

THE EMPORIA STATE



RESEARCH



STUDIES



THE GRADUATE PUBLICATION OF THE EMPORIA KANSAS STATE COLLEGE

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BY

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The Emporia State Research Studies

EMPORIA KANSAS STATE COLLEGE
EMPORIA, KANSAS 66801

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Volume XXIII

Fall, 1974

Number 2

THE EMPORIA STATE RESEARCH STUDIES is published quarterly by The School of Graduate and Professional Studies of the Emporia Kansas State College, 1200 Commercial St., Emporia, Kansas, 66801. Entered as second-class matter September 16, 1952, at the post office at Emporia, Kansas, under the act of August 24, 1912. Postage paid at Emporia, Kansas.

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3589189

“Statement required by the Act of October, 1962; Section 4369, Title 39, United States Code, showing Ownership, Management and Circulation.” **The Emporia State Research Studies** is published quarterly. Editorial Office and Publication Office at 1200 Commercial Street, Emporia, Kansas. (66801). The **Research Studies** is edited and published by the Emporia Kansas State College, Emporia, Kansas.

A complete list of all publications of *The Emporia State Research Studies* is published in the fourth number of each volume.

Completeness in Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*

by

Gregory Marshall *

A conventional view among critics has been that Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* is not a complete work. C. S. Lewis, for example, thinks that the poem should not be considered as a whole, but rather as three fragments.¹ More recently, however, others have begun to suggest that the six existing books are a complete poem in themselves. Northrop Frye, to cite a leading instance, assumes, for the purposes of his analysis, that the poem is complete.² He argues:

If merely uncompleted, then it still may be a unity, like a torso in sculpture; if unfinished, then . . . certain essential clues to the total meaning are forever withheld from us.³

The question being raised can be expressed more clearly than as Frye has put it. It is, moreover, possible to argue both more convincingly and in more detail that *The Faerie Queene* is complete in its six existing books.

The present question, simply stated, is whether Spenser, in 1596, intended Books I-VI to represent his complete *The Faerie Queene*, or whether he intended the six existing books to be but an installment, perhaps about half, of a larger work. Two arguments suggest at once that the poem is complete in its six books. First, the poem is complete as an epic, insofar as "epic" can be usefully defined. Secondly, Book VI and what is known of Spenser's career suggest that, in 1596, he was satisfied with his poem, but discouraged about the prospect for continuing it and, therefore, ready to bring it to completion. Once these two points are made clear, it is not unreasonable to hypothesize that *The Faerie Queene* in the present six books is a complete poem; however, before these two arguments are elaborated, three important limitations should be noted.

First, the "Cantos of Mutabilitie" will not be considered. 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

* The author is a doctoral candidate in English at the University of Notre Dame. Portions of this study originated as a master's thesis in English at Emporia Kansas State College.

¹ C. S. Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, Excluding Drama*, pp. 378-379.

² Northrop Frye, *Fables of Identity*, p. 70.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

death, seems reason enough to doubt their relevance. The "Cantos" were added by the publisher, Matthew Lowmes (or Lownes), as a newly discovered "parcell of some following booke of the Faerie Queene Under the Legend of Constance never before imprinted."⁴ Moreover, Lowmes's authority for adding the "cantos" to *The Faerie Queene* was not then 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 own presentation of them as part of *The Faerie Queene* remains controversial.⁵ Frye and Lewis also demonstrate this controversy. Lewis obviously thinks the "Cantos" are a part, "Fragment C," of *The Faerie Queene*.⁶ Frye, by contrast, states flatly, "What we can see is that the Mutabilitie Cantos are certainly not a fragment."⁷ Consequently, 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 consideration as evidence.

A second limitation involves narrative inconsistencies. 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," it is not until Canto i, stanza 40 of Book II 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.⁸ For example, certain inconsistencies are held to imply certain compositional problems; then, the problems are cited to explain the inconsistencies. Michael Murrin makes a suggestion, seen again in connection with *The Faerie Queene* as epic, that Spenser simply did not concern himself with narrative inconsistencies because he was more concerned with the reader's response to his stories than with the stories themselves.⁹ However this may be, such attention to narrative inconsistencies seems fruitless.

The *Letter to Raleigh*, included in the back of the 1590 edition of *The Faerie Queene*, implies a final limitation in an approach to the problem of completeness. The only firsthand record of Spenser's

⁴ 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.

⁵ 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 that opposite position, temporally and critically, with her suggestion that the "Cantos" could have been intended for the grand climax of Book XII.

⁶ Lewis, *loc. cit.*

⁷ Frye, p. 71.

⁸ W. J. B. Owen, "The Structure of *The Faerie Queene*," *PMLA*, LXVIII (1953), 1085.

⁹ Michael Murrin, *The Veil of Allegory*, p. 73.

intentions regarding *The Faerie Queene* is found in the *Letter*.¹⁰ These intentions, however, represent Spenser's thinking in 1589 and not in 1596. The application of the *Letter* to the poem of 1596 should, then, be viewed with caution. Oftentimes, insufficient emphasis is given to the fact that the *Letter* was not published with the 1596 edition.¹¹ It seems likely that Spenser would have wished to include it had it still been relevant to his poem, and one suggests that the probability that its omission indicates abandonment, or at least a thorough revision, of the twelve-book plan is of major significance.¹² As a record of Spenser's intentions, then, the *Letter* cannot be given much weight, especially regarding the length of the completed poem.

I

Whatever the length, Spenser clearly intended 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 successful in this act of homage; *The Faerie Queene* meets the most sensible group of epic characteristics so far outlined (those of E.M.W. Tillyard), and may, therefore, be considered complete as an epic.

The free use of the word "epic" as an honorific term has served to drain the word itself of most of its precision. On the other hand, narrower definition, 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 to give the concept substance, but flexible enough to allow the word its resonance.¹³ 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." Thirdly, 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

¹⁰ Rudolf B. Gottfried, "Our New Poet: Archetypal Criticism and *The Faerie Queene*," *PMLA*, LXXXIII (1968), 1365; Howard C. Cole, *A Quest of Inquiry*, pp. xi-xii; H. C. Chang, *Allegory and Courtesy in Spenser*, p. v. Cole and Chang provide forceful statements of the value of historical methods to any inquiry. Chang's is remarkable for its brevity and pith: "Historical study is the beginning of all honest inquiry."

¹¹ Josephine Waters Bennett, *The Evolution of the Faerie Queene*, pp. 37, 154.

¹² Janet Spens, *Spenser's Faerie Queene*, p. 11.

¹³ See E. M. W. Tillyard, *The English Epic and Its Background*, pp. 5-12. Quotations in this paragraph are from these pages.

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 two requirements, those of quality and seriousness and breadth of scope. Spenser is one of few poets whose reputation has suffered no eclipses, but has remained uniformly high.¹⁴ As for seriousness of purpose, Milton's reference to "sage and serious Spenser" has persisted even into recent commentary, and, by and large, deservedly so.¹⁵ Similarly, Tillyard's second epic characteristic (inclusiveness and breadth of scope) is certainly to be found in *The Faerie Queene*. The virtue inhering in the poem's very size, seventy-two long cantos, seems obvious evidence for this contention, and it is reinforced by the poem's well-recognized inclusiveness.¹⁶ The success of *The Faerie Queene* in fulfilling Tillyard's first two requirements should not be much in doubt.

On the other hand, the third of Tillyard's epic characteristics (artistic control) is a point of much contention about the epic character of *The Faerie Queene*. For example, Tillyard himself argues, "*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."¹⁷ Later, however, he allows the poem "a genuine if loose totality."¹⁸ Both the genuineness and the looseness of *The Faerie Queene* arise from the variety of methods that Spenser uses to control his material. The range of Spenser's technique will become evident, and no single discussion can hope to do more than suggest its breadth.

Involvement of the reader is an essential method of control in *The Faerie Queene*. 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.¹⁹ The reader shares Guyon's "secret pleasance" 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 earlier alluded to become unimportant: as Michael Murrin suggests, Spenser does not "tie up" his stories because they are not the focus of his concern; the reader is.²⁰ What Murrin calls "the veil of allegory" shadows a world, in this case Faeryland, to

¹⁴ Lewis, p. 393.

¹⁵ Cole, p. 3.

¹⁶ A. C. Hamilton, "Spenser and the Common Reader," *ELH*, XXXV (1968), 624; G. K. Hunter, *John Lyly*, p. 8; Joan Grundy, *The Spenserian Poets*, pp. 39-40; Donald Cheney, *Spenser's Image of Nature*, p. 247; C. S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love*, p. 354.

¹⁷ Tillyard, p. 11.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 292.

¹⁹ Arlene N. Okerlund, "Spenser's Wanton Maidens: Reader Psychology and the Bower of Bliss," *PMLA*, LXXXVIII (1973), 64.

²⁰ Murrin, p. 73.

which the poet is privy and the reader seeks entrance. In Murrin's words, it "creates the value truth needs by setting up difficulties of the understanding."²¹ 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.

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.²² Its three rhymes converge toward the middle, creating a sort of centripetal force that focuses attention on the stanza as a unit in itself.²³ The final Alexandrine supports this tendency by stopping the flow of the meter.²⁴ 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 need to concentrate the elements of the situation into a judgement as if for action.²⁵

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. Canto x is important as the allegorical core in five of the six books.²⁶ That the House of Holiness, House of Temperance, Temple of Venus, Castle of Mercilla, and Mount Acidale episodes represent 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.²⁷ In Canto iii of Books I and VI, the narrative switches to a secondary character; in Book I, Una begins her travels alone, while in Book VI, Calepine is introduced as Calidore's surrogate. In Books II

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

²² Arnold Williams, *Flower on a Lowly Stalk*, p. 90.

²³ A. C. Hamilton, *The Structure of Allegory in The Faerie Queene*, p. 14.

²⁴ Maurice Evans, *Spenser's Anatomy of Heroism*, p. 34.

²⁵ William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, p. 34.

²⁶ R. F. Hill, "Colin Clout's Courtesy," *MLR*, LVII (1962), 492.

²⁷ Thomas P. Roche, *The Kindly Flame*, p. 201.

and V, Braggadochio begins and ends his masquerade as a true Knight. Moreover, in Book V, Florimell and Marinell are married in Canto iii. 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.

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 that *The Faerie Queene* might be "performed," with the canto as a convenient unit of presentation.²⁸ 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 unifying atmosphere, such as Faeryland, or precise execution in small, found in the stanza, but a grand design, or an overall plan, as well.²⁹ Since only the rudiments of a single narrative action, the story of Arthur and Gloriana, are 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.³⁰ This plan involves a cumulative effect, with each part of the poem contributing to an understanding of each subsequent part.³¹ 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.³² 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).³³ Calidore's rescue of Pastorella, then, takes on the quality of a redemption, a social regeneration that fulfills in Book I the potential of the Red Cross Knight's personal regeneration at the Well of Life. The Book of Courtesy, the perfect love of man, appropriately completes a cycle begun by the Book of Holiness, the perfect love of God.³⁴ In the context of such a progressive relationship among

²⁸ Murrin, p. 69.

²⁹ Graham Hough, *A Preface to The Faerie Queene*, pp. 90-91.

³⁰ Evans, p. 225.

³¹ Hamilton, "Spenser and the Common Reader," p. 627.

³² Maurice Evans, "Courtesy and the Fall of Man," *ES*, XLVI (1965), 218-219.

³³ Frye, p. 75.

³⁴ Evans, "Courtesy," p. 218.

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).

Variations on the progressive design are obtained by pairing the books. Book I contrasts instructively with Book II, since 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.³⁵ The situation is reversed in the case of Book V and Book VI. Artegall deals with Justice in terms of Old Testament law, while Calidore seeks the higher plane represented by New Testament gospel.³⁶ 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.³⁷ 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.³⁸ *The Faerie Queene* 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; similarly, Courtesy is the resolution of Friendship with Justice.³⁹ 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, nevertheless, do suggest the foundations upon which Spenser builds his epic unity.⁴⁰ There is a second kind of design discernible, one which may be even more suggestive than the progressive design. This design proceeds from the fact that most commentary, no matter what its approach, seems to agree that Books III and IV belong together.⁴¹ 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

³⁵ A. S. P. Woodhouse, "Nature and Grace in *The Faerie Queene*," *ELH*, XVI (1949), 204.

³⁶ Evans, *Spenser's Anatomy of Heroism*, p. 227.

³⁷ Roche, p. vii; Owen, pp. 1096-1097.

³⁸ Harry Berger, Jr., "A Secret Discipline, *The Faerie Queene*. Book VI," in *Form and Convention in the Poetry of Edmund Spenser*, pp. 35-36.

³⁹ Frye, p. 75.

⁴⁰ Douglas Bush, *Prefaces to Renaissance Literature*, p. 81.

⁴¹ Spens, p. 99; Roche, p. vii; Owen, p. 1097; Bennett, p. 155.

of Chastity.⁴² It is as if the poem were composed folded in half and then unfolded into its present shape. Books III and IV are the "hinge," or its focal point. It opens out from the middle in two directions at once. Here, the parallelism among cantos comes into play, 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 skeleton of the poem, then, is constructed much as the stanza is constructed, balanced in tension between motion and elaboration, and this similarity may bear upon the remarkable sense of harmony that prevails in *The Faerie Queene* despite the variety of its single episodes."⁴³

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.⁴⁴ 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.⁴⁵ Spenser is as medieval as he is modern, and he worked at a time when medieval patterns of thought were still vital.⁴⁶ 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.⁴⁷ 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

⁴² Roche, p. 200.

⁴³ Lewis, *English Literature*, p. 380.

⁴⁴ Glynne Wickham, *Early English Stages*, I, i, 315.

⁴⁵ Grundy, pp. 29-30.

⁴⁶ C. S. Lewis, *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Literature*, p. 117; Lewis, *English Literature*, p. 5; Spens, p. 71.

⁴⁷ Roche, p. vii.

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.⁴⁸ 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, explored in Books I and II, and the other 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.⁴⁹ Significantly, this kind of unity has been independently observed in medieval romance.⁵⁰ 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 this same kind of unity in *The Faerie Queene* and called it ". . . an unity of design, and not of action."⁵¹ He 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 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.⁵²

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.⁵³ Its Gothicism, however, is that of Hurd's garden or of Wickham's cathedral. The poem's central miracle is the Love treated in

⁴⁸ Lewis, *English Literature*, p. 133.

⁴⁹ Bennett, pp. 106-107.

⁵⁰ See John Arthos, *On the Poetry of Spenser and the Form of Romances*, pp. 189-192.

⁵¹ Richard Hurd, "Gothic Unity in *The Faerie Queene*," in *The Prince of Poets*, p. 191.

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 191-192.

⁵³ Hunter, p. 8.

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.⁵⁴ 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.

The import of the center-focus structure of *The Faerie Queene* is reinforced by one final technique of control in the use of mythology. Mythological references are, of course, pervasive, and there is no doubt that Spenser unselfconsciously helped himself to these materials.⁵⁵ However, instead of merely borrowing, he acts out his poem's central miracle, the generative power of love, by rejuvenating 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 and stale, stereotyped to the extent that it is no longer a suitable vehicle for a serious treatment of Love (III. ix-x).⁵⁶ 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.⁵⁷ Likewise, after Malbecco, the worn-out jealousy figure, is comically degenerated into a personification, the theme of possessive love can be reanimated in the Busirane episode.⁵⁸ 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 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 surrounded by a somewhat decadent spectacle:

Great sorts of lovers, piteously complayning,
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 comparing 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

⁵⁴ Gottfried, p. 1372; Spens, p. 99.

⁵⁵ Spens, p. 72.

⁵⁶ Harry Berger, Jr., "The Discarding of Malbecco: Conspicuous Allusion and Cultural Exhaustion in *The Faerie Queene*, III. ix-x," *SP*, LXVI (1969), 138.

⁵⁷ Roche, pp. 132-135.

⁵⁸ Berger, "Discarding," pp. 140-141.

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 supplant an over-used myth with fresh material treating the same theme, reproductive Love.⁵⁹ In this instance, he not only places his poem in a mythological tradition, but also places himself among the 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 river poem.⁶⁰ *The Faerie Queene*, permeated with myth, is at once traditional and fresh, and infuses with new meaning Spenser's clichéd dual identity as both New Poet and poets' poet. The reader's involvement in Faeryland, the Spenserian stanza, the canto, the book, and use of mythology are representative of the ways in which Spenser controls his poem. Control, then, 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 to be satisfied — that the poem be choric (or speak for a group of people). That *The Faerie Queene* is choric is nearly self-evident; it is, like the *Aeneid*, a national epic.⁶¹ 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.⁶² It is, in a sense, a 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.⁶³ 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.⁶⁴ *The Faerie Queene* is choric, then, in its attention to the development of England as a cultural entity.

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.⁶⁵ The "eloquent commonness" of a Wordsworth or a Yeats

⁵⁹ Harry Berger, Jr., "Two Spenserian Retrospects: The Antique Temple of Venus and the Primitive Marriage of Rivers," *TSL*, X (1968), 12-13.

⁶⁰ Jack B. Oruch, "Spenser, Camden, and the Poetic Marriages of Rivers," *SP*, LXIV (1967), 616.

⁶¹ Grundy, p. 31.

⁶² Lewis, *Allegory of Love*, p. 360; Jones, p. 285.

⁶³ Bush, p. 9; David M. Bergeron, *English Civic Pageantry, 1558-1642*, pp. 142-143.

⁶⁴ Bennett, pp. 98-99; Evans, *Spenser's Anatomy of Heroism*, p. 13; Parker, p. 289.

⁶⁵ Williams, p. 89.

owes much to Spenser, for he seldom strays far from the world of ordinary English experience.⁶⁶ *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.⁶⁷ 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.⁶⁸

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.⁶⁹ Spenser's topical allegories are too specific to be of interest for their own sake, but they lend a choric identity to *The Faerie Queene*, a feeling of place and time that an epic needs.⁷⁰ 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 a peculiarly English experience.⁷¹ Historical parallels act, then, as another kind of metaphor, functioning in specific contexts to tie the poem concretely to the nation.⁷² 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.⁷³ 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 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*.⁷⁴ What is, in fact, in either poem is colored by expectation of what more could be there. Such expectation

⁶⁶ Grundy, pp. 39-40.

⁶⁷ Parker, p. 277.

⁶⁸ A. C. Hamilton, "Spenser and Langland," *SP*, LV (1958), 548.

⁶⁹ Gottfried, p. 1370.

⁷⁰ Hunter, pp. 150-152.

⁷¹ Murrin, pp. 117-119.

⁷² Spens, p. 53.

⁷³ Bush, p. 99.

⁷⁴ Richard Neuse, "Book VI as Conclusion to *The Faerie Queene*," *ELH*, XXXV (1968), 329.

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.⁷⁵

This 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.⁷⁶ 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 as an epic, not only poetically, but historically, as well.

II

There are signs, both in Book VI and in what is known of Spenser's career, that he did, in fact, intend in 1596 Book VI to be the final unit of a completed *The Faerie Queene*. Book VI, with its clearly autobiographical core (the Mount Acidale episode), is characterized by a duality expressing, at once, satisfaction and pessimism. The accessible details of Spenser's career reinforce the import of this duality and, consequently, the likelihood that Spenser felt, by 1596, he had achieved a viable epic, but would not enlarge it.

The duality in Book VI is apparent from the beginning as the "delightfull 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.⁷⁷ Spenser is satisfied that his work is a substantial achievement of "Golden" poetry, but he knows, simultaneously, that a Golden age cannot last very long.⁷⁸ He is satisfied with the power of Calidore, his hero, to defeat the Blatant Beast in the poem, but he has discovered that poetry is ineffective in checking similar Beasts of Elizabethan reality.⁷⁹ This kind of duality suggests that Spenser, while writing Book VI, was ready to end *The Faerie Queene*. He is now 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.⁸⁰ He is, in other words, making an end to *The Faerie Queene*.

⁷⁵ Kathleen Williams, "'Eterne in Mutabilitie': The Unified World of *The Faerie Queene*," in *That Soueraine Light*, p. 35.

⁷⁶ Lewis, *Allegory of Love*, p. 359; Murrin, p. 167.

⁷⁷ William V. Nestruck, "The Virtuous and Gentle Discipline of Gentlemen and Poets," in *Spenser*, pp. 138-139; Berger, "Secret," pp. 74-75.

⁷⁸ Lewis, *English Literature*, pp. 64-65.

⁷⁹ Cole, p. 459; Berger, "Secret," p. 41.

⁸⁰ Parker, p. 229; Tillyard, *English Epic*, p. 287.

Spenser's duality of attitude is evident in several aspects of Book VI. His choice of Courtesy as a controlling virtue is one example. Courtesy's source is inward, but its manifestation must be outward.⁸¹ 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."⁸² 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.⁸³ The most explicit examples, however, of the duality in Book VI are to be found in Spenser's use of the pastoral, in the Mount Acidale episode, and in 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 *The Shepherdes Calender* and revived by Sidney's *Arcadia*, which appeared shortly after the first three books of *The Faerie Queene*.⁸⁴ 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.⁸⁵ Spenser's adoption of the fashionable 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 are not, in fact, optimistic in the usual romance sense. Spenser's imitative *Arcadia* is not a world of innocence and peace, but rather one which is on the verge of being violently destroyed.⁸⁶ Meliboe and his clan are traditional in the pastoral, but their slaughter is a sharp departure from convention.⁸⁷ In fact, Spenser has inverted pastoral convention, producing what might be called a mock-pastoral.

In the typical three-part action of a pastoral romance, as described 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 with supernatural powers, a "reintegration" which allows him to return effectively to the real world.⁸⁸ 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 shepherd 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. It is on Acidale that Calidore should learn the essence of Courtesy. Colin Clout's vision, the "hundred naked maidens lilly

⁸¹ Berger, "Secret," p. 44.

⁸² Lewis, *English Literature*, p. 17.

⁸³ Cheney, p. 183.

⁸⁴ Bennett, p. 207.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 213-214.

⁸⁶ Hough, p. 201; Cheney, p. 238.

⁸⁷ Chang, p. 135.

⁸⁸ Walter R. Davis, "A Map of Arcadia. Sidney's Romance in Its Tradition," in *Sidney's Arcadia*, p. 38.

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.⁸⁹ The three Graces suggest Christian grace, and it is they who teach Courtesy's outward forms:⁹⁰

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)

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.⁹¹ Calidore cannot understand Colin Clout's vision; he is unfit to participate in it.⁹² The best Knight whom the best court can offer (remembering the usual identifications of Gloriana as Elizabeth I and Sir Calidore as Sir Philip Sidney, they must be taken as the best) is simply inadequate.⁹³ Calidore is able, finally, to perform effectively only in the pastoral world, rescuing Pastorella from the brigands. He is not "reintegrated" into the real world; his conquest of the Blatant Beast is ineffectual. Spenser's use of the pastoral, then, is ambivalent: on the one hand, his adoption of the pastoral fashion suggests his satisfaction with the poetic discipline, but, on the other, his inversion of the convention reveals an underlying pessimism.

As has been implied, this duality is also matched in the Mount Acidale episode. Colin Clout's vision is an image of final satisfaction, of perfect poetic order.⁹⁴ 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.⁹⁵ She is unnamed and probably unnamable, yet is, at the same time, paradoxically, a simple "county lasse," the beloved of Colin Clout, who is, in this sense, the real hero of Book VI.⁹⁶ The poet, here appearing in his generic yet personal persona,

⁸⁹ Lewis, *Allegory of Love*, p. 350.

⁹⁰ Lila Geller, "The Acidalian Vision: Spenser's Graces in Book VI of *The Faerie Queene*, *RES*, XXIII (1972), 268.

⁹¹ Neuse, pp. 344-345.

⁹² Evans, "Courtesy," pp. 210-211.

⁹³ Harold E. Toliver, *Pastoral Forms and Attitudes*, p. 64.

⁹⁴ Evans, *Spenser's Anatomy of Heroism*, p. 213; Cheney, p. 229; Geller, p. 270; Berger, "Secret," p. 72; Frye, p. 87.

⁹⁵ Berger, "Secret," pp. 72-73; Geller, p. 270.

⁹⁶ Evans, *Spenser's Anatomy of Heroism*, p. 18.

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 revealed, now in Colin's reaction to the destruction of his vision, as all flee:

All save the shepherd, who, for well despight
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 who they of them selves list so to grace.'
(VI. x. 20)

The finality and sense of loss of control that Colin expresses in these lines at least counterbalance the satisfying impact of the vision itself. Duality of attitude clearly inheres in Colin Clout's perfect vision and its destruction 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 very 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.⁹⁷ Indeed, Spenser has rounded out Book VI so satisfactorily that it has been called the height of his poetic achievement.⁹⁸ 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 be able to defeat him. Hence, 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:⁹⁹

Ne may this homely verse, of many meanest,
Hope to escape his venomous despite,

⁹⁷ A. Williams, p. 13.

⁹⁸ Hamilton, *Structure of Allegory*, p. 191.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 206; William Nelson, *The Poetry of Edmund Spenser*, p. 295.

More then my former writs, all they were cleaneſt
 From blamefull blot, and free 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 to be the Blatant Beaſts of Elizabethan England, is tantamount to a renunciation of poetry, once and for all.¹⁰⁰ 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 the paſtoral.

Book VI is ſimultaneously optimistic and peſſimistic; it expreſſes both ſatisfaction and diſcouragement. This duality ſtrongly ſuggeſts that Spenser intended Book VI to complete *The Faerie Queene*: that he recognized and valued his achievement, but, at the ſame time, that he realized the improbability of further continuing the poem. Book VI, then, is deſigned both to complete *The Faerie Queene* as a poetic whole and to expreſſe 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.¹⁰¹

Book VI is the only book of *The Faerie Queene* compoſed mainly of poſt-1591 materials, and it has a uniquely perſonal tone, epitomized by the introduction of Colin Clout.¹⁰² It is as if Spenser is inviting the reader to look into the poet's life and to diſcover 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 "left-overs from Book III," although it may have been reviſed as late as

¹⁰⁰ Nelson, p. 16.

¹⁰¹ Toliver, p. 80; Chang, p. 123.

¹⁰² Owen, pp. 1096-1098; Neſtrick, pp. 135-136.

1594.¹⁰³ The topical material in Book V was necessarily written after 1591, some of it perhaps as late as 1595, but about half of Book V is comprised of earlier materials.¹⁰⁴ 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.¹⁰⁵ 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 earlier 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*.¹⁰⁶ 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 1590'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 his works under separate titles.¹⁰⁷ The nature of his 1591-1595 works is such that they surely could have been included in a larger *Faerie Queene* had he 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.¹⁰⁸ 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, such a decision by Spenser would seem natural.

In the context of his career, Spenser's pessimism also seems natural. No major English poet, except perhaps Chaucer, has had to write under

¹⁰³ 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.

¹⁰⁴ Bennett, pp. 186, 204; Owen, p. 1097.

¹⁰⁵ Bennett, pp. 207, 243.

¹⁰⁶ Frederick Ives Carpenter, *A Reference Guide to Edmund Spenser*. See pp. 19-21 for a useful chronology of these years.

¹⁰⁷ Spens, p. 10.

¹⁰⁸ Tillyard, p. 287; Parker, p. 229; Bennett, p. 37; Kenneth Muir, *Introduction to Elizabethan Literature*, p. 30.

more difficult circumstances than did Spenser.¹⁰⁹ 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.¹¹⁰ 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."¹¹¹ Thus, a duality similar to that which occurs 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.¹¹²

What is known about the composition of Books IV-VI also 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 created: Book VI would simply be unsuitable to follow Book III.¹¹³ On the other hand, his predilection for symmetry and balance 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.¹¹⁴

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-à-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.¹¹⁵ 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 in a topical vein during the 1590's is amply evident from *Colin Clouts Come Home Again*, *Amoretti*, *Epithalamion*, and probably *Prothalamion*. It would be natural for him to use topical materials, the political allegory

¹⁰⁹ Parker, p. 228.

¹¹⁰ Murrin, p. 86.

¹¹¹ Grundy, p. 25.

¹¹² Neuse, p. 336; Berger, "Secret," pp. 44-45.

¹¹³ Bennett, p. 243.

¹¹⁴ Evans, *Spenser's Anatomy of Heroism*, pp. 18-19.

¹¹⁵ Spens, p. 99; Bennett, p. 155; Owen, p. 1096.

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.¹¹⁶ 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; that he, thus, intended *The Faerie Queene* to 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, his political commentary is not designed to please those influential in court circles in 1596; in fact, it may have been dangerous to him.¹¹⁷ 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.¹¹⁸ Spenser appears to be almost flaunting his approval of Raleigh through the figure of Timias, although Raleigh was by that time disgraced and in retirement.¹¹⁹ Poetic reference to court business was permitted by Elizabeth I, and perhaps even encouraged as a useful political device, if it did not get out of hand.¹²⁰ 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, for as long as he stayed on the good side of the *Queene*, 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 Book V and VI does not sound like a poet who intends to continue seeking courtly patronage for his writing.

Finally, there are two pieces of evidence that cannot be accommodated by this scenario. 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,

¹¹⁶ Bennett, pp. 204-205.

¹¹⁷ Spens, p. 113.

¹¹⁸ Murrin, p. 117; Nelson, p. 16.

¹¹⁹ Bennett, pp. 209-210.

¹²⁰ Hunter, p. 150.

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 prayses 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.¹²¹ The finality connoted by "compile" and the separateness suggested by "second worke," however, may indicate that he has changed his plan from twelve books (perhaps followed by twelve more) to six books, possibly followed by a six-book sequel.¹²² In this case, *Amoretti*, LXXX, does not necessarily controvert the hypothesis that Spenser intended *The Faerie Queene* of 1596 to be 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.¹²³

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 his relationship with Ponsonby, except that it was apparently satisfactory to both parties, as Ponsonby handled the publication of all of Spenser's works, save for the first edition of *The Shepheardes Calender*.¹²⁴ Ponsonby had published Sidney's works and was known, until his death in 1603 or 1604, as the leading London publisher.¹²⁵ His reliability, then, is hardly to be ques-

¹²¹ Nelson, p. 316, fn. 8.

¹²² Evans, *Spenser's Anatomy of Heroism*, pp. 237-238.

¹²³ Carpenter, p. 109.

¹²⁴ *DNB*, XVI, 87-88.

¹²⁵ *DNB*, XVI, 88. Alexander C. Judson, *The Life of Edmund Spenser*, in *The Works of Edmund Spenser: A Variorum Edition*, VIII, 140.

tioned. It is, however, known that many publishers, including reliable and reputable ones, edited and added to works for their own purposes.¹²⁶ Ponsonby himself had thoroughly edited Sidney's *Arcadia*, and Spenser's *Complaints* may have been published on Ponsonby's initiative rather than Spenser's.¹²⁷

Alexander Judson, the *Variorum* biographer, thinks that Spenser personally supervised the printing of the 1596 edition of *The Faerie Queene*, and there is evidence to show that the poem was revised while in press.¹²⁸ 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 two arguments in favor of this hypothesis are, however, solid. The six existing books are complete as an epic. *The Faerie Queene* is serious, accomplished, inclusive, artistically controlled, and choric. What is known of Spenser's career reinforces the import of Book VI, objectifying in Spenser's life the contending elements of satisfaction and pessimism, the sense of achievement in the six finished books, of discouragement over the prospects for adding to them. On the basis of these suggestions, it is reasonable to suppose that *The Faerie Queene* in the present six books is a complete poem, and that Spenser intended it so in 1596.

¹²⁶ Evelyn May Albright, *Dramatic Publication in England, 1580-1640*, p. 372.

¹²⁷ *DNB*, XVI, 88; Frank A. Mumby, *The Romance of Bookselling*, p. 96. Judson thinks that Spenser initiated and guided the *Complaints* publication. However, Judson 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 *Epithalamion* (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 evidence.

¹²⁸ Judson, pp. 179-180; Bennett, pp. 204-205.

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