

# The Prospect of Imagination: Spenser and the Limits of Poetry<sup>1</sup>

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## I

ONE might do worse than consider the course of Spenser's poetry from the prospect of Mount Acidale. For, turning a corner in Book VI canto ix of the *Faerie Queene*, we come suddenly on what we might have thought to be a vanished world, a ghost out of Spenser's past career, the pastoral landscape of the *Shepherd's Calendar*. This vision solidifies and is gradually transformed as we approach Acidale; one has the sense that the poet's whole career is being evoked, reviewed, revalued, as if he sees it truly in perspective for the first time. And yet when we approach Acidale we are not guided by Spenser but by the nominal hero of Courtesy, Sir Calidore, who knows nothing of all this. If there is something deeply involved with the personal experience of Edmund Spenser in the pastoral interlude, and if this something makes the poet abandon the heroic quest he has pursued through six books of the *Faerie Queene*, it is nevertheless arrived at only through that long pursuit. The return to the inner life of the poet is reached via the arduous quests of those heroes whom the poet has created and to whom he has given himself for so many years.

The facts of the pastoral episode are familiar. We remember how Calidore is diverted, falls in love with Pastorella, plays shepherd, and one day while roaming in the wood comes suddenly on Mount Acidale. At that very moment our old friend Colin Clout, who has been piping away since 1579 at least, is having a vision: "An hundred naked maidens lilly white,/All raunged in a ring, and dauncing in delight," and within this the three Graces circling around a central maiden identified by Colin in an ambiguous manner. As soon as Calidore appears in view, "They vanisht all away

<sup>1</sup>This is a revised and amplified version of a paper read before the Spenser Group of the English Institute in New York, September, 1959. I should like to thank Mr. Richard B. Young, Mr. Eugene M. Waith, and Mr. Hugh Maclean for their sympathetic and acute criticism, which led me to make a number of changes.

out of his sight,/And cleane were gone . . ./All save the shepherd,  
 who for fell despight/Of that displeasure, broke his bag-pipe  
 quight,/And made great mone for that unhappy turne." Calidore  
 apologizes, his pains are rewarded by a gloss on the vision, and for  
 a time, ravished by all this humanism, he wants to stay in Colin's  
 school. But his love for Pastorella finally draws him away, and we  
 hear no more of Mt. Acidale.<sup>2</sup>

The problems posed by this scene have often been remarked. It is a digression from a digression. It is unrelated to the main quest, has no effect on it, does not noticeably alter the hero after he leaves Colin. In addition to this, the poet goes out of his way to make us aware of its irrelevance. J. C. Maxwell has shown how, by rationalizing Calidore's truancy, by apologizing for both the hero and himself, the poet underlines what might otherwise have passed for a typical Spenserian meander.<sup>3</sup> Maxwell has also noted the casual treatment accorded the main quest, and its limited allegorical expressiveness: the form of the blatant beast is a radically simplified version of the evil it represents; furthermore, the beast does not symbolize an enemy within the hero: its "field of action is the world of society."<sup>4</sup>

He might have added that its field of action includes the poet Spenser. For these facts all point to a peculiar displacement in Book VI, a displacement which leads up to the vision on Acidale, and is consummated by it. The theme of courtesy and the importance of Calidore are challenged by another theme which has to do with poetry and poets. This is quite clearly implied by the reversal of roles on the mountain top. It is the shepherd who aspires, who finds felicity in high places, who is revealed as the true aristocrat. And it is Calidore who seeks the virtuous mean, life in the lowly dale, a Paris-like escape from the heroic world. The shepherd is a poet, and his song, like the entire pastoral interlude, is a pastiche from the works of Edmund Spenser.

The shift from hero to poet, the oddly reflexive and personal tone of the sixth book, provide me with my own field of action, and I should like to explore this field in four stages: first, I shall consider the reflexive tendency in itself, its causes and its effect on the sixth book; the second and third stages will concern the par-

<sup>2</sup>*Faerie Queene*, VI.ix.1-x.31.

<sup>3</sup>"The Truancy of Calidore," in *That Souveraine Light*, ed. W. R. Mueller and D. C. Allen, Baltimore, 1952, pp. 63-69.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 69.

ticular thematic form this tendency takes; the fourth will outline Spenser's final resolution. Simply stated, the theme centers on a conflict in the poet between the claims of the actual and of the imaginary. The second part will deal with the poet's response to the dangerous world about him, the third part will return to the pastoral retreat, the scene of the visionary climax, and the final section will move on to Arlo Hill.

## II

Readers coming to the sixth book from Book V have always been impressed by the change of tone and style—by the way in which the poet sharply turns from the dark image of contemporary life and withdraws to the more artificial yet freer landscape of romance. They have followed the lead given by Spenser in the proem to VI, and shared the relief with which he abandoned the narrative-and-moral rigors of V to wander “ravisht with rare thoughts delight” in the treasury of the Muses. But if they think of the *Faerie Queene* as an *epic*, and if they remember the common Renaissance epic criteria, they may well feel that a withdrawal which culminates in poetry at once pastoral and personal is a violation of the rules. For the epic genre demands an impersonal voice. The poet's private life is irrelevant; he locates himself entirely within the domain of public performance, assuming the mantle of Homer, Virgil, Dante—poets whose personalities are civilizations, whose lives are totally translated into their works.<sup>5</sup> Epic poetry and theory—especially as modified by the Italian concern with romance—make important points of contact with the Neoplatonist doctrine of soul developed by Ficino and Pico. The epic imagination is the universe, the soul is both center and circumference of

<sup>5</sup>E. M. W. Tillyard calls this the *choric* aspect of epic poetry. As early as Plato critical thought recognized—albeit in negative terms—the poet's claim to universal knowledge. The classical epic, a compendium of life, was symbolized in the shields of Achilles and Aeneas. The early humanists and later theorists of the Italian Renaissance reverted continually to the function of the poet as initiator and legislator of culture, as Court Moralist and Chronicler, dispenser of general wisdom, preserver of traditional lore. To this complex of ideas the theory of literary imitation lent assistance, but also—in rare cases, e.g. Castelvetro—raised problems of a more modern nature. Typical opinions are conveniently assembled in Allan H. Gilbert, *Literary Criticism: Plato to Dryden*, N. Y., 1940, and G. Gregory Smith, *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, London, 1904. In Gilbert: Elyot, pp. 233-5; Cinthio, pp. 264-5; Minturno, pp. 281-6; Castelvetro, pp. 325-6; Sidney, pp. 407-8; 435-6, 457-8; Tasso, pp. 487-94. In Smith: Webbe, I,232-6; Puttenham, II,3-10, 24, 40-44; Chapman, II,303.

the world it creates.<sup>6</sup> In the epic poet's sustained effort, work and soul evolve together, creativity and self-creativity are identical. But the self written into the poem is representative, not particular.<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, the heroic nature of the epic poem demands great and familiar themes which are to be sought among the significant moments of history or legend.<sup>8</sup> In all these respects the first book of the *Faerie Queene* is a model of epic propriety. The poet flings off his shepherd weeds and immerses himself in the bygone time, the traditional subject which, as he later said to Raleigh, was "made famous by many mens former workes." Spenser completely translates his imagination into the world of his subject matter, the former shepherd Colin into the former shepherd Redcross. The subsequent books depart from this fulfilled standard in two ways. First, there is a progression forward in time and outward, so to speak, in thematic amplitude: the *Faerie Queene* moves from antique

<sup>6</sup>See, for example, Ficino, *Theologica Platonica*, iii.2, which is entitled: *Anima est medius rerum gradus, atque omnes gradus tam superiores quam inferiores connectit in unum, dum ipsa & ad superos ascendit & descendit ad inferos*. See also, of course, Pico's *Oration*. The choric function of epic is grounded in a tendency which is inherent in the nature of man and cosmic in scope. The epic poem is its highest manifestation. Sidney, pp. 412-14; Tasso, pp. 470-1 and 500-1 (Gilbert). Chapman, II, 297 (Smith). The idea of the second Nature, the world of symbolic forms, assumes more importance as the principle of the relativity of the centric soul (first clearly articulated by Cusanus) is taken more seriously.

<sup>7</sup>See Castelvetro, pp. 325-6; Mazzoni, pp. 392-8; Sidney, pp. 417-25; Tasso, pp. 476-8 (all in Gilbert). The representative-particular issue is connected with the epistemological status of the world of Ideas, with the opposition between what may be called the Neo-platonic and the Puritan-medical theories of imagination, with the growing emphasis on subjective experience and genius. For definitive treatment of these problems the best discussions are still Ernst Cassirer's *Individuum und Kosmos in der Philosophie der Renaissance*, Leipzig, 1927, chapter 4, and Erwin Panofsky's *Idea*, Leipzig, 1924, chapters 3 and 4. With reference to Spenser, John Arthos has made some interesting comments of a general nature, but he has neither put them to the test of interpretation nor distinguished their applicability to different phases of Spenser's career: *On the Poetry of Spenser and the Form of Romances*, London, 1956, pp. 55, 65-6, 70, 75, 79.

<sup>8</sup>Spenser's Letter to Raleigh is a good instance of Renaissance opinion on this point. For other examples see, in Gilbert, Minturno (p. 278), Castelvetro (p. 321), Sidney (pp. 417-22), and the interesting qualifications offered by Cinthio (pp. 269-71). The historical requirement, arising from the classical (and Teutonic) ideals of *areté* and heroic action, is related to the didactic and eulogistic functions of the epic. But in the Renaissance, with its greater historical consciousness, the requirement becomes pseudo-historical—in reality its purposes are political, or apologetic, or metaphoric, or metaphysical. Dante's view of the relation between history and poetry provides the obvious medieval contrast.

forms and subjects to modern times, from individual to social and cosmic problems. Second, the narrative concerns become less objective, more reflective in focus until finally, at the end of the *Mutabilitie Cantos*, the poetic world vanishes and only the poet remains. At the same time, the successive books of the *Faerie Queene* grow increasingly tenuous and inconclusive. It seems that the frailty of the first hero, who is closest to Everyman, gradually rubs off on the poet as he pursues his own quest, and as this quest leads him back to his own world, to his own problems.

Bound up in this development is a growing loss of faith in history and historical process, a growing failure to see any pattern in God's creation. The poet cannot find the traditional and expected patterns of order in the chaotic world that surrounds him. The Britain of the first three books is distanced and generalized in the glass of legendary chronicle. If it is a symbol of the actual, the historical, as opposed to the imagination's Faery, it is still pre-eminently *symbolic*. In Book I history is given its most general symbolic form, that of apocalypse. In Books II and III we confront the bloody chronicle of British succession; Britomart's history comes closer to the present than Arthur's, and momentarily breaks through the fiction when Merlin sees the "ghastly spectacle" of the present time and says, "But yet the end is not." In the second installment we do not see the British forest for the trees, the contemporary and the topical press with greater insistence into the poem. The ghastly spectacle is actualized in the political disorder of Book V, and in the treacherous social atmosphere of VI.

The heroic material of the first two books, and in part the third, is unified by the long epic look into a bygone time; at the same time, the complicated psychological allegory brings it vividly to life. We see there a comprehensive acceptance of the traditional world order in no way questioned by the subject matter—a belief in the books of nature and history, in a universe whose mutable forms embody and symbolize an order more permanent, more real, than itself. In the first book it is the hermit Contemplation who reveals the ultimate vision on the mountain top. The vision is ancient and familiar; its knowledge is the possession of the ages and its promise is divulged to all members of the race. The apocalyptic promise, the final stripping-away, is the end of time, accomplished through the process of history.

Loss of faith in historical process leads Spenser to a new dependence on poetic and imaginative process. Because the antique vision,

the wisdom of the elders, fails him, he has to seek for the sources of moral vision and order within himself. The change may be seen to reflect in miniature the transition from a medieval and High Renaissance view in which the perceived cosmos is empirically and symbolically valid—from this to the later Neoplatonist view more firmly rooted in what Mannerist art critics called the *disegno interno*. So the hermit on the hill of Contemplation is replaced by the visionary poet on Mt. Acidale. The vision is no longer corporate, but uniquely personal; it transfigures all the themes of one man's imagination. It reveals precisely what nature has denied to Colin, the fulfillment of his love. Nature is not the source but the recipient of this grace. The vision, directly inspired from above, radiates out from the mind's center in the expressive forms of poetry, the dance of graces and choir of muses, ultimately the new symbolic forms of Nature's pageant.

This tendency toward a reflexive viewpoint makes itself felt in the proem to Book IV with two new notes which had not been heard in the first installment: there is an allusion to the poet's difficulties with censors; and implied in this is a new sense of the poem as a poem, a fiction produced under circumstances influenced by the poet's social and political environment. A minor sign of this appears in the fact that most of the Ariostan transitions<sup>9</sup> are to be found in the last three books. When the poet remarks that the canto is over, that he is tired, that he cannot get all his material into this particular unit, we are reminded that he is in the process of writing what we read. The problems of narrative composition, the difficulties of the artist as a citizen and subject, the danger of giving oneself too completely to the Muses—these argue a different approach to the relations of the imaginary and the actual from that apparent in the first three books. There, the problem was, how to portray the real in the forms of imagination—how, for example, to do justice to the Queen, his exemplar and source of inspiration.

But in the last three books the problem is altered by the fact that Faery comes into sharp conflict with the demands of the actual world. The fragmented and chaotic appearance of the present challenges the antique vision of order. The underlying assumptions of Book IV make this clear: the evil in the world is so radical that only a god or godlike man can cope with it; wicked time, pain,

<sup>9</sup>Documented by Allan H. Gilbert in *PMLA*, 34 (1919), 225-32.

death are man's inheritance, given by fate and fortune.<sup>10</sup> Life is determined from below by the Terrible Mothers in the Abyss of Chaos.<sup>11</sup> To find happiness one must dream up the life one wants—create a substitute nature by magic, or by art as a form of magic.<sup>12</sup> In the beginning of IV, the perspective on history is taken from the standpoint of discord—Thebes, Troy, Rome, Nimrod, and Alexander are consigned to the house of Ate. History does not reveal progress, or reason, or a divine plan; only the relics of decay, fallen civilizations, time and elde.<sup>13</sup>

The problem that faces Spenser is stated in the proem to V: how to re-form poetically the corrupt spectacle of modern life in the ideal images of antiquity. The poet sees that the world around him is out of joint, and he feels that if he would discharge his obligation as a man and citizen he must try to set it right. Since the actuality perceived offers no hints of order, no models of the reality desired, the poetic mind must confer upon the world its own mythic forms. Spenser's antique forms are those which he has created in his great poem. The life of his imagination is compacted into the lives of Artegall, Britomart and the other creatures of Faery. They have their own problems and passions and destinies, they impose their own claims on their creator. Although they are make-believe—or precisely *because* they are make-believe—they are more real to the poet than any of the fragmented forms he sees in the world outside his mind. And so, if he is going to make his creatures express that very different world, he will have to jeopardize their independence. Justice, as he remarks in the tenth canto, "Oft spilles the principall, to save the part." And the same holds

<sup>10</sup>IV.ii.1-2, iii.1-2.

<sup>11</sup>IV.ii.47-52.

<sup>12</sup>This is the real point of the legend of Cambel and Triamond, with its easy resolutions, its escape to complete fantasy and wish fulfillment, its ever-after happiness produced by a drop of nepenthe administered by Cambina *ex machina*. Agape, Canacee and Cambina are all adept at magic. Particular acts of poetic exorcism appear at ii.53 and iii.3. In the first, the Fates immediately accede to Agape's wish after loud proclamations of their irrevocable natures; in the second, the poet moves quickly from mortal pain to the three *-mond* brothers who, while they lived, "none did ever see/More happie creatures . . . / Nor more ennobled for their courtesie,/ . . . Ne more renowned for their chevalrie." Spenser presents the episode as pure romantic abracadabra, beginning in rape and violence, moving through the biggest, longest and best of all possible combats to the expected end: "In perfect love, devoide of hatefull strife/ . . . all alike did love, and loved were,/That since their days such lovers were not found elsewhere" (iii.52).

<sup>13</sup>IV.i.19-30.

true for an allegory of justice: the *principall* is the concrete world of adventure, the *part* the allegorical or exemplary meaning. But this is not merely a problem facing the poet: he makes it his theme—no doubt, if Mrs. Bennett's chronology is right,<sup>14</sup> his revision of V was governed by this reflexive awareness. He shows the body of the poem always threatened with the fate of Munera, the Lady Meed figure in Canto ii. Munera has fair locks and a slender waist, but she also has gold hands and silver feet. Talus nails up her symbolic extremities and throws the rest of her in the river. Though Artegal is momentarily moved by her femininity, he does not interfere. The allegory of justice requires that when a particular episode is over, its apposite meaning be nailed up on the wall, and its remaining details discarded.

The subject of Book V is reflected in its style, which reveals two opposed stances of the imagination: one fixed on its interior world, the other directed outward. In the characters, a tension is produced between their status as persons and as personifications. For in terms of Faery and the chivalric idiom, the narrative problems are personal rather than political. What is a social or national force in political allegory, is a psychological, natural or cosmic force in the personal story. This is clearly apparent in the double nature of the Isis episode: superficially presented as an allegory of justice and a vision of Britomart's royal destiny, it is basically an allegory of passion; it catches up the erotic psychology of Books III and IV in the new symbolic context. Isis is a sublimated Venus, her priests are sublimated attendants of Cybele, the crocodile Osiris is a sublimated Typhon.<sup>15</sup> The *askesis* points to the next five cantos, which will focus more rigorously on topical issues.

The Isis episode in fact signifies the approaching end of another truancy. For Artegal's long adventure with Radegund, articulated by conventional romance motifs, amounts to a defection by the poet. In these cantos, Spenser clearly suggests possible connections to the allegory of justice and then leaves them unexplored, as if to remind us that he is straying from the subject. Like the hero, the poet is not a good justicer unless he sacrifices the meander in Faery which is *his* love, the most precious part of his emotional life. The demands of justice, forcing a distinction between the

<sup>14</sup>Josephine Waters Bennett, *The Evolution of the "Faerie Queene,"* Chicago, 1942.

<sup>15</sup>V.vii.3-11. The passage recalls and reforms the Temple of Venus, IV.x.37-43. See the Variorum Spenser, *F.Q. V* (Baltimore, 1936), for Spenser's departures from the classical tradition in this episode.

private person and the public individual, also split the poetic imagination down the middle. Furthermore, he seems to recognize that the contemporary world, so much in need of justice, cannot be set right by a poet who sticks a pin in his mythic image; the work to be done wants a politician.

Some such awareness seems to account for the growing flatness of allegorical resolutions toward the end of V. Spenser achieves a *poetic* resolution by shifting his attention to the personal symbolism more appropriate to chivalry. The last two cantos focus on the shield as an emblem of one's name, therefore as a means of defense against slander. "Why," Artegal asks Burbon, "have you thrown away your shield, 'Your honours stile'?"—

That is the greatest shame and foulest scorne,  
Which unto any knight behappen may  
To loose the badge, that should his deedes display.

A good part of Artegal's fight with Grantorto involves a struggle over the hero's shield, and the theme is tacked down when Envy, Detraction, and the blatant beast appear on the scene. Spenser reveals that he can deal with the two opposed demands on poetry by using chivalry to dramatize the problems of social self-preservation. But this means that the chivalric idiom undergoes a radical change. In the earlier books honor and fame were part of the traditional baggage. The hero's quest concerned his own ethos, his self-development; in that remote atmosphere, the quest and its symbolism were strictly isolated from the workaday world. The knight traditionally does not mingle with churls; he cannot be seriously hurt by anything they say or do because his life is lived on a much higher plane. But in Book V the "raskall many" have got into the act. The chivalric world is no longer an autonomous realm, no longer an idealized image unconditioned by the social and political realities of everyday.

Book VI should be understood as the logical result of these developments. It is at once an attempt to cope with justice at the personal and social levels, and to give freer play to the stylistic reflexes of the poet's imagination. In accordance with these needs, the chivalric idiom must be more emblematic, the view of actuality more oblique. To move from justice to courtesy means to turn away from the direct and rigorous moral confrontation of V toward the more mannered and esthetic perspective of VI. This accords with one of the compositional rhythms of the *Faerie Queene*: Books I,

III, and V are primarily British books because they are, in different ways, approaches to the real or the actual—as theological, as natural, as social. But II, IV, and VI seem to involve corresponding withdrawals into Faerie. Book V presents the decay of antique norms, and the threatened subjection of Spenser's antique forms, before the darkness of the present. VI retreats from the plains, mountains and rocky coast of V into the rich wood of Faerie forms and motifs.

Space does not allow a close inquiry into the effects of the transition on the sixth book. But a brief listing of its main features may suggest something of its quality. There is, for example, a deliberate casualness in Spenser's treatment of narrative and character. After the first canto almost every episode is left unresolved. Either the poet breaks off an incident promising further installments which never materialize;<sup>16</sup> or he presents a situation whose very nature is inconclusive, as in the case of Mirabella;<sup>17</sup> or he conclusively ends an episode before our narrative expectations have been fulfilled, as with Priscilla, Serena, and Pastorella.<sup>18</sup> This effect is impressed on us by the heavily stressed transitions from one story to another.<sup>19</sup> At times he introduces details and motifs of romance which are left undeveloped, and made to flaunt their irrelevance, as in the story told by Matilda to Calepine.<sup>20</sup>

The characters are all flat and typical, and it is often hard to keep them straight. This is made worse by a similarity in names and situations: the same *kinds* of situation recur again and again, and the poet merely substitutes one set of figures for another. There is, however, a pattern in the substitutions, for the second group is always worse or more ineffective than the first—we move from

<sup>16</sup>Thus we are left in the air about the future of Tristram, the Salvage and Matilda's child (ii.40, v.1-2, iv.38).

<sup>17</sup>VI.viii.17-18, 22, 29-30.

<sup>18</sup>At iii.18-19 Calidore leaves Priscilla with her father, and we never find out whether or not she is reunited with her lover Aladine, though this is the main point of the episode. Similarly, the fate of Calidore and Pastorella is ignored (xii.22), though a reader might divine it without the help of the gods. Nevertheless, the lack of resolution is being emphasized in this part of the poem: Calidore fails to resolve the blatant beast, and at the end the poet himself is in trouble. But perhaps the most flagrant example of this motif comes at the end of Canto viii, when Spenser abandons Calepine in the dark with the naked Serena, who nervously waits for daylight to "discover bad and good."

<sup>19</sup>See ii.40, iv.17, v.11, vi.17, vii.27, viii.4, 31, 51, ix.1, 46, x.1-3, xi.24, xii.1-2, 14, 22.

<sup>20</sup>iv.29-33.

Crudor to Turpine, from Calidore to Calepine, from the hermit to Melibee, from the noble savage to the cannibals to the bandits. As a result, we are aware of a progressive flawing in the romance world. Related to this pattern are the wounds inflicted by the blatant beast, which grow steadily worse and do not respond to physical treatment.<sup>21</sup> Physical action, in general, is played down. The problem posed by courtesy and slander pertain to the sting infixed in the name, not in the body. The physical action demanded by the chivalric idiom is revealed as inadequate—in both its narrative and its symbolic functions.

Though variety is stressed by the transitions and large number of episodes, the poet continually returns to a small number of motifs. There are the motifs of the nursery,<sup>22</sup> the gifts of nature,<sup>23</sup> the foundling;<sup>24</sup> the motif of withdrawal-and-return, or of retirement;<sup>25</sup> the motif of primitivism, related to the nursery theme and diversely embodied in the savage, the cannibals, and the shepherds. There is the motif of the center and the ring which appears in three progressively higher and more symbolic stages: Serena at the raised altar surrounded by cannibals; Pastorella on a hill surrounded by swains; and the unnamed figure on Mt. Acidale surrounded by dancing graces. The most frequently repeated motif is, significantly enough, that of a character surprised in a moment of diversion.<sup>26</sup> Such moments are all perfectly natural or necessary—love, sleep, hunting, or merely a walk in the woods. These are the small but precious joys of everyday life, and they are not the ordinary subjects of the epic world. Yet to these moments the poet adds many touches which might be called homely or realistic—the care of babies, the adjustment of harness and pasturing of mounts, the gathering of food, and other agricultural details.<sup>27</sup> This realistic

<sup>21</sup>iv.16, v.31, 39, vi.1-15.

<sup>22</sup>Pr.3-4, 7, i.1, iv.11-14, v.1-2, vi.9-12, ix.20, x.22-3. By *nursery* is meant simply the concept of *source* in its various adumbrations. See below, p. 110.

<sup>23</sup>Examples: i.2, ii.2, 24, iii.1-2, v.1-2, vii.1-2, 28, viii.1-2, ix.20-23.

<sup>24</sup>iv.32-38, ix.14, xii.3-9. One may perhaps add the Salvage, though he is not definitely stated to be a foundling (v.1-2). And Colin's beloved, as we shall see, is a kind of metaphoric foundling (x.25).

<sup>25</sup>ii.27-30, v.11-23, v.36-vi.4, ix.24-31, x.2-3, 9, 22, xii.19-21.

<sup>26</sup>ii.16-18, iii.20-21, 23-24, iv.17, v.10-11, 15, vii.6-7, 18-19, viii.34, x.18, 34, 39, xii.40-41.

<sup>27</sup>iv.14, 23-24, 38, v.10-11, 38, vi.19, vii.24, viii.35, ix.1-xii.4 *passim*. Images of this sort are also found in comparisons applied to Calidore's encounters in the first and last cantos (i.21, 24, 35, 37, xii.30); these are comic breaches of decorum and they diminish our sense of the seriousness of the poem's physical action.

texture keeps the actual world always before us, even in the heart of Faerie. Precisely here, where we feel most secure, where we momentarily turn our backs on the outside world, the danger is greatest. For the beast of slander is no chivalric figure. The hermit, who knows this, gives hard counsel to Timias and Serena: "Abstain from pleasure, restrain your will, subdue desire, bridle loose delight, use scantied diet, forbear your fill, shun secrecy and talk in open sight."<sup>28</sup> In other words, "Keep your eye always on the treacherous world around you; don't withdraw, don't relax, for a single moment." And this, as we know, is the advice to be disregarded in the figure of Colin.

The total result of these features is curiously ambivalent. No book of the *Faerie Queene* is so completely dominated by the romance atmosphere. Where Book V alludes to topical issues, Book VI, as scholars have amply shown, alludes to literary forms and conventions. The poet is bemused, a little bewildered, by the rich variety of Faerie, its many paths, the lure of so many joys. He is like all the lovers in the woods, or Timias with Belpheobe, or Arthur disarmed by his dream of Gloriana. Book VI is his Acidale, where he finds freedom from care. But at the same time the other part of his imagination realizes what is happening. The contrivance of the narrative, the inconclusiveness of the adventures, the gradual flawing of the romance world, the failure of chivalric action—these suggest that the poet is no longer certain about the ability of his imaginary forms to deal with the facts of social existence. The book, like the emblem of the blatant beast, is organized as a kind of flattening or distorted mirror; we feel everywhere the presence of the actual evil which the simplified reflecting surface so patently excludes.

### III

To see what this evil is, and why it affects the poet in this way, we have to look outside the sixth book. This brings us to our second main problem, namely, what claims does the actual world make on the imagination? If it is true that life needs poetry, why will it never give a man a breathing space so that he can turn inward and cultivate the muses? Spenser himself poses the issue in what seems to be an early poem, *Mother Hubberds Tale*, in which Calidore and the blatant beast are dimly prefigured, sets the portrait

<sup>28</sup>vi.7, 14.

of the ideal courtier over against the fox and ape. In the courtier, esthetic activities have a moral and practical function: he banishes idleness with "faire exercise/ Of knightly feates," revives his spirit, when weary, with "Musicks skill . . ./ Or els with Loves, and Ladies gentle sports." Last but not least, "His minde unto the Muses he withdraws . . . Delights of life and ornaments of light." The muses inform him of "Natures workes, of heavens continuall course,/ Of forreine lands, of people different,/ Of kingdomes change, of divers government . . ." <sup>29</sup> In other words, the muses reveal the world which has been ordered by the work of *mind*. Presiding over what Kant later called categories, and Cassirer symbolic forms, they are the constitutive sources of the cosmos we perceive. And since they give us knowledge *about* the world, they not only keep us in order; we need them to stay alive. The enemy in *Tears of the Muses* is ignorance, and in *Mother Hubberds Tale* the perfect dupe is a priest who vilifies learning.

Through style and art, the courtier *manifests* his virtue. To use Ficino's metaphor, beauty is the blossom of his goodness, the appearance that unfolds and displays his reality.<sup>30</sup> But fox and ape have no reality, no interior form at all. The deliberately inconsistent portrayal, oscillating rapidly between literal and symbolic narrative, reveals them as protean figures whose reality *consists* in their manifold appearances. They are impelled to knavery by their privation. They dislike, Spenser tells us, "their evill/ And hard estate." "Paine and inward agonie" give them over to the sweat of getting and spending and—miserable have-nots—they flicker without respite from form to borrowed form. Their emptiness, the source of pain, makes them parasites on the reality of others: to mask, to impersonate, is the condition of their survival.

By a meaningful coincidence, Ortega y Gasset has recently described *literal* apes in terms similar to those presented by the poem. They are, he says, "constantly on the alert, perpetually uneasy, looking and listening for all the signals that reach them from their surroundings." The ape "does not rule its own life, it does not live from *itself*," but it is "pushed and pulled and tyrannized over" by "what is going on outside it . . . what is other than itself." Man too is susceptible to this condition, but he can "from time to time, suspend his direct concern with things, . . . turn his back on the world and take his stand inside himself." Seizing, like Spenser's

<sup>29</sup>MHT 735-67.

<sup>30</sup>Cf. *De Amore* V.1.

courtier, "every moment of rest which things allow him, he uses it to enter into himself and form ideas about" the world.<sup>31</sup>

In Spenser we find two kinds of inward turning: not only the withdrawal described above, but also a vicious kind which precedes and causes the treadmill career of fox and ape. They are not themselves the source of privation and inward pain, since they belong to our nature: the fox is mental cunning, the ape physical cunning. They represent whatever in us derives from sheer behavior, survival-instinct, animal reflex. But because they are no longer mere animal their reflexes—their legerdemain—must be trained and re-oriented according to the needs of spirit. And this is only achieved through culture, in the ancient sense of the word—through *paideia*, and *mousiké*. To give in to fox and ape is to deny that unique inwardness of person, the source of name and style, which is *our* only reality, and theirs.

The ignorance that lets them flourish derives from the surrender of will revealed in Lucifera's pageant as idleness—traditionally a "sorrowing about spiritual matters," an escape from the arduous. When the sleep of spirit settles us back into our archaic nature, it releases us to the obsessive fascination with mere things. So, the dialectic of the vices moves from the indolent self-absorption of Idleness and Gluttony to the spastic other-directedness of Avarice, Envy and Wrath. The first three books are chiefly pre-occupied with Lucifera's first four evil counselors, idleness, gluttony, lechery and avarice; the second part of the *Faerie Queene* focuses in various ways on the remaining vices.

This dialectic, which begins in absence of spirit and moves through privation to inward pain, derives from the Christian metaphysic of evil as nonbeing. Demons, we know, are the archetypal have-nots, and their restlessness is proverbial. Driven by the hunger of existence, parasites on the human will, they can neither rest in themselves nor ease the pain of being themselves. It is a condition which, in the ethical and psychological domain, produces that despair later analyzed by Kierkegaard as the sickness unto death: "To despair over oneself, in despair to will to be rid of oneself, is the formula for all despair." And the formula—as Janet Spens has shown<sup>32</sup>—recurs again and again throughout Spenser's poetry, not merely in the ninth canto of Book I. We see it in fox

<sup>31</sup>"The Self and the Other," in *The Dehumanization of Art*, Garden City, 1956, pp. 165-6, 169.

<sup>32</sup>Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, London, 1934, pp. 122ff.

and ape; in Arachne and Aragnoll; in Lucifera whose pride is founded on the despair of being herself, daughter of Pluto and Proserpina; in Duessa and Archimago, Occasion and Furor, Braggadocchio and Malbecco. The chaos beneath the garden of Adonis hungers perpetually after the visible form which gives it shape and life, and a similar desire is dramatized in the lust of Proteus for Florimell.

The character of the have-not changes in the second part of the *Faerie Queene*, and the change is essentially from false images to false words—from Archimago, Acrasia and Busirane to Ate, Slander and the blatant beast. This accords with a change of emphasis from the problems of false and true seeing, appearance and reality, to the problems of communion, communication and encounter. It accords also with the increasingly reflexive character of the poem, as the enemies of man come to be those which particularly threaten poetry and poets. The mordant music of the blatant beast, its verbal violence, make it the culminating social form of all previous evils. Its uncontrollable and frenzied malice is aimed at the organized diversity of social order. As an emblem, it recalls the many tongues of Babel, and perhaps the “multitudinous, many-headed monster” described by Socrates in Book IX of the *Republic*—the gain-lovers in state and soul. Northrop Frye has associated it with the fury of the mob in search of a victim to rend,<sup>33</sup> and this points to its connection with the “raskall many” of Book V. In the desire to find fault, the envy at others’ success, the urge to calumny, Lucifera’s despair at being herself extends even to Book VI. And because the enemy has penetrated to the domain of words and names, thought and culture, the field of battle becomes, once again, the soul—but now it is the soul of the poet rather than that of the hero. The real conflict, as we have seen, is embodied in the style of the sixth book more than in its subject matter.

This partly accounts for the change of emphasis from Calidore to Colin. Calidore, from the beginning, is portrayed in a curiously ambivalent manner. He represents a standard of behavior desirable and necessary in actual life, yet he is drawn in two dimensions. Unlike Artegal, British-born and Elfin-trained, he is not split down the middle; he has no life and love apart from the Faerie quest until the pastoral interlude. Spenser’s distinction between Elfin and Briton temperaments is concisely stated in the opening stanzas

<sup>33</sup>*Anatomy of Criticism*, Princeton, 1957, p. 149.

of Canto ii: some knights have it all by nature, others have to work hard to get it. And though "everie thing, to which one is inclin'd,/ Doth best become, and greatest grace doth gaine," still, "praise likewise deserve good thewes, enforst with paine." The Briton needs, and is aware that he needs, further improvement or fulfillment. Only part of his consciousness is fixed on Faerie; his future, so far as the imaginary world is concerned, is open-ended.

But the Elfin hero—Guyon or Calidore—is locked in Faerie by his very perfection. The courtier's *sprezzatura* cannot be actualized by training unless it is given by birth. And precisely because of his birth, because existence has been conferred upon him by the poet's mind in search of a pattern, the Elfin hero is self-satisfied. He need not—he cannot—take a stand within himself. When Spenser allows us any detailed observation of Calidore's behavior, as in the pastoral interlude, it is only to make us feel the hero's self-interest, a certain painful note of condescension, and also a hint of something else—Calidore is quicker of foot than he is of thought. If these are subdued tones, if Calidore is for the most part an ideal figure consigned to Faerie, one still feels that Spenser has dimly adumbrated his actual experience of courtiers. He no longer expects to find heroes in the world around him; there is no one left to understand and protect either poets or poetry. Sidney is dead. The ideal courtier of *Mother Hubberds Tale* has divided into Calidore and Colin.

Calidore's gift is a first, not a second grace—reflex, not revelation. Effortless and innocent, with splendor inborn, with his consciousness fixed on the unreal admiring world that surrounds him, he can receive only the briefest glimpse into the mysteries of the muses, the inward life. Spenser now sees that it is partly the aristocrat's freedom from the lure of the muses that fits him to protect society from the blatant beast. When Calidore is diverted, first by the Arcadian muse, then by the muse of Colin, the beast ramps into the present. And this necessary limitation of the courtier's imagination becomes another facet of that present whose darkness, openly imaged in V, presses continually on the edges of VI. The evil and malice and disorder are manifestations of a society which ignores or rejects culture, the work of the human mind and the source of concord.

Thus, if it is paradoxical it is also perfectly logical that Spenser's image of the social defender, and of his own concern with the outside world, be Elfin. It is part of his general retreat into Faerie

and into himself, part of his growing disillusionment with the actual. Artegal is not only a more realistic but a better champion than Calidore. A sign of this is that he, like the poet, suffers personally for his public effort. Calidore, on the contrary, is sent back to playland with the most triumphant of all Elfin homecomings, a ridiculous tickertape parade through Faerie—a parade ironically exposed a moment later when the beast threatens the poet. The limited ideal courtier is a copy or analogue of his actual model in Spenser's contemporary world. Since neither poetry nor society can avail itself of a real protector in the political domain, the burden falls on the poet. But this means—given the current state of affairs—not only that he would have to do it himself, but that he would have to spend all his time doing it, perpetually vigilant, shunning secrecy and talking in open sight. And one feels that Spenser considers this a wasted effort. To have Calidore muzzle the beast is, again, to stick a pin in an image; this is the best a poet can do in so dark a world, and it is not enough. Therefore the heroic spotlight moves from Artegal through Calidore to Colin. The transition is fulfilled in that strange reversal which occurs on Mt. Acidale.

Colin's appearance in Faerie goes against the rules in so far as it introduces the lyric voice, the world of the minor poetry, into the epic landscape. The importance to a poet of genre theory has been lucidly described in Renwick's great study, especially where he treats of the manner in which the poet was to fuse the two virtues of literary imitation and personal expression.<sup>34</sup> This double ideal was not merely a criterion imposed upon Spenser: he made it the theme of most of his minor poems. Only if a man reduces himself to a poet, if he translates his soul completely into the imaginary world of epic, can he break loose from the limits of his personal situation. He is not simply a poet but also a citizen, a lover, a courtier or suitor. The great minor poems present Spenser as both poet and man, faced with the problem of establishing the correct decorum between the urge to make poems and the urge to do anything else: these are by no means congenial urges, and he is often hard pressed to make each serve, rather than hinder, the other.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>34</sup>Edmund Spenser, London, 1925, pp. 125ff.

<sup>35</sup>Colin Clouts Come Home Againe, *Prothalamion* and *Muiopotmos* embody different versions of this problem in its most sophisticated form, though it appears also in the *Shepherd's Calendar*, *Mother Hubberds Tale*, and the *Amoretti*. His poorer poems suffer not so much because the problem remains unsolved but because it is not dramatically presented as a problem. In perhaps his best short poem, the *Epithalamion*, it is presented and resolved.

By their very nature, the minor poems are poised between the brazen world and the golden. They deal with the difficulties imposed by life on a mortal who wants completely to transform the one world into the other. For this reason they provide a kind of running commentary, a set of footnotes and prefaces to the *Faerie Queene*. And their intrusion into the great poem brings the reflexive tendency to a penultimate climax, superseded only at the end of Nature's Calendar.

Colin's appearance in the *Shepherd's Calendar* is of momentous importance; and yet, like the whole of that poem, it is very curious. As the announcement of a new poetic personality, the poem comes relatively late, and no doubt many of its parts had been written separately, at different times. What Mrs. Bennett has so brilliantly revealed about Spenser's habits of composition seems to hold true for the *Calendar* as well as the *Faerie Queene*. And this means that with Spenser, as with so many poets, the true act of creation, the true expression of a distinct poetic personality, the true moment of *vision*, comes only in revision. "We had the experience," Eliot writes in *Dry Salvages*, "but missed the meaning,/ And approach to the meaning restores the experience/ In a different form." The poet's early fragments stem, as he well knows, from the mindless joys of Clarion ravished in the garden of conventional flowers. This phase, the pleasure of imitation and translation, yields the raw material of later poetic experience—a raw material which consists neither in nature nor in ideas, but in literary forms, delightful surfaces. And we know that Spenser is an especially good instance of what Ransom has called the poet nearly anonymous: we are not even sure that his earliest work is really his. In the *Theatre For Worldlings* the tradition and the individual poet blend indistinguishably.

The eclogues, which seem separately to be not more than exercises, are transformed by their inclusion in the *Calendar*. A. C. Hamilton has shown how the three kinds of eclogues present three different relations of poetry to life.<sup>36</sup> The recreative poems deal with poetry as an escape from care; "hi ho holiday" is their leitmotiv, and they treat life merely as an excuse for indulging in song. The plaintive eclogues are mainly about Colin, who was once a recreative shepherd but has been stopped by a love which breaks all pastoral rules, since it keeps him from poetry. Colin considers

<sup>36</sup>"The Argument of Spenser's *Shepherd's Calendar*," *ELH*, vol. 23 (1956), 171-83.

using his verse either for persuasion or for therapy, but in the end he gives it all up; the pastoral world dissolves before what purports to be a real emotion.

The moral eclogues are less about the problems of the great world than about the inadequacy of the artless to verbalize or reflect on these problems. By giving us a rollicking image of true rusticity Spenser shifts the subject of satire from matter to manner. He emphasizes the rudeness of rustic life, its lack of culture, its bondage to mere subsistence. In this way he dissipates its artificiality, which is the source of its symbolic power. His moral pastors have neither the time nor the inclination for poetry. They have not taken their stand within themselves, but cope with raw experience on its own terms. Their inadequacy grows through the *Calendar* until the last pastor, Diggon Davie, who can scarcely be understood, returns from the great world fleeced by fox and ape. The real conclusion of the *Calendar* is that neither the recreative nor the moral forms, as here given, will suffice for a poetry that would both create the image, and control the threat, of the actual world. The moral submits to fact, the recreative escapes from it.

The figure of Colin provides a way out of the dilemma, because Colin was moved first by the joy of poetry, then by a problem that went beyond the limits of his poetry. Though Spenser aligns himself with Colin, this is not yet a biographical identification—the muted echoes of personal life seem rather to be ways of confirming his choice, facing the reader in the right direction. For Colin is not a man but a disembodied poetic voice, the mask of convention and literary commonplace. If Spenser's *Calendar* shows a man in the process of becoming a poet, this is inverted in Colin's pastoral mirror, i.e., we see what happens to the pure-poet when human problems get in his way. It is not merely Rosalind, but Spenser, who drags the unwilling persona out of pastoral and tumbles it into life. Colin's existence is compacted of *topoi*, and through his voice, Spenser will exploit their possibilities. Behind this decision lies the awareness that the flat forms of which the *Calendar* is a grab-bag are—to use the Neoplatonist designation—hieroglyphs. Their very artifice is a guarantee that spirit had been here, had left its mark, and could be re-discovered. Spenser's meditation on these *topoi* will ultimately yield the archetypal ring of the graces.

Colin's career is a steady journey inward toward the center of Spenser's being. He is first a *persona* in the Greek sense of the word (*prosopon*)—an external mask, a set of fixed and familiar postures.

By Book VI he has become a Boethian *persona* and his manner expresses the inmost reality of a human soul. The dormant *seeds* of poetry have been planted in the soil of the poet's own experience. As in the Garden of Adonis, shapes do not flower unless they spring up out of the chaos of raw experience, of formless motion and aimless force. And on the other hand, the boar of winter, death and chaos can only be imprisoned by this mythmaking or form-producing action of the mind. We remember that Venus and Adonis first appeared in their *Ovidian* character on a lifeless tapestry; but in the garden they have come to express Spenser's own myth, they embody in momentary equipoise all the scattered and protean meanings of the third book.

Colin's inward journey can be briefly traced in his changing relation to Rosalind. The *Calendar* depicts a lass in the "neighbour town," the "Widowes daughter of the glenne" who is faithless and void of grace. She represents the actual world with which his poetry fails to cope, and so, interrupting his song, she remains outside him, unidealized, a country girl. But at the end of *Colin Clouts Come Home Again* we see a new balance between the woman outside the poem and his idealized figure. Rosalind's *otherness*, her *daunger*, drives him to turn within himself and recreate her "more refyned forme" in poetry. The concluding praise is a fusion of sexual love, spiritual love, and worship taken in part from the previous blazons of Cynthia, whose pastoral disguise conceals both Elizabeth and Gloriana. In this way the poem builds up a complex image of the Beloved that separates itself from her actual form, and yet depends on it.

Mt. Acidale is of course the final stage of Colin's journey. Significantly, this takes place in the epic world where there is nothing external to the poet's soul, no merely actual thing that has not been re-created in imaginary form. The world of the minor poetry has been moved lock, stock, and barrel into the center of Faerie. Colin, who is still pure-poet has (to borrow a phrase from Northrop Frye) released all fact into imagination. He has totally triumphed over otherness. But this involves a total triumph over love, for true love—as the *Epithalamion* shows—is inseparable from the otherness of the beloved. The supreme achievement of the *lover's* poetry is to transform the other from an object to a person, from an *It* to a *Thou*. He does this by turning away, taking his stand within, singing to himself alone; yet his aim is to create not merely the mirror of his own thought, but also the living image of a soul who asserts

her sovereign independence by holding herself apart, ingathered, even at the altar. In the *Epithalamion*, Colin and the learned Muses are servants of the lover; they cater the wedding.

But on Acidale, there is only the refined form that mirrors thought. At the center of the ring of graces is no single creature but a richly complicated knot of all the figures the poet has ever meditated on—Rosalind, Elizabeth, Amoret, Belphoebe, Florimell, Britomart, Venus, Psyche—

Who can aread, what creature mote she bee,  
Whether a creature, or a goddesse gracéd  
With heavenly gifts from heven first enracéd?  
But what so sure she was, she worthy was,  
To be the fourth with those three other placéd:  
Yet was she certes but a countrey lasse,

Yet she all other countrey lasses farre did passe. (VI.x.25)

Here, as in the rest of this superb passage, we can see how the poet's words turn on themselves and return, how they mark the rhythmic circling of his thought moving in measure, rapt in its dance around the center. At the center is the Beloved, *enchaced* by his thought, distilled from so much "tedious travell." He has not ever taken his eye off that first form, the simple country lass, but whoever she is in herself no longer matters. The form has been refined until the Beloved has become the Lover; has become the hieroglyph of Eros—not the *other*, but a vision or symbol or concept of whatever it is that draws us toward the other.

We come upon this place through a magical, a kind of Proustian, transformation. Calidore has been led out of chivalric Faery and back in time to the world of Spenser's earliest poetry. Suddenly, the blatant beast disappears. We are again in that innocent landscape, the scene of the first gift. We meet the recreative shepherds whose music has not stopped since the August singing match; we meet the stoic pastor Melibee who still counsels moral escapism, the sufficiency of mere nature; we meet Coridon whose rudeness makes him unfit for anything but the care of sheep; finally we meet Pastorella, in whose idyll is figured the aristocrat's dream—a life totally given to the simple and refined pleasures, far from the cares of court. This polyglot pastoral is the world of borrowed conventions which Spenser assembled in the *Calendar*, and now it is revived, to be understood for the first time.

Acidale is the farthest point of Calidore's journey away from his quest, but it is not simply the farthest back in time, rather it is the beginning and the end at once. It is an echo of Colin's song

to Eliza in the *April* eclogue, an echo so carefully detailed as to be an allusion. But *there*, it was simple ornament and praise; the mythical figures were given in their flattest form, so as to keep out any depth or particularity of implication. Not only was the actual queen more significant than Eliza; the meaning of the imaginary forms, excluded from the poem itself, remained inert in the gloss taken from dictionaries and handbooks.

The Acidalian vision and gloss comprehend much more. We may recall the revelation on the mountaintop in Book I, and the other in the Garden of Adonis; the hundred virgins in the Temple of Venus; the image of Amoret surrounded by her garland of virtues. We certainly recall the previous episodes in Book VI, the rings around Serena and Pastorella, the ring around Elizabeth mentioned in the poem. The vision is the solution and resolution of all the problems, all the motifs, suggested in earlier parts of the book: the aristocracy and foundling motifs; the nursery, withdrawal and retirement motifs; the motifs of love, of holiday and diversion, of being caught offguard, turning inward—all these are now revealed as symbols and dim prefigurations of Acidale.

In its form, the vision is Platonic and Plotinian. For it suggests that the soul is a foundling, an aristocrat long ignorant of its true source, its first nursery. The soul confuses its principle with its primitive beginnings, with something temporally prior and externally simpler, like savagery, or rusticity. The true beginning and principle is neither in time nor space but always vivid at the center, deep within the mind. Only by turning within, by self-creation, by tirelessly seeking and wooing and invoking the Muses, or eros, or whatever lies behind them all—only thus do we regain our longlost heritage. By some process akin to *anamnesis* we withdraw, we retire, we return to the nursery, we close the circle of beginnings and endings, we come finally to that first *Idea*, that pure grace which has always moved us.

The episode circles through three familiar emphases: First, the vision of delight, where the earliest recreation becomes the latest re-creation. Second, the plaintive moment in which the vision is interrupted, and Colin again breaks his pipe. Third, the moral emphasis when Colin converts the vision into an emblem. Here, he has replaced E.K.; this would have been unthinkable in the *Calendar*, where the amplitude of life and meaning was precisely what that first world of conventions excluded. But now Colin catches up the recreative and plaintive moments into the moral;

the three diverse modes of the *Calendar* are infolded into a single complex idea. Love, poetry, and morality converge—"Divine resemblance, beauty souveraine rare,/Firme chastity." All become eros, the latest gift and the earliest source. For it was eros that led him years ago to fall in love, and moved him to confront the fox and ape, and above all impelled him to play with words, to become a poet long before he could know *why* he was so inclined—eros was the true source of even that mindless joy.

The circle with its center is a geometrical form. That it should provide the vision with its basic structure is significant: it reminds us that when the poet returns from his dark wanderings through the chaos, the tangled growth or wreckage of Books IV and V—that when he returns to order, to a vision of the real, his point of contact is in the dynamism of thought itself. The vision is a symbolic form, a response of mind, whereas the visionary character of Book I was quite different, for what was perceived there was felt to be true, public, objective, affirmed through history, given by God. Now, in Book VI, what is felt as divine is not the vision itself so much as the sense of having been given—the sense of a richness and variety, a copious world of forms and meanings which the mind produces *as if* by its own reflex activity, but really by the grace of God. The divine, the real, are now sought for only in their transfigured forms, and they are found not in the transfiguration, but in the activity, the process of transfiguring. So the *Faerie Queene* swings on its axis from the objective reality of Chaucer's universe toward the symbolic form of Milton's.

Love, says Ficino, begins in beauty and ends in pleasure. The *beautiful* is the good, the divine otherness, made visible. *Pleasure* is what we feel when we come to rest in the beautiful.<sup>37</sup> But *love* is desire—the restless force, the divine energy that drives us within or draws us without, toward the beautiful. Desire brightens the glance, sways bodies to its music, and melts the dancers into the dance. Desire is energy, and the vision of eros is energy made manifest, the flowering circle great-rooted in its center. If the vision dissolves, desire will unfold it again on another mountaintop.

#### IV

But the force embodied in the *Mutabilitie Cantos* is not, as the title suggests, the simple form of the divine energy. If we recall

<sup>37</sup>*De Amore*, II.1-2.

the formless energy, the ceaseless flux, of Spenser's fox and ape; if further we recall the false withdrawal analyzed in Lucifera's pageant—the despair that begins in idleness or *accidia*; we may see in Mutability Spenser's final transformation of this evil which resists the action of divine energy. Spenser's portrayal of the destructive force is based on the traditional formulation best articulated by St. Paul:

we, when we were children, were in bondage to the elements of the world . . . .

But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?

(Gal. 4.3,9)

The turning, or withdrawal is from a true to a false image of actuality, and the *stoicheia* in question are the mingled elements of world and flesh, the unworked and chaotic fragments of given experience. A modern paraphrase of St. Paul will perhaps make the relationship clearer:

the thing man supposes he can control, whether it be pleasure or serious moral effort, becomes a power which controls him . . . . For by supposing that he can attain life from transitory things he makes himself dependent on them, thus becoming a victim of transitory reality.<sup>38</sup>

The humanist cast of Spenser's thought, with its emphasis on what man *can* do—on the powers of mind and the cultural reality they create—naturally renders the Pauline stricture less absolute. But the point is that such a withdrawal is not in fact radical enough: the soul does not disentangle itself from its impinging environment, no inward stand is taken, man has not shaken the tyranny of the reflex arc, has not sufficiently interpreted or evaluated the signals from transitory reality. In the character of Mutability, all the defective tendencies of the mind are personified.

Mutability is a character in search of a mythology, but she also represents a way of seeing—an impulse of mind whose epicurean drive is both cultural and cosmological: she would convert the Renaissance doubt about the spiritual sources of physical nature into a New Philosophy, would set the banner of the old classical materialism in a Neoplatonic heaven whose gods are outmoded figments of the mind. She embodies a chaotic force, similar to that

<sup>38</sup>Rudolf Bultmann, *Primitive Christianity*, N. Y., 1956, p. 192.

of the Adonis garden but now intellectualized and active in the human imagination; she wants to seize all form for herself and thereby reduce all traditional symbols to mere images of decaying elements:

Thus, all these fower (the which the ground-work bee  
 Of all the world, and of all living wights)  
 To thousand sorts of Change we subject see:  
 Yet are they chang'd (by other wondrous slights)  
 Into themselves, and lose their native might;  
 The Fire to Aire, and th'Ayre to Water sheere,  
 And Water into Earth: yet Water fights  
 With Fire, and Aire with Earth approaching neere:  
 Yet all are in one body, and as one appeare.

So, in them all raignes Mutabilitie;  
 How-ever these, that Gods themselves do call,  
 Of them doe claime the rule and sovereignty:  
 As, Vesta, of the fire aethereall;  
 Vulcan, of this, with us so usuall;  
 Ops, of the earth; and Juno of the Ayre;  
 Neptune, of Seas; and Nymphes, of Rivers all.  
 For, all those Rivers to me subject are:  
 And all the rest, which they usurp, be all my share.  
 (VII.vii.25-6)

Mutability gives a more "accurate" reflection of physical nature, shorn of illusion and without the distortions imposed by the myth-making habits of the mind.

To this verbal and discursive presentation of the positivist tendency Spenser opposes a *vision* of Nature which is hieratic and clearly mindmade. True nature in this poem is no longer the unworked actuality of experience but the energy and desire emanating from God, moving us to exercise our mutability (as Pico would have it) and to return to the Source. This energy is preeminently expressed in the soul of man, in the responses and works of mind as it converts its images—its incoming signals from the actual world—into symbols. So the months of the year are embodied concepts, each a tableau whose symbolic focus unites biological process, zodiacal or cosmic influence, and the emotive import of seasonal feeling, into a single, vividly concrete emblem: the forces of mutability are held fast in meaningful form, and even Nature is seen to be partly a dynamic construct of the muses.

The world of Mutability is a world of *stoicheia*, the mere things of transitory reality. The situation of Mutability involves at once a despairing surrender to this world and an attempt to make one-

self absolute (untransitory) in terms of it. We see here most profoundly the paradox of the negative withdrawal which had been barely hinted at in the images of fox and ape. But the continuity of Spenser's thought seems clear, and the *Mutabilitie Cantos* is another justification of the true inward stand, another triumph achieved through the arduous cultivation of the muses. Only this cultivation can contain the mind's mutability-impulse, its turning inward and downward, so to speak, in pursuit of the pleasure principle, its unconscious *nisus* towards death. If one objects to the Freudian echoes, one should remember that Freud was only reaffirming an ancient insight. Here, for example, is Leonardo's formulation of the death instinct which, even in Renaissance terms, expresses itself to consciousness as a longing for life or pleasure:

Behold now the hope and desire of going back to one's own country or returning to primal chaos, like that of the moth to the light, of the man who with perpetual longing always looks forward with joy to each new spring and each new summer, and to the new months and the new years, deeming that the things he longs for are too slow in coming; and who does not perceive that he is longing for his own destruction. But this longing is in its quintessence the spirit of the elements, which finding itself imprisoned within the life of the human body desires continually to return to its source.<sup>39</sup>

Leonardo's spirit of the elements is a kind of archaic id-energy, the force of mere-nature within the human psyche as well as around it. It is similar in its phenomenal aspects to man's unregenerate nature but stripped of all theological reference—one can see, however, in Leonardo's caricatures and grotesques, how this force ages, stretches, and distorts the features, how its lust threatens the inherent nobility of the human figure. If his is a more violent version than Spenser's, if he feels the death-oriented drive of the mutability-impulse in a more direct and primitive fashion, their two visions nevertheless have much in common.

This force of mere-nature gives birth to art and opposes it; art must constrain and inform it and hold it fast, yet somehow reproduce its dynamism:<sup>40</sup>

<sup>39</sup>*The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci*, tr. and ed. Edward MacCurdy, N. Y., n.d., I,80-81.

<sup>40</sup>See especially the entries in MacCurdy I,67-80, 327-31, 345-48, 393-406, 539, 646-55. See also Kenneth Clark, *Leonardo da Vinci*, London, 1958, pp. 80-82.

Force I define as an incorporeal agency, an invisible power, which by means of unforeseen external pressure is caused by the movement stored up and diffused within bodies which are withheld and turned aside from their natural uses; imparting to these an active life of marvellous power it constrains all created things to change of form and position, and hastens furiously to its desired death, changing as it goes according to circumstances . . . . It is born in violence and dies in liberty; and the greater it is the more quickly it is consumed. It drives away in fury whatever opposes its destruction. It desires to conquer and slay the cause of opposition, and in conquering destroys itself . . . . Without force nothing moves.<sup>41</sup>

Spenser, who is less monistic, locates the struggle at a more distinctly spiritual level. But the described dynamics applies to all his major have-nots, and determines the responses of art. So in the Garden of Adonis the image of chaotic force moves the poet's mind to escape to a second garden image (*F.Q.* III.vi. 41-5); his wish-fulfillment begins as a complaint against time and glides from the conditional "If all things were perfect" (st. 41) to the declarative "All things *are* perfect" (st. 42). But since all things are not perfect the dialectic of garden-images moves into a third phase which reconciles the first two: Venus and Adonis withdraw to their pleasure, but there they generate new life in a bower directly over the prison that contains the enemy, the boar of winter, death and chaos. The final tableau is not an image of dissolving plants but a place inhabited by mythic figures whose character, history, and meaning are expressions of human spirit. Here nature has become culture, dream has become poetry, force has been caught up and symbolized in mobile form. In a similar fashion it is Mutability who efficiently causes the masque of seasons by asking Nature to call them forth. But once Nature grants her wish and sets them in motion, they assume their own character. When this happens, mutability is transcended: force yields to form and fulfills itself in the very form it wishes to devour.

It is no accident that at the end of the second canto of mutability, Nature and the fictional world vanish simultaneously, leaving the poet alone, abased, before the source of sources,—before the Sabaoth God, Lord of the hosts that multiply and the rest that fulfills, Lord of creation and of the final holiday. In the course of these cantos the processes of poetry and nature have become identical. Spenser has realized Pico's program: by exercising its mutability his soul

<sup>41</sup>MacCurdy, I,539.

has re-created the world within itself, a universe of symbolic forms, a hieratic masque of Nature: this is where the last have-not, Mutability, in the blindness of her atomic swirl, is really going, this is what she *is* and *means*. The restless desire that underlies both poetry and nature fulfills all things in the same way:

They are not changed from their first estate;  
 But by their change their being doe dilate:  
 And turning to themselves at length againe,  
 Doe worke their owne perfection so by fate . . . .  
 (VII.vii.58)

Here is the final fulfillment of Acidale, as it is of Spenser's earliest sonnets and epigrams. His poetry, which began in pleasure, ends in prayer. Indeed, he might have been beside another poet, in a later time—"On a winter's afternoon, in a secluded chapel"—and felt "the drawing of this Love and the voice of this Calling." But he would not need to listen to what followed for he had already heard it within himself:

We shall not cease from exploration  
 And the end of all our exploring  
 Will be to arrive where we started  
 And know the place for the first time . . . .

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