

The Faerie Queene

Heroic poetry, which in the Renaissance was taken by most commentators to be the highest kind, was necessarily associated with the growth-of-nationalist feelings,¹ since it attempted to achieve in the vernacular what Virgil had done for the Roman empire in Latin. This explains Spenser's interest not only in the ancient models but also in modern Italian and French poetry—he would learn what he could from renaissances that flourished earlier than the English. But it also explains why *The Faerie Queene*, for all its dreamy Romance landscape and narrative, is very much a poem of its moment. He was celebrating national or imperial power, and did so not only by placing its origins in a fictive British past but by justifying modern policies, ecclesiastical, political, and military. He had to make his poem relevant to the glories, real and imaginary, of the reign he chose to represent as climactic in history; but he could not ignore the dark side of the picture.

The Acts of Supremacy and Uniformity of 1559 gave the country a foundation of peace and order but alienated recusants. The loss of Calais in 1558 marked the end of English power in France; henceforth England would be more narrowly nationalistic, and its church, with the Queen at its head, reflected this development. It became the chief Protestant power and engaged in a long and mostly cold war with Spain, the chief Catholic power. Meanwhile the cities grew larger and the great men grew greater, but the reign of Elizabeth ended with years that were glorious only in some ways; they were also melancholy, anxious, and beset by social and economic problems.

Elizabeth was a great but difficult woman. Her failure to marry and produce an heir meant that over the long period when this was no longer even a possibility her reign was under threat of the Catholic Stuart claims, represented in life by Mary Queen of Scots, and in Spenser's poem by Duessa. Mary was beheaded in 1587, the Armada defeated in 1588; but the succeeding thirteen years continued to be anxious, and the last of the favorites, Essex, was executed in 1601 for rebelliously declaring his interest in the succession of Mary's son, James VI of Scotland.

The celebration of the Virgin Queen, which Spenser and others carried to such heights, was in origin a way of making the best of a bad situation; and was intimately, though not obviously, related to foreign and ecclesiastical policy, which would arguably have been much easier if the Queen had lost her virginity, since the disputed succession made all the problems more acute. The religious situation was political, and vice versa. When Elizabeth succeeded to the throne in 1558, the country had just lived through her father's dispute with Rome, the brief period of triumphant Protestantism under Edward VI, and the Catholic reaction under Mary. Elizabeth was by no means an extreme Protestant, and the settlement of 1559 was a compromise, which for years pleased neither Protestant nor Catholic. The church now claimed, in fact, to be both—a Catholic church purged by Protestant action, with the Queen as its governor. Conformity was required by law. The clergy had mostly changed doctrines with each new reign; they were undistinguished, often venal, and easily exploited by the great laymen who had made fortunes out of the dissolution of the monasteries. The new (or, as propaganda said, very old) church was in poor condition. It was rescued by a brilliant intellectual enterprise: Archbishop Jewel's apology for the church, Archbishop Parker's history of it, and Hooker's justification of its middle way in broad historical and theological terms (see *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* below) created a myth which Spenser and others accepted. The English church was older than Rome, having been founded soon after the Crucifixion by Joseph of Arimathea, and it was ruled by an

empress who inherited the powers of Constantine, the emperor who Christianized the Roman empire. So, from the doctrinal confusion and worldly corruption he commented on in the *Calender*, Spenser moved on to the heroic situation of a nation in all respects the heir of Rome, a church which had restored primitive purity in an apocalyptic manner, and an empress who concentrated the Catholic and universal in her reign over one people. Rejecting both the extremes, the Catholic enemy who threatened both inside and outside England, and the Puritanism he had known at Cambridge, with its mistrust of bishops and the Prayer Book, Spenser found himself in a position to write an Anglican epic. The enemy therein is, primarily, Catholicism, the usurping papacy (antichrist); in his myth they are destroyers of paradise, types of the perfidy and duplicity which beset fallen humanity. Truth is England, Falsehood Rome.

This is stated most clearly in Book I. But Spenser never calls the British restoration of Truth perfect. And the strength of the whole poem arises in part from his reconciling incompatible feelings and attitudes to his subject. The court is the fount of courtesy, but also corrupt. The world which has seen the restoration of the true church is also evil and decaying. A polarity of light and dark is essential to his mind. He delights in the changing forms and colors of life, while allowing that movement belongs to time, not eternity, and color to earth, not heaven. He celebrates fertility and generation, but allows that it is inseparable from "fleshy slime" (III.vi.13). Life is not only delightful, it is also a trial or initiation, a total temptation. Time, which makes the world changeable and delightful to the senses, is the drudge of eternity, and our main business is with that.

Whatever his stated subject, Spenser confronts a virtue with its opposites, dark with light; he invents myth after myth to celebrate opposites, and develops his great technical variety in order to accommodate them. The very length of the poem, its turnings aside, is a function of his need to make contraries meet in one: past and present, concord and discord, good and evil, time and eternity, light and dark. The inclusiveness of the poem is its most remarkable virtue. It lacks the gravity of Virgil, the speed and power of Ariosto, but as a "continued allegory" it has no rival. Spenser aims, as heroic poets were supposed to, at educating a gentleman in the virtues; but in doing so he used his allegorical powers to much greater effect than Ariosto and Tasso, even with all the help they got from their commentators, had wanted or been able to do. Sometimes he is simple, as in the House of Alma or the House of Holiness. Sometimes the allegory is thin; sometimes frankly popular, as in parts of the First Book, which are little different in design from the popular allegories of Lord Mayors' shows or celebrations of the Queen's birthday, or her reception at some country house. The symbolism of the First Book is especially popular; but Spenser is capable of deepening it until it remembers the learned allegory of Ben Jonson in his masques, so that Spenser is both "homely, churchwardenly," as C. S. Lewis calls him, and a profound philosophical allegorist, with elaborate allegorical programs that have still not been worked out.

The allegory, then, is multiform, sometimes thin, sometimes thick, always an aspect of a syncretic myth-making operation which for Spenser was the poet's way to tell the truth about everything—and that means about the state of affairs in the England of the 1580's and 1590's as well as in the whole frame of the world. Hence the blend, strange to us, of topicality and ethical generality; hence the sudden moves from shallow to very deep water. In a sense it could be said that this habitual allegorizing at one level or another makes Spenser more "medieval" than, say, Tasso; if so, the issue is not

very important. The England of the Renaissance did retain, in spite of its efforts to be modern and humanist, much of the medieval spirit, and Chaucer was as important to Spenser as any other poet. But there was nevertheless a true modernism in Spenser's experimental, past-rifling methods. An employment of every resource—Ovidian mythologizing, heroic convention, symbolism and allegory of whatever kind—to speak about the world as it is, about deep problems which, rightly expressed, are reflected in the movements from day to day of politicians and religious leaders, is in that sense modern.

A poem, to do all that, must have readers who understand its peculiar languages and its ways of achieving flexibility. Spenser's language is not modern; it corresponds to his device of thrusting all the action back into a remote past, where connections are easier to make, life being simpler. Thus did the Elizabethans restore in show and tournament the old language and symbolism of chivalry. The archaism of *The Faerie Queene* increases its range of meaning; the vagueness of its fairyland allows Spenser to fluctuate, as in a myth or a dream, between vagueness and sharp definition at will. The reader must collaborate: *The Faerie Queene* is a world and a great one to all who learn to move in it.

A Letter of the Authors

Spenser returned to London with Raleigh in 1589–90, and presumably wrote this Letter specially for the publication of Books I through III in 1590. Perhaps he did so in haste, for, valuable as it is, it contains some puzzles and inaccuracies. The account of Book II seems to conflict with the facts of the poem. The reference to, "the twelve private morall vertues, as Aristotle hath devised" and again to Magnificence and "the xii other vertues" has long been debated. Is it twelve or thirteen? In any case Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* has no such list of virtues; and furthermore the six Spenser actually treated—even if one counts Constancy—do not match Aristotle; for example, Temperance is an Aristotelian virtue but Holiness is not. Perhaps the mistake about Book II arose from haste—in setting down the part of Guyon's story which precedes the narrative as we have it, he neglected to make the two exactly consistent. As to the virtues, he may have been thinking more loosely than at first appears when he spoke of using Aristotle's *Ethics*—or some of the many Christianizing commentaries on the book—as a scheme from which he could vary.

These difficulties do not cancel the great value of the Letter. Here is a summary of its argument: 1. (1–12) mode of the work: allegory; 2. (12–44) moral intention; justification of subject and method; 3. (44–59) defense of allegorical poetry as morally beneficial ("ensample" better than "rule"); 4. (60–87) "general intention" of portrait of Arthur and of the Faerie Queene and other "shadowings" of Elizabeth; 5. (87–95) the other knights of the first three books; 6. (95–172) difference between poetry and historiography—stories of Books I through III as they would be in a chronicle rather than a poem; 7. (173–78) "other adventures intermeddled"; 8. 179–87) conclusion: the Letter tries to establish the general design of a poem that might without this explanation seem "tedious and confused."

The Letter, in its general claims, is in the tradition of Renaissance apologies for epic poetry; see Sidney's remarks in the *Defence*. The object is to fashion gentlemen; moral precepts are easier to swallow if the pill is coated. The choice of Arthur fits the role

that the hero should be both great and of a remote time (more, he was an official ancestor of the Tudors and the last emperor of Britain before them; thus he was a hero of the type used by Virgil and the Italian heroic poets of the sixteenth century). Homer and, more importantly, Virgil provide models; Ariosto and Tasso maintained and modified their tradition in modern times; to cover all the ground he would need twenty-four books.

Teaching "by ensample," Spenser needs an exemplary hero. His Arthur, however, cannot be to Elizabeth what Aeneas was to Augustus, and the sex of his monarch led him into various "dark conceits." Arthur is Magnificence, which includes all the other virtues. Elizabeth is first the Faerie Queene, Glory, for which gentlemen should strive; secondly, "a most vertuous and beautiful Lady." The division reflects her two "persons," political and natural (Gloriana and Belpheobe), a division that goes deep in English constitutional theory. She is also present in other female characters. As for the knights, they have a virtue apiece. Spenser found some difficulty in working Arthur into a scheme already so elaborate.

In the "historiographical" rendering, Spenser allows only an occasional hint of allegorical intention—as when he speaks of Red Cross's armour as that of the soldier of Christ (*miles Christi*, Ephesians 6). He also states that some episodes are "accidents" rather than "intendments"—scenes and narratives that developed along the way without belonging to the master plan; but this does not mean that they have no allegorical meanings; Britomart, Marinell and Florimell, and Belpheobe certainly have, and so do "many the like."

Everybody wishes Spenser had said a bit more, and said it more clearly, in this Letter; but it is the first commentary ever written on the poem, and comes from the best-informed commentator; so it is certainly worth study.

A Letter of the Authors

expounding his whole intention in the course of this worke: which for that it giveth great light to the Reader, for the better understanding is hereunto annexed.

To the Right noble, and Valorous, Sir Walter Raleigh knight, Lo. Wardein of the Stanneries, and her Majesties liefetenaunt of the County of Cornewayll.

Sir knowing how doubtfully¹ all Allegories may be construed, and this booke of mine, which I have entituled the Faery Queene, being a continued Allegory, or darke conceit,² I have thought good as well for avoyding of gealous³ opinions

1. Ambiguously.
2. Homer and Virgil were interpreted as continuously allegorical; allegorical readings were attached to Ariosto by the poet himself and his commentators; Tasso insisted on his moral allegory. So it was right for heroic poetry to be allegorical, to have a meaning or meanings below the surface and therefore "dark." These meanings Spenser calls "conceits," meaning something between the modern "concepts" and the now obsolete "acute metaphorical discoveries." In a poem so long and loosely structured as *The Faerie Queene* the conceits cannot be uniformly dark—the allegorical significances vary from the transparent to the unfathomable.
3. Hostile, envious.

and misconstructions, as also for your better light in reading thereof, (being so by me commanded,) to discover unto you the general intention and meaning which in the whole course thereof I have fashioned, without expressing of any particular purposes or by-accidents therein occasioned. The generall end therefore of all the booke is to fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline: Which for that I conceived should be most plausible and pleasing, being coloured with an historical fiction, the which the most part of men delight to read, rather for variety of matter, then for proficite of the ensample: I chose the historie of king Arthure, as most fitte for the excellency of his person, being made famous by many mens former workes, and also furthest from the daunger of envy, and suspection of present time. In which I have followed all the antique Poets historical, first Homere, who in the Persons of Agamemnon and Ulysses hath ensampled a good gouernour and a vertuous man, the one in his Ilias, the other in his Odysseis;⁴ then Virgil, whose like intention was to doe in the person of Aeneas: after him Ariosto⁵ comprised them both in his Orlando: and lately Tasso⁶ disscouered them againe, and formed both parts in two persons, namely that part which they in Philosophy call Ethice, or vertues of a private man, coloured in his Rinaldo.⁷ The other named Politice in his Godfredo.⁸ By ensample of which excellent Poets, I labour to portraict in Arthure, before he was king, the image of a brave knight, perfected in the twelve private morall vertues, as Aristotle hath deuised, the which is the purpose of these first twelve bookes: which if I finde to be well accepted, I may be perhaps encouraged, to frame the other part of politicke vertues in his person, after that hee came to be king. To some I know this Methode will seeme displeasent, which had rather have good discipline delivered plainly in way of precepts, or sermoned at large, as they use, then thus cloudily enwrapped in Allegoricall deuises. But such, me seeme, should be satisfide with the use of these dayes, seeing all things accounted by their shewes, and nothing esteemed of, that is not delightfull and pleasing to commune sence. For this cause is Xenophon⁹ preferred before Plato, for that the one in the exquisite depth of his iudgement, formed a Commune welth such as it should be, but the other in the person of Cyrus and the Persians fashioned a gouernment such as might best be: So much more profitable and gratious is doctrine by ensample, then by rule. So haue I laboured to doe in the person of Arthure: whome I conceive after his long education by Timon, to whom he was by Merlin delivered to be brought up, so soone as he was borne of the Lady Igrayne, to haue seene in a dream or vision the Faery Queene, with

whose excellent beauty ravished, he awaking resolved to seeke her out, and to being by Merlin armed, and by Timon thoroughly instructed, he went to seeke her forth in Faery land.¹¹ In that Faery Queene I meane glory in my generall intention, but in my particular I conceive the most excellent and glorious person of our soveraine the Queene, and her kingdom in Faery land. And yet in some places els, I doe otherwise shadow¹² her. For considering she becometh two persons,¹³ the one of a most royall Queene or Emprise, the other of a most vertuous and beautifull Lady, this latter part in some places I doe expresse in Belphebe, fashioning her name according to your owne excellent conceipt of Cynthia,¹⁴ (Phoebe and Cynthia being both names of Diana). So in the person of Prince Arthure I sette forth magnificence in particular, which vertue for that (according to Aristotle and the rest) it is the perfection of all the rest, and containeth in it them all, therefore in the whole course I mention the vertues of Arthure applyable to that vertue, which I write of in that booke. But of the xii. other vertues, I make xii. other knights the patrones, for the more variety of the history: Of which these three bookes contain three, The first of the knight of the Redcrosse, in whome I expresse Holynes: The seconde of Sir Guyon, in whom I sette forth Temperance: The third of Britomartis a Lady knight, in whome I picture Chastity. But because the beginning of the whole worke seemeth abrupte and as depending upon other antecedents, it needs that ye know the occasion of these three knights severall adventures. For the Methode of a Poet historical is not such, as of an Historiographer. For an Historiographer discourseth of affayres orderly as they were donne, accounting as well the times as the actions, but a Poet thrusteth into the midst,¹⁵ even where it most concerneth him, and there recouring to the things forepast, and divining of things to come, maketh a pleasing Analysis of all. The beginning therefore of my history, if it were to be told by an Historiographer, should be the twelfth booke, which is the last, where I devise that the Faery Queene kept her Annual feaste xii. dayes, upon which xii. severall dayes, the occasions of the xii. severall adventures hapned, which being undertaken by xii. severall knights, are in these xii. books severally handled and discoursed. The first was this. In the beginning of the feast, there presented him selfe a tall clownishe¹⁶ younge man, who falling before the Queen of Faries desired a boone (as the manner then was) which during that feast she might not refuse: which was that hee might have the achievement of any adventure, which during that feaste should happen, that being graunted, he rested him on the floore, unfitte through his rusticity for a better place. Soone after entered a faire Ladye in mourning weeds, riding on a white Asse, with a dwarf behind her leading a warlike steed, that bore the Armes of a knight, and his apparell in the dwarfes hand. Shee falling before the Queene of Faeries, com-

4. As opposed to general, meaning the "accidents" mentioned near the end of the letter. *Iliad, Odyssey*.

5. Lodovico Ariosto (1474-1533), author of *Orlando Furioso* (1532), the formative heroic poem of the Renaissance; Spenser is closest to it in the many interlinked stories of Bks. III and IV.

7. Torquato Tasso (1544-95), author of *Gerusalemme Liberata* (1581), owing much to Ariosto but made graver and more explicitly Christian by the influence of the Counter-Reformation.

8. Hero of Tasso's poem in its dealings with personal morality.

9. Godfrey of Boulogne, hero of Tasso's poem in its dealings with political morality.

10. Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*, *The Education of Cyrus*, and Plato's *Republic*; see Sidney's *Defence of Poesie*.

11. "By the Faery land of the poem I mean England."

12. Portray.

13. Referring to the doctrine that the monarch had two persons, one private and mortal, one political and immortal ("the king is dead, long live the king"). Elizabeth is therefore represented as both Queen and Empress, and most virtuous and beautiful lady.

14. Raleigh's poem to the Queen, *Cynthia*; like Phoebe and Diana, a name of the goddess of the moon and of chastity.

15. In *medias res*, as Horace (*Ars Poetica*, 148) advises.

16. Rustic, unpolished.

played that her father and mother an ancient King and Queene, had bene an huge dragon many years shut up in a brasen Castle, who thence suffered them not to yssue: and therefore besought the Faery Queene to assigne some one of her knights to take on him that exploit. Presently¹⁷ that clove-crowning, and the Lady much gaine-saying,¹⁸ yet he earnestly importuned his desire. In the end the Lady told him that unless that armour which she brought would serve him (that is the armour of a Christian man specified by Saint Paul v. Ephes.) that he could not succeed in that enterprise, which being forthwith put upon him with dewe furnitures¹⁹ thereunto, he seemed the goodliest man in al that company, and was well liked of the Lady. And estesoones taking on him knighthood, and mounting on that strange Courser, he went forth with her on that adventure: where beginneth the first booke, vz.

A gentle knight was pricking on the playne, &c.

The second day ther came in a Palmer bearing an Infant with bloody hands, whose Parents he complained to have bene slayn by an Enchaunteresse called Acrasia: and therefore craved of the Faery Queene, to appoint him some knight to performe that adventure, which being assigned to Sir Guyon, he presently went forth with that same Palmer: which is the beginning of the second booke and the whole subject thereof. The third day there came in, a Groome who complained before the Faery Queene, that a vile Enchaunter called Busirion had in hand a most faire Lady called Amoretta, whom he kept in most grievous torment, because she would not yield him the pleasure of her body. Whereupon Sir Scudamour the lover of that Lady presently tooke on him that adventure. But being unable to performe it by reason of the hard Enchauntments, after long sorrow, in the end met with Britomartis, who succoured him, and rescued his love.

But by occasion hereof, many other adventures are intermedled,²⁰ but rather as Accidents, then intendments. As the love of Britomart, the overthrow of Marinell, the misery of Florimell, the vertuousnes of Belphebe, the lasciviousnes of Hellenora, and many the like.

Thus much Sir, I have briefly overronne²¹ to direct your understanding to the wel-head of the History, that from thence gathering the whole intention of the conceit, ye may as in a handfull gripe al the discourse, which otherwise may happily²² seeme tedious and confused. So humbly craving the continuance of your honorable favour towards me, and th'eternall establishment of your happines, I humbly take leave.

23. January. 1589.

Yours most humbly affectionate
Ed. Spenser

17. At once.

18. Protesting.

19. Equipment.

20. Mixed in.

21. Run through.

22. Perchance.

probably did not begin here; the parts of the work that Harvey saw in 1580 when they survive at all, be in the middle books, for the work in which Spenser is attempting to "overgo" Ariosto can have had nothing to do with the Revelation of St. John, a topic which Harvey recommends, and which is central to Book I. We now have it. When he did settle to Book I he made it very different in tone, and made it much more self-contained than the more Ariostan books; in fact, I know more so than II, which is to a great degree modeled on it, and V, the other book that comes closest.

Red Cross is the greatest of the knights, a saint rather than a mere hero, and occasionally the image of Christ. The historical scope of the Book (extended by more or less dark conceits²³) is the whole history of the world from the Fall to the final overthrow of Satan. Its theology and religion are more directly expressed than in the other Books, and it speaks with far more urgency to the great themes of history, and notably the vicissitudes of the church on earth, than they.

Red Cross is St. George, slayer of the dragon; a figure who is both a type of Christ and a droll figure in folkplay and popular pageant, hero of great works of art and of the antique Mummings Play; patron saint of England. He rides into Spenser's poem, *medias res*, with his usual pageant companions, the lady on the ass and the lamb. His scene is vague and dreamlike, and we can already see what Coleridge meant when he spoke of "the marvellous independence and true imaginative absence of all particular space and time" in *The Faerie Queene*. But that is only a half-truth. These characters from the village play and the Lord Mayor's Show, in their narrative of night-mare apparitions, dreamlike transfigurations, apparently fitful meanings, are going to tell a story which deals with the history of the human condition as it appeared in an apocalyptic climax, the late 1580's. We have the same fancy in our day, but do not express it, as Spenser did and Virgil had done, in a heroic poem about human activity in the context of earthly power and heavenly providence; nor would we give history a milieu of Arthurian romance, though we might envy the way in which it enables the poet to achieve those strange transitions and condensations which so remind us of the Freudian dreamwork.

Red Cross, though of the elect, is a sinner, everyman. Spenser emphasizes his fall and despair by echoing the anti-Romanist article of his church: "that we are justified by faith alone is a most wholesome doctrine." Given grace to repent, Red Cross undertakes the imitation of Christ, redeems the parents of Una (Adam and Eve), tames the old Dragon, and harrows hell—becomes, in short, Christ, the object of his nation, and marries his Bride, Una, the True Church (i.e. the Church of England). But are the transformations of Spenser's world, and they are prepared for in the opening lines. Red Cross, who wears the apocalyptic "bloudie Cross" (Christ wore it in the battle in heaven, as shown in illuminated manuscripts of Revelation), is also called "Right faithful true," which, *fidelis et verax*, is the title of Christ in Revelation 19:11. And Red Cross, St. George, is also England, defender of the true faith.

Revelation is the ultimate source. Una is "the woman clothed with the sun" (Revelation 12:1), traditionally identified with the true church; Spenser speaks of her "purity face" (l.xii.23) as the medieval illuminators showed her in a glory of light. Unlike her prototype, flees into the wilderness (Revelation 12:6). Duessa plays hostility to Una's integrity, but is also the Whore of Babylon, the Scarlet Woman

ing canto is a long account of Elizabeth's legendary ancient British ancestors) Spenser describes the siege, the assault on the human body of its enemies, led by Maleger (Latin: *aeger*, sick). This is one of the great passages of *The Faerie Queene*; Maleger is Spenser's most nightmarish figure—"like a ghost he seemed, whose grave clothes were unbound"—and Arthur's combat with this unkillable but apparently lifeless shadow has real horror. It represents the unstoppable onslaught of ills brought on by Adam's intemperance.

Canto xii brings Guyon to the climax of his quest, the Bower of Bliss, home of Acrasia, Intemperance herself. But it takes a long voyage to get there, and the account of it serves to recapitulate much of the Book. Guyon and the Palmer sail past Phaedria, for example, and many other *exempla* of intemperance. At the Bower they encounter many spurious beauties provided by art to conceal the truth that it is an evil structure calling for merciless purgation. The Porter is Genius, but not the benign Genius of "life and generation" we meet in *Epithalamion*; in fact he is the exact opposite, "the foe of life," and Guyon knocks over his winebowl and breaks his staff. Within, the Bower is a false version of the Earthly Paradise.]

From Canto xii

- 50 Thus being entred, they behold around
A large and spacious plaine, on every side
Strowed with pleasauns,² whose faire grassy ground
Mantled with greene, and goodly beautifide
With all the ornaments of *Floraes* pride,
Wherewith her mother Art, as halfe in scorne
Of niggard Nature, like a pompous bride
Did decke her, and too lavishly adorne,
When forth from virgin bowre she comes in th' early morne.
- 51 Thereto the Heavens alwayes Joviall,³
Lookt on them lovely, still in stedfast state,
Ne suffred storme nor frost on them to fall,
Their tender buds or leaves to violate,
Nor scorching heat, nor cold intemperate⁴
T'afflict the creatures, which therein did dwell,
But the milde aire with season moderate
Gently attempted, and disposd so well,
That still it breathèd forth sweet spirit and wholesome smell.
- 52 More sweet and wholesome, then the pleasaunt hill
Of *Rhodope*,⁵ on which the Nimphe, that bore
A gyauat babe, her selfe for griefe did kill;

pleasaunces

sapphire
ruby

garments

squeezed
detriment

manner

Joviall under the influence of the planet Jupiter, producing joy and happiness
Nor . . . intemperate Spenser represents the place somewhat conventionally as an Earthly Paradise and, like Milton in *Paradise Lost* IV, enforces the idea by saying that this is better than all the others; but he includes various indications—not only Guyon's determination to have nothing to do with the pleasures of the place—to suggest that it is the scene of

abuses as well as of the natural plenty proper to paradises. Hence the "season wreathings", but especially he places Excess in the foreground, for the lavish gifts of nature are being abused, as later they are by Comus.
Rhodope mountain in Thrace into which *Rhodope* was turned for claiming to be more beautiful than Juno; she bore Neptune a giant son

Or the Thessalian *Tempe*,⁶ where of yore
Faïre *Daphne*⁷ *Phæbus* hart with love did gore;
Or *Ida*,⁸ where the Gods lov'd to repair,
When ever they their heavenly bowres forlore;
Or sweet *Parnasse*, the haunt of Muses faïre;
Or *Eden* selfe, if ought with *Eden* mote⁹ compaire.

can

- 53 Much wondred *Guyon* at the faïre aspect
Of that sweet place, yet suffred no delight
To sincke into his sence, nor mind affect,
But passèd forth, and lookt still forward right,
Bridling his will, and maistering his might:
Till that he came unto another gate;
No gate, but like one, being goodly dight
With boughes and braunches, which did broad dilate
Their claspng armes, in wanton wreathings intricate.

- 54 So fashioned a Porch with rare device,
Archt over head with an embracing vine,
Whose bounches hanging downe, seemed to entice
All passers by, to tast their luscious wine,
And did themselves into their hands incline,
As freely offering to be gatherèd:
Some deepe empurpled as the *Hyacint*,²
Some as the Rubine,³ laughing sweetly red,
Some like faïre *Emeraudes*, not yet well ripenèd.

- 55 And them amongst, some were of burnisht gold,
So made by art, to beautifie the rest,
Which did themselves amongst the leaves enfold,
As lurking from the vew of covetous guest,
That the weake bowes, with so rich load opprest,
Did bow adowne, as over-burdenèd.
Under that Porch a comely dame did rest,
Clad in faïre weedes,⁴ but fowle disorderèd,
And garments loose, that seemd unmeet for womanhèd.

- 56 In her left hand a Cup of gold she held,
And with her right the riper fruit did reach,
Whose sappy liquor, that with fulnesse sweld,
Into her cup she scrudz,⁵ with daintie breach⁶
Of her fine fingers, without fowle empeach,⁷
That so faïre wine-press made the wine more sweet:
Thereof she usd to give to drinke to each,
Whom passing by she happened to meet:
It was her guise,⁸ all *Straungers* goodly so to greet.

Tempe Orpheus by his music led trees to the mountain valley in Thessaly, famous for its groves and walks.

Daphne She escaped *Phoebus* Apollo in *Tempe* by being turned into a laurel.
Ida Cretan mountain, frequented by gods during the Trojan war

- 57 So she to *Guyon* offred it to tast;
 Who taking it out of her tender hond,
 The cup to ground did violently cast,
 That all in peeeces it was broken fond,
 And with the liquor stained all the lond:
 Whereat *Excesse* exceedingly was wroth,
 Yet no'te^o the same amend, ne yet withstond,
 But suffred him to passe, all were she loth;
 Who nought regarding her displeasure forward goth.
- 58 There the most daintie Paradise on ground,
 It selfe doth offer to his sober eye,
 In which all pleasures plenteously abound,
 And none does others happinesse enuye:
 The painted flowres, the trees upshooting hye,
 The dales for shade, the hilles for breathing space,
 The trembling groves, the Christall running by;
 And that, which all faire workes doth most aggrace,
 The art, which all that wrought, appeared in no place.^o
- 59 One would have thought, (so cunningly, the rude,
 And scorned parts were mingled with the fine,)
 That nature had for wantonnesse ensude^o
 Art, and that Art at nature did repine;
 So striving each th' other to undermine,
 Each did the others worke more beautifie;
 So diff'ring both in willes, agreed in fine:^o
 So all agreed through sweete diversitie,
 This Gardin to adorne with all varietie.
- 60 And in the midst of all, a fountaine stood,
 Of richest substance, that on earth might bee,
 So pure and shiny, that the silver flood
 Through every channell running one might see;
 Most goodly it with curious imagerie
 Was over-wrought, and shapes of naked boyes,
 Of which some seemd with lively jollitee,
 To fly about, playing their wanton toys,^o
 Whilst others did them selves embay^o in liquid joyes.
- 61 And over all, of purest gold was spred,
 A trayle of yvie in his native hew:^o
 For the rich metall was so coloured,
 That wight, who did not well avis'd it vew,
 Would surely deeme it to be yvie trew;
 Low his lascivious armes adown did creepe,
 That themselves dipping in the silver dew,

could not

imitated

in the end

games
bathe

appearance

The art . . . place exactly translated from Tasso, *Gerusalemme Liberata* (the main inspiration of this canto). Spenser's meaning is not

that art is lower than nature, as some critics say; the fault in the paradise lies in the human uses to which it is put, not in its design.

Their fleecy flowres they tenderly did steepe,
 Which drops of Christall seemd for wantonès to weepe.

- 62 Infinit streames continually did well
 Out of this fountaine, sweet and faire to see,
 The which into an ample laver^o fell,
 And shortly grew to so great quantitie,
 That like a little lake it seemd to bee;
 Whose depth exceeded not three cubits hight,
 That through the waves one might the bottom see,
 All pav'd beneath with Jasper shining bright,
 That seemd the fountaine in that sea did sayle upright.

basin

- 63 And all the margent round about was set,
 With shady Laurel trees, thence to defend^o
 The sunny beames, which on the billowes bet,^o
 And those which therein bathed, mote offend.
 As *Guyon* hapned by the same to wend,
 Two naked Damzelles he therein espyde,
 Which therein bathing, seemed to contend,
 And wrestle wantonly, ne car'd to hyde,
 Their dainty parts from vew of any, which them eyde.

fend off
beat

- 64 Sometimes the one would lift the other quight
 Above the waters, and then downe againe
 Her plong, as over maistered by might,
 Where both awhile would covered remaine,
 And each the other from to rise^o restraine;
 The whiles their snowy limbes, as through a vele,
 So through the Christall waves appeared plaine:
 Then suddenly both would themselves unhele,^o
 And th'amarous sweet spoiles to greedy eyes revele.

rising

uncover

- 65 As that faire Starre,^o the messenger of morne,
 His dewy face out of the sea doth reare:
 Or as the *Cyprian* goddesse,^o newly borne
 Of th'Oceans fruitfull froth, did first appeare:
 Such seemed they, and so^o their yellow heare
 Christalline humour^o dropped downe apace.
 Whom such when *Guyon* saw, he drew him neare,
 And somewhat gan relent his earnest pace,
 His stubborne brest gan secret pleasure to embrace.^o

in the same way
water

- 66 The wanton Maidens him espying, stood
 Gazing a while at his unwonted guise;^o
 Then th'one her selfe low ducked in the flood,

behavior

faire Starre the Morning Star (Venus)
Cyprian goddesse Venus, born of the union
 of Saturn's semen and the ocean
 His stubborne . . . embrace *Guyon*'s momen-
 tary lust for the girls in the fountain recalls

the lapses of his pagan (but Christianized)
 prototype Hercules; but Right Reason (the Pal-
 mer) enables temperance to overcome con-
 cupiscence.

Abasht, that her a stranger did advise:^o
 But th'other rather higher did arise,
 And her two lilly paps aloft displayd,
 And all, that might his melting hart entise
 To her delights, she unto him bewrayd:^o
 The rest hid underneath, him more desirous made.

- 67 With that, the other likewise up arose,
 And her faire lockes, which formerly were bownd
 Up in one knot, she low adowne did lose:^o
 Which flowing long and thick, her cloth'd around,
 And th'yvorie in golden mantle gown:
 So that faire spectacle from him was reft,
 Yet that, which reft it, no lesse faire was fownd:
 So hid in lockes and waves from lookers theft,
 Nought but her lovely face she for his looking left.

- 68 Withall she laugh'd, and she blusht withall,
 That blushing to her laughter gave more grace,
 And laughter to her blushing, as did fall:
 Now when they spide the knight to slacke his pace,
 Them to behold, and in his sparkling face
 The secret signes of kindled lust appeare,
 Their wanton meriments they did encrease,
 And to him beckned, to approach more neare.
 And shewd him many sights, that courage^o cold could reare.

- 69 On which when gazing him the Palmer saw,
 He much rebuk to those wandring eyes of his,
 And counsell'd well, him forward thence did draw.
 Now are they come nigh to the *Bowre of blis*
 Of her fond favorites so nam'd amis:
 When thus the Palmer; Now Sir, well advise;
 For here the end of all our travell is:
 Here wonnes^o *Acrasia*, whom we must surprise,
 Else she will slip away, and all our drift^o despise.

- 70 Eftsoones they heard a most melodious sound,
 Of all that mote delight a daintie eare,
 Such as attonce might not on living ground,
 Save in this Paradise, be heard elsewhere:
 Right hard it was, for wight, which did it heare,
 To read,^o what manner musicke that mote bee:
 For all that pleasing is to living eare,
 Was there consorted in one harmonie,
 Birdes, voyces, instruments, windes, waters, all agree.

- 71 The joyous birdes shrouded in chearefull shade,
 Their notes unto the voyce attemptred sweet;
 Th'Angelically soft trembling voyces made

look at

displayed

unloose

desire

lives
plans

tell

To th'instruments divine responsee meet;
 The silver sounding instruments did meet
 With the base^o murmur of the waters fall:
 The waters fall with difference discreet,
 Now soft, now loud, unto the wind did call:
 The gentle warbling wind low answer'd to all.^o

- 72 There, whence that Musick seem'd heard to bee,
 Was the faire Witch her selfe now solacing,
 With a new Lover, whom through sorcerie
 And witchcraft, she from farre did thither bring:
 There she had him now layd a slombering,
 In secret shade, after long wanton joyes:
 Whilst round about them pleasantly did sing
 Many faire Ladies, and lascivious boyes,
 That ever mixt their song with light licentious toyes.
- 73 And all that while, right over him she hong,
 With her false eyes fast fix'd in his sight,
 As seeking medicine, whence she was stong,^o
 Or greedily depasturing^o delight:
 And oft inclining downe with kisses light,
 For feare of waking him, his lips bedewed,
 And through his humid eyes did sucke his spright,
 Quite molten into lust and pleasure lewd;
 Wherewith she sigh'd soft, as if his case she rewd.

- 74 The whiles some one did chaunt this lovely lay:^o
 Ah see, who so faire thing doest faine to see,
 In springing flowre the image of thy day;
 Ah see the Virgin Rose, how sweetly shee
 Doth first peepe forth with bashfull modestie,
 That fairer seemes, the lesse ye see her may;
 Lo see soone after, how more bold and free
 Her bared bosome she doth broad display;
 Loe see soone after, how she fades, and fallies away.
- 75 So passeth, in the passing of a day,
 Of mortall life the leafe, the bud, the flowre,
 Ne more doth flourish after first decay,
 That earst was sought to decke both bed and bowre,

The joyous . . . All This stanza of natural and artificial harmony Spenser developed from Tasso, *Gerusalemme Liberata* XVI.2, though that leaves out the instruments and voices; however, Tasso includes there when he writes a rather similar stanza (XVIII.8); hence if Spenser is really, as some critics say, making the combination of artificial and natural music seem sinister, Tasso, whose sinister intent is hard to see, preceded him.
 seeking . . . stong seeking a cure from that which hurt her

lay Translated from Tasso (XVI.14-15), where it is sung by a bird. The theme—*carpe diem*, seize the day—it is ancient, and so is the group of figures attached to the rose. The beauty of the "lovely lay" emphasizes, like the beauty of the approaches to the Brower, the powerful forces against which Temperance must fight. The theme occurs in many poems which have not the moralistic context of Spenser's, but Comus's use of the rose-figure in Milton's masque is very like this one (ll. 742-43).

bass

consuming

Of many a Ladie, and many a Paramowre:
 Gather therefore the Rose, whilst yet is prime,
 For soone comes age, that will her pride deflowre:
 Gather the Rose of love, whilst yet is time,
 Whilst loving thou mayst lovèd be with equal crime.⁷

sin

- 76 He ceast, and then gan all the quire of birdes
 Their diverse notes t'attune unto his lay,
 As in approvance of his pleasing words.
 The constant paire heard all, that he did say,
 Yet swarvèd⁸ not, but kept their forward way,
 Through many covert groves, and thickets close,
 In which they creeping did at last dispoise⁹
 That wanton Ladie, with her lover lose,
 Whose sleepe head she in her lap did soft dispose.

swerved

discover

- 77 Upon a bed of Roses she was layd,
 As faint through heat, or dight to pleasant sin,
 And was arayd, or rather disarayd,
 All in a vele of silke and silver thin,
 That hid no whit her alabaster¹⁰ skin,
 But rather shewd more white, if more might bee:
 More subtle web *Arachne* cannot spin,
 Nor the fine nets, which oft we woven see
 Of scorched dew, do not in th'aire more lightly flee.

alabaster

- 78 Her snowy brest was bare to readie spoyle
 Of hungry eies, which n'ot¹¹ therewith be fid,
 And yet through languor of her late sweet toyle,
 Few drops, more cleare then Nectar, forth distild,
 That like pure Orient perles adowne it trild,
 And her faire eies sweet smyling in delight,
 Moystened their fierie beames, with which she thrild
 Fraile harts, yet quenched not; like starry light
 Which sparkling on the silent waves, does seeme more bright.

could not

- 79 The young man sleeping by her, seemd to bee
 Some goodly swayne of honorable place,
 That certes it great pittie was to see
 Him his nobilitie so foule deface;
 A sweet regard, and amiable grace,
 Mixd with manly sternnesse did appeare
 Yet sleeping, in his well proportiond face,
 And on his tender lips the downy heare
 Did now but freshly spring, and silken blosomes beare.

- 80 His warlike armes, the idle instruments
 Of sleeping praise, were hong upon a tree,
 And his brave shield, full of old monuments,¹²
 Was fowly ra'st,¹³ that none the signes might see;

figures
erased

Ne for them, ne for honour carèd hee,
 Ne ought, that did to his advancement tend,
 But in lewd loves, and wastfull luxurie,
 His dayes, his goods, his bodie he did spend:
 O horrible enchantment, that him so did blend.¹⁴

blind

- 81 The noble Elle, and carefull Palmer drew
 So nigh them, minding nought, but lustfull game,
 That suddain forth they on them rusht, and threw
 A subtle¹⁵ net,¹⁶ which onely¹⁷ for the same
 The skilfull Palmer formall¹⁸ did frame.¹⁹
 So held them under fast, the whiles the rest
 Fled all away for feare of fowler shame.
 The faire Enchauntresse, so unware opprest,
 Tryde all her arts, and all her sleights, thence out to wrest.

fine / specially
expressly / design

- 82 And eke her lover strove: but all in vaine;
 For that same net so cunningly was wound,
 That neither guile, nor force might it distraine.²⁰
 They tooke them both, and both them strongly bound
 In captive bandes, which there they readie found:
 But her in chaines of adamant he tyde;
 For nothing else might keepe her safe and sound;
 But *Verdant*²¹ (so he hight) he soone untide,
 And counsell sage in steed thereof²² to him applyde.

break

of constraint

- 83 But all those pleasant bowres and Pallace brave,
Guyon broke downe, with rigour pittlesse;
 Ne ought their goodly workmanship might save
 Them from the tempest of his wrathfulnesse,
 But that their blisse he turn'd to balefulnesse:
 Their groves he feld, their gardins did deface,
 Their arbors spoyle, their Cabinets²³ suppress,
 Their banket houses burne, their buildings race,²⁴
 And of the fairest late, now made the fowlest place.

bowres
raze

- 84 Then led they her away, and eke that knight
 They with them led, both sorrowfull and sad:
 The way they came, the same retourn'd they right,
 Till they arrivd, where they lately had
 Charm'd those wild-beasts,²⁵ that rag'd with furie mad.
 Which now awaking, fierce at them gan fly,
 As in their mistresse reskeve, whom they lad;
 But them the Palmer soone did pacify.
 Then *Guyon* askt, what meant those beastes, which there did ly.

net borrowed from *Odyssey* VIII. 276 ff., where
 Hephaestus (Vulcan) traps his wife Aphrodite
 (Venus) in bed with Ares (Mars) by a similar
 stratagem
 Verdant perhaps because in the spring of his

life; perhaps "spring (or life)-giving," as
 Mordant, Acrasia's earlier lover, was "death-
 giving"
 wild-beasts They met these beasts on the way
 in stanza 39.

- 85 Said he, These seeming beasts are men indeed,
Whom this Enchauntresse hath transformed thus,
Whylome^o her lovers, which her lusts did feed,
Now turned into figures hideous,
According to their mindes like monstrous.^o
Sad end (quoth he) of life intemperate,
And mournfull meed of joyes delicious:
But Palmer, if it mote thee so aggrate,^o
Let them returned be unto their former state.

formerly

please

- 86 Streight way he with his vertuous staffe then strooke,
And streight of beasts they comely men became;
Yet being men they did unmanly looke,
And stared ghastly, some for inward shame,
And some for wrath, to see their captive Dame:
But one above the rest in speciall,
That had an hog beene late, hight *Grille*^o by name,
Repined greatly, and did him miscall,
That had from hogghish forme him brought to naturall.

- 87 Said *Guyon*, See the mind of beastly man,
That hath so soone forgot the excellence
Of his creation, when he life began,
That now he chooseth, with vile difference,
To be a beast, and lacke intelligence.
To whom the Palmer thus, The donghill kind
Delights in filth and foule incontinence:
Let *Grill* be *Grill*, and have his hogghish mind,
But let us hence depart, whilest wetther serves and wind.

1590

Book III

Book III is the Legend of Chastity, a Book of Love, and very different structurally from I and II, being in this regard closely linked to IV. It may be that parts of it are earlier than I and II, and belong to a time when Spenser was much more interested in writing a poem like Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, which has, though with greater pace and dash, a similar interweaving of many stories. Spenser here combines the tales of Britomart and Artegall, Marinell and Florimell, Belpheobe and Timias, with that of Scudamour and Amoret and many others. Amoret is chaste married love, and Scuda-

According . . . monstrous Acrasia is modeled on Homer's Circe, who turns men into beasts. Allegorically, the cop she offers gives a man his choice between two extremes between which, according to Aristotle, there is no mean: Bestiality and Heroic Virtue. Acrasia's victims choose Bestiality, and so are transformed into beasts.

Grille According to Plotarch, in his *Whether the Beasts Have Use of Reason*, one of Odys-

seus' comrades refused to be turned back into a man. This was Gryllus. The story was known in England from a book called *Circe*, translated from Italian and published in 1557. Guyon uses *Grille* as an occasion to reflect on the willingness of some men to forgo their rank above the beast and next to the angels; the Palmer abandons him, since some men do, through incontinence, lose even the desire to be restored to humanity.

mour finally achieves her at the end of the Book, but only in the 1590 edition of Books I to III; in 1596 Spenser canceled the last five stanzas and replaced them by three new ones postponing the union.

In Book III Elizabeth is celebrated in her second person, not as Queen but as "a most virtuous and beautiful Lady," namely Belpheobe. Spenser can include in a treatment of love philosophical considerations wider and higher than relations between men and women; he glories in love as the bringer of fertility and order in the whole world. Thus the Virgin Queen can be the patroness and exemplar of plenty, fertility, order, while remaining a devotee of virginity; her twin sister, Amoret, expresses the other kind of chastity, which is consistent with married love.

The cosmic and moral implications of love are present also in the parts of the Book Spenser calls, in the Letter to Raleigh, "Accidents"; one is "the over-throw of Marinell, the misery of Florimell," a story that runs on into Book V. Florimell is based on Ariosto's Angelica, who is always being chased and who has an evil double, as Florimell has a Snowy Florimell imitating her. Her allegorical significance is not clear, but she seems to be a type of the beauty of natural creation, the opposite but also the complement of the chaotic sea (Marinell) out of which Love was born.

[In the opening canto Spenser follows his now established procedure—the departing Guyon meets the knight of the new Book, the maiden warrior Britomart, and she beats him in fight because Chastity, her virtue, is higher than Temperance, Guyon's. But she presides over the Book much less firmly than Guyon over his, and comes into her own only at the end. The first canto also contains a key to the whole Book in the account of Castle Joyeous, the abode of Malecasta, which is full of emblems of unchastity. Britomart defeats Malecasta's champions. Cantos ii and iii establish the relation between Britomart and Artegall (knight of Justice in Book V) to Elizabeth, and iv is about Marinell and Florimell and ends with a beautiful apostrophe to Night. Canto v describes the healing of the squire Timias by Belpheobe (probably a reference to the quarrel between Raleigh and the Queen). Canto vi is the "core" canto, and one of the most important in the entire poem.]

Book III, Canto vi

This canto, which has strong associations with the Mutability Cantos, contains a charming, newly invented myth and a philosophical allegory which is not only hard to interpret but also, in some respects, central to the poem, and the source of much that we consider "Spenserian"; if *The Faerie Queene* in any sense adds up to a great poem much depends upon these stanzas; they tell us about the color of the poet's mind and the way he had learned to speak a philosophy of life through mythological fictions.

The Garden of Adonis is about the great opposites that everybody knows about in his own life; we experience continuity but also change; we know that humanity, like plant life, survives, but also that as individuals we die. In short, life is mutable but also constant. The Renaissance poet will express this felt knowledge by making a myth which brings the opposites into a unity. Spenser will explain that the forms are sempiternal, that is, perpetual though lacking the final immutable stillness of eternity.