly followed by a six-book sequel.<sup>258</sup> In this case, Amoretti, LXXX, does not necessarily controvert the hypothesis that The Faerie Queene is complete in six books. Neither, however, does it support such an hypothesis, and, finally, it may probably best be regarded as ambiguous.

The second piece of evidence, which poses the more serious problem, is the title-page of the 1596 edition of The Faerie Queene, which reads:

The Faerie Queene. Disposed into twelue bookes, Fashioning XII. Moral vertues. With The Second Part of the Faerie Queene. Containing the Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Bookes, by Ed. Spenser. Imprinted at London for William Ponsonby.<sup>259</sup>

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<sup>257</sup>Nelson, p. 316, fn. 8.

<sup>258</sup>Evans, Spenser's Anatomy of Heroism, pp. 237-238.

<sup>259</sup>Carpenter, p. 109.

This appears to offer nearly conclusive evidence, despite the absence of the Letter to Raleigh, that Spenser still intended a twelve-book The Faerie Queene in 1596. Not much is known about Spenser's relationship with Ponsonby, except that it was apparently satisfactory to both parties, as Ponsonby handled publication of all of Spenser's works, save for the first edition of The Shepherds Calendar.<sup>260</sup> Ponsonby had published Sidney's works and was known until his death in 1603 or 1604 as the leading London publisher.<sup>261</sup> His reliability, then, is hardly to be questioned. It is, however, known that many publishers, including reliable and reputable ones, edited and added to works for their own purposes.<sup>262</sup> Ponsonby himself had thoroughly edited Sidney's Arcadia, and Spenser's Complaints may have been published on Ponsonby's initiative rather than Spenser's.<sup>263</sup>

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<sup>260</sup>The Dictionary of National Biography, XVI, 87-88. Hereafter referred to as DNB.

<sup>261</sup>DNB, XVI, 88. Alexander C. Judson, The Life of Edmund Spenser, in The Works of Edmund Spenser: A Variorum Edition, VIII, 140.

<sup>262</sup>Evelyn May Albright, Dramatic Publication in England, 1580-1640, p. 372.

<sup>263</sup>DNB, XVI, 88. Frank A. Mumby, The Romance of Bookselling, p. 96. Judson thinks that Spenser initiated and guided the Complaints publication. Judson, however, seems to have a curious habit of crediting all successes to Spenser and assigning the less fortunate happenings to Ponsonby. For example, he surmises that it was Ponsonby who inserted the odd verses between Amoretti and Epithalamio (p. 166) Since Spenser was out of the country at the publication of both Complaints and Amoretti and Epithalamion, Judson seems to be proceeding on the basis of something other than substantial evidence.

Alexander Judson, the Variorum biographer, thinks that Spenser personally supervised the printing of the 1596 edition of The Faerie Queene, and there is evidence that the poem was revised while in press.<sup>264</sup> There is no evidence, however, that Spenser's supervision, if indeed it was such, extended to the title-page. In fact, Ponsonby's reputation and the satisfactory relationship between publisher and poet may suggest that the title-page is Ponsonby's doing. Large projects were much in fashion in Elizabethan times, and Ponsonby could have wished to make The Faerie Queene seem as ambitious as possible. Even so, Ponsonby was likely to know something of Spenser's intentions, and what would prompt him to print a title-page contrary to those intentions is unknown. The title-page of the 1596 edition of The Faerie Queene cannot, then, be impugned as evidence, although it should be pointed out that it is not at all conclusive. It apparently cannot be accommodated by the hypothesis that Spenser intended the 1596 version of The Faerie Queene to be complete in six books.

The evidence in favor of this hypothesis is, however, solid. Spenser set out upon an experiment in Courtesy writing and ended it on a negative note, after six books.

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<sup>264</sup>Judson, pp. 179-180; Bennett, pp. 204-205.

He intended to write an epic, and the six existing books of The Faerie Queene are complete as an epic. The sixth book, while expressing Spenser's discouragement with the possibility for true Courtesy in the real world, also satisfactorily completes the poem's epic structure.

This same duality, discouragement balanced by satisfaction, appears in what is known of Spenser's career during the 1590's. These factors, mutually supporting one another, strongly suggest that Spenser did, in 1596, intend that The Faerie Queene be complete in six books. From this perspective, then, the assertion of the completeness of The Faerie Queene takes on considerable substance and respectability.

A substantial and respectable hypothesis is important to the question of the completeness or incompleteness of The Faerie Queene. With a supported hypothesis available, opinions about whether The Faerie Queene is complete need not be derived from preconceived assumptions. It is necessary neither to assume completeness for the sake of valid analysis, as archetypal-formalist critics have done, nor to take incompleteness as a starting point for apologies, as historical-textual critics have done. When the assumption of the former group can be supported using the methods of the latter, everyone gains.

In this case, an independent approach to the question of the poem's completeness in terms of Spenser's intentions, an historical-textual focus, produces the hypothesis that the present six books are a complete poem, the archetypal-formalist position.

The Faerie Queene is so critically inexhaustable a poem that an hypothesis of incompleteness could perhaps be made in terms of archetypal and formalist criticism. If so, it should be made, and if it is, it is likely to be no more conclusive than is the hypothesis suggested, here. It would, however, also be valuable as a reconciliation, and useful insofar as it makes explicit that which is hidden but operative. Just as Spenser reanimated myth and spoke for a national consciousness, so must critics reanimate their conclusions in order to speak for varieties of cultural consciousness. Meanwhile, The Faerie Queene speaks for itself as it always has and as it will no doubt continue to do, for as long as elegance of form and dignity of content are valued.

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