

## To Our Readers

### 40.15

Welcome to a new issue of the electronic *Spenser Review*. This issue includes news from the 2009 MLA meeting. Audience members at the Spenser Roundtable there requested print versions of the fascinating presentations there and we are here able to offer a brief accounting of the remarks made there. Now that we are coming out electronically, we have more room for such special features, so please feel free to make proposals or send ideas for future news of Spenser-related events.

As we go to press, we have learned of the death of Berkeley emerita Professor Janet Adelman, who gave the Hugh MacLean lecture for the International Spenser Society a few short years ago. Many of the Spenser community worked with Professor Adelman at Berkeley and all of us have benefited from her astute literary insights. The *Review* expresses condolences to Professor Adelman's friends and family on behalf of the Spenser community.



## BOOK REVIEWS AND NOTICES

## 40.16

Hadfield, Andrew and Stoll Abraham, eds. *The Faerie Queene. Book VI and the Mutabilitie Cantos*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2007. xxii+239. ISBN 0-87220-891-5. \$32.95 cloth. ISBN 978-087220-891-9. \$9.95 paper.

*Reviewed by Jennifer C. Vaught*

In their edition of *The Faerie Queene. Book VI and the Mutabilitie Cantos* Andrew Hadfield and Abraham Stoll provide an expertly introduced and thoroughly annotated volume aimed at a wide audience, from undergraduate readers in a survey course to advanced graduate students in a seminar. The scholarly edition also includes Letter to Raleigh, a short essay entitled “The Life of Edmund Spenser,” a useful glossary, index of characters, and up-to-date list of critical works for further reading. Hadfield’s and Stoll’s edition is the concluding volume of a series from Hackett Publishing that includes Book I of *FQ* (edited by Carol V. Kaske), Book II (edited by Erik Gray), III and IV (edited by Dorothy Stephens), and Book V (edited by Abraham Stoll, General Editor). Volumes prior to the one under discussion here are examined fully in the *Spenser Review* in Fall 2006 (37.3) and in Fall 2007 (38.3). As illustrated by Hadfield’s and Stoll’s commendatory edition, this complete series of individual books of *FQ* and *Mutabilitie* offers a reader-friendly, inexpensive alternative to selections of Spenser’s works commonly found in anthologies. For teachers of undergraduate and graduate courses who wish to include entire books of the epic romance unavailable in Spenser texts such as the Norton Critical Edition of *Edmund Spenser’s Poetry* but whose purposes do not necessitate A.C. Hamilton’s entire *FQ*, volumes from this Hackett Publishing series (General Editor, Abraham Stoll) are well-worthy of consideration for adoption in a variety of courses.

Hadfield begins his critically adept Introduction that includes a variety of useful subtopics by stating that Book VI is “problematic, embittered, and fascinating.” He contends that the allegorical quests the knights undertake throughout *FQ* become progressively “more complex” and that Calidore’s quest to capture the Blatant Beast is the most “problematic” of all because it “concludes...as if the process

were actually futile” (vii). Hadfield largely attributes the futility of Calidore’s quest to the failure to establish social order in Book V, at the end of which the Blatant Beast first appears and attacks Artegall. He links the court of Gloriana’s recalling of Artegall from his quest to reform the Salvage Islands to Spenser’s involvement with Lord Grey de Wilton’s ultimately unsuccessful effort to colonize Ireland. Hadfield similarly reads Calidore’s quest through this postcolonial, Irish lens. He argues that in Book VI the continued lack of social order, threats of rudeness and violence, and the abuses of language contribute to the ambiguous definitions of courtesy in this legend. Hadfield’s and Stoll’s glosses and textual annotations illustrate the full range of meanings for this word from politeness to outright deception. Despite the persistent, linguistic threats posed by the Blatant Beast in the Legend of Courtesy, Spenser’s continued enjoyment of language games remains clear. Throughout this volume the editors call attention to his sense of humor, discussing wry, comical moments in the text, figurative winks by the poet, instances of irony, and even Spenser’s “dirty jokes” (36).

Hadfield’s Introduction deals effectively with the theme of pastoral and the significance of the Graces in Book VI, providing an apt overview of critical disagreement about the meanings of Calidore’s pastoral sojourn with Meliboeë, Pastorella, and the other shepherds. Yet he tends to dissolve the ambiguity surrounding the interaction of Meliboeë and Calidore too quickly and definitely. He concludes that Meliboeë is telling Calidore to resume his quest for the Blatant Beast when he states that “fittest is, that all contented rest / With that they hold,” a line that he glosses as knights should remain knights (ix.29.8-9). Though this may be the case, I wonder if the definitiveness of Meliboeë’s advice is at all qualified by the fact that he, too, experienced a change of career in the past. After selling himself “for yearly hire” at court for “ten yeares” and growing discontented with the “vainenesse” there, he returned to his pastoral roots as a shepherd, an indirect endorsement of Calidore’s own disillusionment with the court, if not support of his desire for pastoral relaxation (ix.24.7; ix.25.3). Hadfield’s convincing discussion of the intertwining of art and politics in the episode of the dance of the Graces on Mount Acidale culminates with his point that the conflict between Colin Clout and Calidore about his disruption of the vision serves as a reminder of the dangerous separation of poetry and court life. Although

Hadfield rightly argues that the poet interjects his own voice into the final stanzas of Book VI and despairs audibly over the escaped Blatant Beast's assault on language, I remain skeptical that Calidore's quest as a whole is necessarily "rendered meaningless" by the Beast's escape (xviii). His encounter with the dancing Graces on Mount Acidale, fleeting figures who reveal that true courtesy is a divine gift, remains meaningful despite the threats this Beast continues to pose by the end of Book VI.

The detailed glosses and annotations to Hadfield's and Stoll's edition, which are clear and easy to understand, provide a breadth of information and commentary. The notes explain the meanings of characters' names and their analogous relationship to one another and illuminate parallels between Book VI and earlier books of *FQ*. They also link Book VI to the romance tradition, the grail legend, the Bible, mythology, Chaucer, Petrarchan poetry and the blazon, and to other works by Spenser such as the *Amoretti* and *A Veve of the Present State of Ireland*. The annotations situate readers effectively in terms of English history, including views of usury, interest in travel books, and fascination with cannibals and other savage peoples that intensified with the proliferation of fictional accounts about those living in the Americas and in Ireland. In keeping with Hadfield's introductory commentary on Spenser's own situation in Ireland and his doubt about establishing "peaceful order" there as aid to Lord Grey de Wilton (xxii), his and Stoll's notes for *Mutabilitie Cantos* focus specifically on references to Spenser's house and Irish topography and discuss *Mutabilitie's* "revolutionary politics" that seek "to break down barriers and abolish rank and order" (208). In the concluding essay "The Life of Edmund Spenser" the editors present him as a man who sought "to win court favor" while simultaneously maintaining "skepticism toward court life" (228). They remark that in 1598 the Tyrone Rebellion in Ireland forced Spenser and his family to flee from Kilcolman just before the estate was burned, an incident emphasizing the fragility of social order for Englishmen attempting to govern there (229). Despite the few quibbles and queries noted above, teachers and readers of Spenser will no doubt be ignited by Hadfield's and Stoll's excellent volume of *Book Six and the Mutabilitie Cantos* from Hackett Publishing.

Jennifer C. Vaught is Jean-Jacques and Aurore Labbé Fournet Associate Professor of English at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. She is author of *Masculinity and Emotion in Early Modern English Literature* (Ashgate, 2008), and of articles on Spenser, Sidney, Shakespeare, and Garrick. She is editor, with Lynne Dickson Bruckner, of *Grief and Gender: 700-1700* (Palgrave, 2003) and is currently at work on a new book project entitled *Carnival and Literature in Early Modern England*.

## 40.17

Edmund Spenser: *Selected Letters and Other Papers*, ed. Christopher Burlinson and Andrew Zurcher. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009. ISBN 978-0-19-955821-6. lxvii + 292 pgs. \$250.00 cloth.

*Reviewed by William Oram*

The title of this fine book is somewhat misleading. Spenser did not compose these letters, nor are they always in his hand. The edition presents letters and copies of letters sent or forwarded by Arthur, Lord Grey in 1580-2 when he was Lord Deputy of Ireland, to his official English correspondents—Sir Francis Walsingham, the Privy Council, Lord Burleigh, and the Queen. Spenser, Gray's principal secretary, copied out most of them and always wrote out their superscriptions, directing them to their recipients. With a few exceptions, he can be assumed to have known their contents and to have experienced many of the events that they recount.

They give an extraordinarily rich picture of how Grey perceived—or how he wanted his recipients to perceive—the events that he faced: the destruction of the Papal forces at Smerwick; his attempts to deal almost constant disturbances and rebellions, including those of the Desmonds in the South and Turlough Luineach O'Neill to the North; the bouts of sickness that decimated the English forces in Wicklow and Askeaton; and the plight of English soldiers dismissed by royal order to starve in the streets. To his patron, Sir Francis Walsingham, he repeatedly voices his frustration at the Queen's direction to offer general pardons to all but the ringleaders of rebellions, his increasingly desperate need for soldiers and funds, and eventually his intense desire for recall. In addition, the editors print two later letters in Spenser's hand from Sir John Norris (30 March 1585) when he was Lord President of Munster and Sir Thomas Norris (1 July 1588) after he had succeeded to that post, as well as several papers concerned with Spenser's Kilcolman plantation, including his 1599 bill of complaint against Lord Roche. The effect of the whole is to give one a vivid, gritty sense of Ireland as Grey saw it.

The editing of the letters is superb. A fifty page general introduction sets them in historical and social context, giving a masterly overview of English policy in Ireland and the consequent problems that Grey faced, detailing what Spenser's position as his chief secretary entailed and considering how his service to him and his later service to the Council of Munster affected his writing. Each document is prefaced with an analytic introduction, identifying the circumstances

in which it originates and the way that it confronts them, and followed by extensive notes on the language, the places and the minor personnel in the text (An indispensable appendix includes seventy-nine condensed biographies, up to a page in length, of the major players). There are two good maps, a chronology of the English in Ireland from 1509-1603, a short glossary of technical terms, and even a page displaying the cipher that Grey often used for sensitive matters in his letters to Walsingham. Throughout editors use their mastery of other archival material to illuminate these documents. Their editing is never merely a display of learning: it tells you what you want to know.

The introductions to the individual letters are particularly good on strategies directing Grey's words and actions. Take the editors' treatment of Grey's letter of August 12, 1581 to the Privy Council, in which he details how he forced Turlough Luineach to sign a treaty he was unlikely to honor:

Not only did Grey seize an unprecedented opportunity to catch Turlough Luineach on the back foot, by pinching him between Malby's forces...on the west and his own from the south, thus forcing him to subscribe to a set of articles...but Grey perfectly orchestrated his own commission from London, timing his journey carefully in order to be able to claim ignorance, on his return, of the instructions he had meanwhile been sent from Westminster. ...Of course Grey did not expect Turlough Luineach to keep the peace to which he had agreed—as he wrote to Walsingham just before leaving for Ulster...he knew his course was safe because his negotiations, even if temporarily successful, would eventually prove fruitless—but the aim at the Blackwater was not to secure peace, but to create the defensible pretext for open war with Turlough Luineach that Grey desired.

(109)

Here Grey pins his Irish opponent on the one hand while evading his Queen's commands on the other—and creates a treaty to set up an excuse for future war. This care to see what Grey is *doing* in the letter as well as what the letter is saying is entirely characteristic of the edition.

The editors also illuminate the “culture of violence” (xxiii) characterizing the actions of both sides in the conflict, the habitual callousness about human cost. They write that it was not only his fear about return through hostile territory that made Grey execute all but a few of the prisoners taken at Smerwick but his wish to make himself feared: “As Spenser would later attest, [Grey's] primary concern was to make of the foreign garrison an exemplary and terrifying spectacle—both to the Spanish and Italian soldiers who escaped and to the Irish who hoped for future continental support” (xxii). Lord Grey's own account of this incident, which describes

vividly the setbacks of the march to Smerwick, the investing of the fort and its eventual surrender, never bothers to justify the summary execution of six hundred men:

Morning come I presented my companies in battaile before the Forte: the Coronell comes forth with x or xij of his chief ientlemen, traying theyr ensigns rolled up, & presented them unto mee with theyr lives & the Forte: I sent straight certain gentlemen in to see their weapons and armures layed downe & to gard the munitiion & victaile there lefte for spoile: Then putt I in certyn bandes, who straight fell to execution. There were 600 slayne; munitiion & vitteile great store, though much wasted through the disorder of the Soldier, which in the furie could not be helped. Those that I gave lyfe unto, I have bestowed upon the Capteines & gentlemen, whose service hath well deserved.

(19)

Clearly Grey felt no need to justify his actions; his enemies had given themselves into his hands “for lyfe or death” (18) and he chose the latter. “There were six hundred slain” begins a sentence concerned entirely with the magnitude of the victory; it would fit without change into the Old Testament Book of Judges. “So hath it pleased the Lord of hostes to deliver your enemies into {your} Highnes handes” (19) as Grey later puts it. What he does need to justify to a suspicious Queen is his allowing his gentlemen the ransom of the few remaining prisoners.

The section of the general introduction discussing Spenser's position as a secretary suggests the extraordinary weight of correspondence that he must have faced daily. On the basis of the fraction that remains the editors suggest that he “might have produced or supervised the production of as many as 3,500 to 4,000 folios during his service for Grey alone” (xxx). It's a wonder, given the weight of secretarial work during 1580-89, that the first installment of *The Faerie Queene* was ready for publication in 1590. My one quibble is that the more general account of an Elizabethan secretary's position, with analogies drawn to the grotesque fictional secretary in Gascoigne's *Adventures of Master F.J.*, seems have little bearing on what we can see of the actual relation between Spenser and Lord Grey. The editors point out that in the 1580s and '90s the intimate relation of secretary and master, idealized in many contemporary accounts of the position, came under strain as the sheer volume of correspondence necessitated a stable of secretaries and a more impersonal collaboration (xlii-xliii). But the evidence amassed here suggests that Grey and Spenser must have been close. Despite some instances in which Grey seems to have folded a letter before Spenser could see it (xlvi-xlix), they conclude that Spenser's position was one of “trust, authority and

meticulous oversight, pointing to a strong view of his access to and participation in the central business of the Dublin and Munster administrations” (xxxii). In December 1581 Grey rewarded him with the lease of the manner and abbey of Enniscorthy in Wexford, and long afterward in *A Vewe of the Present State of Ireland* Spenser would defend his former master with a characteristically stubborn loyalty.

In sum, this is a landmark edition. Its exemplary learning and intelligence make it a pleasure—and an education—to read.



## Spenser Society Executive Committee Meeting

December 28, 2009

12:00-1:30 p.m.

Sole Food Restaurant, Loews Philadelphia Hotel, 1200 Market St., Philadelphia

# 40.18

### MINUTES:

1. Minutes of the December 2008 meeting approved.

2. New Vice President and President nominated and voted on by the membership at the Society luncheon on December 29: David Lee Miller, Vice President, and Kenneth Gross, President.

3. New members of the Executive Committee for 2010 and beyond. Our current membership and the years of their 3-year membership as of 2009 are:

Judith H. Anderson (3rd year; Indiana University)  
Joseph Campana (3rd year; Rice University)  
Hannibal Hamlin (2nd year; Ohio State University)  
David Landreth (1st year; UC Berkeley)  
David Lee Miller (1st year; University of South Carolina)  
Melissa Sanchez (2nd year; University of Pennsylvania)  
Philip Schwyzer (1st year; University of Exeter)  
Christopher Warley (2nd year, University of Toronto)  
Jessica Wolfe (3rd year; University of North Carolina).

Cora Fox (Arizona State University), Graham Hammill (SUNY Buffalo), Julian Lethbridge (University of Tübingen), and Beth Quitslund (Ohio University) were nominated to replace outgoing members Judith Anderson, Joseph Campana, Jessica Wolfe, and David Lee Miller. All were confirmed by the executive committee, and by the membership the next day.

4. Secretary-Treasurer's Report by Rhonda Lemke Sanford showed a beginning of the year balance of \$17,000 and end of year balance of \$17,035. The major source of income is society dues; the major expense is the *Spenser Review*. We have 378 members.

5. Annual review of health and implementation of graduate-student grants for participation in MLA sessions. We currently have \$776.00 in the fund, and discussed

extending privileges to any graduate student giving a Spenser paper at the MLA. Discussion at the annual meeting included other suggestions (including presentations at other conferences), all of which will be considered on case by case basis by members of the executive committee.

6. *Spenser Review* Editor's Report by Sheila Cavanagh. Cavanagh reported that the transition to online has been slow, but that people love online format. Discussion of cost for online publication and Emory's continued support of the journal.

7. Proposal to eliminate the premium for dues for international memberships was approved by the executive committee, and approved by the membership at the luncheon. Because we no longer have to mail the Review internationally, dues will be leveled out for all members: \$28 for fulltime faculty and \$18 for students/retired faculty/independent scholars.

8. The state and hosting of the Spenser Society's web page. The website hosted at Cambridge University is now completely updated, many thanks to Andrew Zurcher.

9. Discussion of topics for the Society's 2011 MLA Convention session in Los Angeles. (Note: the next MLA is January 2011; there is no 2010 MLA.) Beginning in 2011, we have just one guaranteed session of our own; we can propose two additional sessions, as long as one of them is co-hosted with another allied or affiliate organization. As arranged last year, the 2011 proposed session is a joint session with the Marlowe Society of America. Our designated session to be chaired by Jeff Dolven, will be "Spenser: The Poet's Poet."

10. Report on Spenser Society activities at RSA in Los Angeles (2009) and SCSC in Geneva (2009). Melissa Sanchez will take over RSA planning. Shall we engage in a permanent presence at SCSC, given that our MLA activities will be curtailed?

11. The 2009 MacCaffrey Award for best book is to be awarded to Judith Anderson; the committee to select the

2010 prize for best article published in 2008 or 2009 will be chaired by David Lee Miller, with David Landreth and Hannibal Hamlin to serve on the committee.

12. Discussion possible future speakers for the Hugh Maclean Memorial Lecture.

The next meeting will be in Los Angeles in 2011.

Respectfully submitted,  
Rhonda Lemke Sanford  
Secretary-Treasurer, International Spenser Society



## CONFERENCE ACTIVITIES

The following papers were given at the 2009 MLA Conference, December 27-30, in Philadelphia, PA.

*The International Spenser Society offered a round table on the Mutabilitie Cantos, chaired by Kenneth Gross. Due to audience request, we are reproducing as many of the formal presentations as possible, in the form of abstracts and extended remarks.*

## PAPERS

## 40.19

“Mutability, Materialism, Mortality”

Judith H. Anderson  
Indiana U

Lately, two issues in the *Mutabilitie Cantos* have interested me. One is the relation of Spenser’s figure Mutabilitie to the biblical Fall. The other is the bearing of the Cantos on death, and more exactly, on Spenser’s engagement with mortalism, the death of the soul—alternatively, in the Averroist tradition, of only the individual soul—along with the body. Both issues relate to Spenser’s engagement with materialism.<sup>1</sup>

Mutabilitie’s ambition, destruction, and responsibility for death associate her with the Fall. Yet her name also suggests something larger and variously other than the Fall. Should we want a single word or phrase to gloss her significance, we might try the one Spenser provides at the outset of the Cantos, namely, “*Change*,” or “the euer-whirling wheele / Of *Change*” (VI.i.1-2), imagery associated with fortune, in all its challenge to a universe of law and order. The name *Mutabilitie* comes only in line four and only as a synonym for *Change*. She does not exist as a character before lines five through nine, at which point her form, emerging dramatically and sequentially, is conspicuous as a staged poetic construction rather than a prefigured entity.

*Sin* and *Death* are *not* sufficient names for Spenser’s Mutabilitie. She is neither a mirror of the Fall nor a metonymic encoding of it. Her figure and story draw on diverse renderings of change—Ovid, Lucretius, and

Boethius, for example—and do so without just figuring any one. In fact, the Fall looks more like an expression of Mutabilitie than is she of the Fall: she represents a concept of which the Fall is an historical expression. She is the larger term, and the Fall is a manifestation of her in the Cantos bearing her name, yet not an exclusive or full manifestation. This is how Spenserian allegory works.

Spenser’s Mutabilitie is also out of sync with the Fall: she is beautiful, and the damage she does to the world precedes her rebellion against the gods. Moreover, she damages a world in which Bellona, the goddess of war, and the infernal Hecate are already empowered. In fact, they are her role models. In Mutabilitie’s closing argument, as in Nature’s, *Change*, now along with *Time*, again becomes one of her ex-changeable names. Mutabilitie observes the reign of “*CHANGE*” over all creatures, “For, who sees not, that *Time* on all doth pray? / But *Times* do change and moue continually. . . . Wherefore,” she asks, “this lower world who can deny / But to be subiect still to *Mutabilitie*?” The shift in Mutabilitie’s rhetorical questions from the personified *Time* to the de-personified *Times*, from singular concept to plural occurrences, anticipates Nature’s warning to Mutabilitie that she seeks her own decay by desiring supremacy. In effect she seeks her own disappearance as a figure, a concept, and a distinguishable phenomenon. Of course, the judicial figure of Nature herself then vanishes, as if dissolving her own hypostasis into the words of her verdict, the conspicuously judicious, all-containing truth she has spoken. Her departure is the final irony that accompanies and qualifies the affirmation in her judgment.  
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When Mutabilitie presents her claim to Nature, the implication of mortalism also enters Spenser’s Cantos. Mutabilitie moves associatively from Earth/earth to animals and human beings—that is to us:

And men themselues doe change continually,  
From youth to eld, from wealth to pouerty,  
From good to bad, from bad to worst of all.  
Ne doe their bodies only flit and fly:

But eeke their minds (which they immortall call)

Still change and vary thoughts, as new occasions fall.

Crossing here from the physical into the economic and moral, Mutabilitie reassumes her identity with Fortune and,



beyond this, with random change. Here she delivers her greatest challenge.

From the beginning, Mutabilitie has represented a chaos force from below, one variously related to the inescapable Mammon, to the “huge eternal *Chaos*, which supplies / The substances of natures fruitfull progenyes” in the Garden of Adonis, to the ambivalent, egalitarian Giant of materialism in Book V, and to her own half-brother Maleger, resurgent, resilient, monstrous son of the Earth. If indeed Earth is the “great mother of vs all,” Mutabilitie’s consanguinity extends even further. She would sweep into her inheritance any pattern, form, or order that attempts to transcend a purely material world. *Mens*, the intellective mind—not just *ratio*, abstracting reason, though including this—is the object of her challenge, which is all the more alarming for its almost casual, matter-of-fact delivery at the end of a stanza. In Mutabilitie’s assertion, all intellectual thought becomes relative to occasion, to temporal, material causation: “But eeke their minds (which they immortal call) / Still change and vary thoughts, as new occasions fall.” Occasion is time, fortune, happenstance, expediency, and now Mutabilitie, or so she intimates. Occasion becomes the latest of Mutabilitie’s shifting identities, her shifting sameness. Thus seen, Mutabilitie indeed makes her claim to Nature.

Mutabilitie’s claim recalls Book II, where the hag Occasion is fettered by Guyon. Her fettering is at once an attempt to stop time and to exclude a personified abstraction from the movement of narrative, and it leads only to impasse. Occasion, hag though she is, represents the material, the many, and the spontaneous. In time, her arrest ironically becomes itself an occasion of strife. *Temporarily*, it also suspends Guyon’s quest. Temperance has its very root in *tempus*, or “time.”

In closing, I want to align Mutabilitie’s earth-born challenges with Lodowick Bryskett’s depiction in *A Discourse of Civill Life* of his friend Spenser’s interest in the relation of mind to matter as it bears on the immortality or mortality of *mens*, the intellective power, and thus on mortalism. Five times in Bryskett’s dialogue, “Maister *Spenser*” urges questions that exhibit his concern about the soul’s immortality. He challenges Bryskett’s conclusion that the intellective soul is immortal and impassible by arguing that it is acted upon by fantasy and by sensation. He repeatedly presses at the relation of the intellective soul to the body and more generally to matter. His final question, which Bryskett pronounces heresy, is whether there are two souls in human beings, “the one sensitive and mortall, and the other Intellective and Divine.” Such a view would endorse a pronounced dualism—*duo esse*, shades of Duessa or of a free-floating idealism without basis in matter. Whatever the relation of the Spenserian poet to the role Bryskett assigns “Maister *Spenser*,”

the *Discourse* is a pertinent contemporary document that suggests dramatically what is at stake in Mutabilitie’s claim that the mind is subject to whatever “new occasions fall.”

## 40.20

“A Seminar on the Thing: *Mutabilitie*”

Gordon Teskey

Harvard U

We are celebrating the four-hundredth anniversary of the publication, in 1609, of Spenser’s *Mutabilitie*. But at this time of year, in late December 1599, a decade before it was published, *Mutabilitie* was still a new piece of writing, and Spenser was back in London, after the destruction of Kilcolman. He had only two weeks to live. I wish to observe that fact on this occasion. It has nothing to do with my paper. And everything.

I have been thinking of *Mutabilitie* as a seminar on the thing, and I might begin with an observation that may be too symmetrical to be accurate. But it points up the nature of our question, What is a thing? or What is a poetic thing, a Spenserian thing? The question for the ancient Greek scientists was this: “given that there are things, how can there be change?” The question for Spenser, and indeed for the entire Christian tradition, is, “given that change is universal, how can there be things?” The very word, *thing*, chimes frequently at the poem’s climax and conclusion: “all *things* tost and turned by transverse” (VII.vii.56); “all *things* stedfastnes doe hate” (58); “In all *things* else she bears the greatest sway” (viii.1); “love of *things* so vaine to cast away” (vii.1); “stedfast rest of all *things* firmly stayd” (vii.2). The very status of *Mutabilitie* raises these questions about the thing, since we hardly know whether to refer to this text in the singular or the plural, as *Mutabilitie* or as *The Mutabilitie Cantos*, and whether this text is a thing to itself or part of a larger poetic thing, *The Faerie Queene*.

The intellectual background to the poem is indicated by its title. All things flow, as the weeping philosopher says, and continually turn into other things by the force of ‘change’ or \_\_\_\_\_, each thing undermined by \_\_\_\_\_ or ‘lack.’ *Metabole* was translated into Latin as *mutabilitas*, as in Augustine’s *Confessions*, where no doubt Spenser saw it. Spenser may also have heard the commonplace phrase, *lubrica mutabilitas*, ‘slippery change,’ which is used by Gregory the Great, commenting on Job 14:2, in which man is compared to a flower and to a shadow, which “never remains in the same state.” Lubricious Mutabilitie! Lubricated Mutabilitie! I think of her as a great moving mucus membrane, absorbing everything, like the voracious, cocaine-soaked adenoid gland

in Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*. But Mutabilitie is a membrane, a witty partition more than a thing, a division, and a slippery one. She is a thing and she is not.

I would say that there are four species of thing in *Mutabilitie*. You may think there are more, but four seems about right to me, and I'm pretty sure it's the smallest number to which the classes of things in this poem can be reduced. I name them first by their examples: the bull, the mouse, the hill, the girl; that is, the thing in myth, the thing in science, the thing in phenomenology—or, shall we say, in experience?—and the thing in poetry, or vision. I shall briefly identify the first three and say more about this last, the thing in poetry or vision, exemplified by the girl or nymph, Molanna. But to anticipate: for Spenser, the thing in poetry or vision is the product of what Yves Bonnefoy beautifully calls “the metaphysical imaginary,” which “re-inflames our desire to exist” (Bonnefoy 19).

The thing in myth is exemplified by Jove disguised as a bull when he raped Europa: “the same which led / *Europa* floating through th' *Argolick* fluds” (vii. 33). He is lubricious and slippery, wet with the waves “through which he waded for his love's delight”—that is, his delight taken in her, not her delight in him. The bull is also part of the astrological sign corresponding with the month of April. He is thus a set period of time, although every period of time is slippery and slides into the next. We might also observe that it appears to be in the nature of mythic beings to degenerate from purely narrative being into physical things, as the gods of antiquity turned into the planets and their victims into stars.

The thing in science is exemplified by the mouse (if by “wicked beast” a mouse is meant) caught in the housewife's trap, “som snare or gin,” her experimental apparatus (vi. 48). I think of the Large Hadron Collider and its hunt for that elusive particle, the Higgs Boson. If it exists—and theory predicts it—the Higgs Boson does so without us, but it does not exist fully for us, in science, until we trap it in our apparatus, until we have physical, sensuous proof.

The thing in experience is exemplified by Arlo Hill, first because a hill only is a hill from a certain distance, neither too near nor too far, although Spenser was at just the right distance and looked at Galtymore every day, as Melville, in the room where he wrote *Moby Dick*, looked out the window towards Greylock Mountain, thinking it very like a whale. Unlike the Higgs Boson, you cannot prove a hill to exist, as something more defined and independent than a wrinkle on the surface of the earth. The thingly existence of Arlo hill is also unstable because the hill is changed from the initial state in which we see it, an earthly paradise of “woods and forests . . . Sprinkled with wholsom waters” and overseen by the goddess Cynthia, who hunts there, and bathes (vi. 38). It is changed from that to a place relinquished by the goddess and

suffering under her curse, so that the woods and all its other beauties are, to use the word Spenser uses, defaced (vi. 55). It is as if the beautiful features of the hill have been scraped off by a glacier, revealing something altogether new. We may be reminded of Milton's earthly paradise, Eden, which is torn loose from its foundations by the Flood and washed down the Euphrates to the Persian gulf, where it gets stuck, and is today a salt-pocked, shit-stained rock: “an island salt and bare, / The haunt of seals and orcs and sea-mews clang.” With Arlo Hill and Eden Hill both, the substructure is the same, but the hill is hardly the same as it ever was.

Mountains are part of massifs, and massifs are essentially watersheds, vast regions from which water flows downhill, eventually to the sea, but in the intermediate term, to rivers and floodplains. That the water flows downhill in streams is irrelevant from a geographical point of view: the point is that the water flows downhill, not up. Streams are part of our phenomenological experience, as other provisional features are, such as islands, or indeed mountains: we experience them as things. But Molanna isn't a thing, she's a girl, a nymph. She isn't the product of a point of view; she appears to us as existing in her own right, and we therefore see her as a vision. We do not make her; we cannot trap her; we catch sight of her.

What is interesting about this catching sight is that it occurs as a step through and beyond our seeing natural phenomena as things. Molanna starts out in our attention as a stream, one not so different from a mountain or any other thing in category three, and in the stanza to follow we never stop seeing her this way, as a phenomenological thing, the experience of seeing a stream. Yet as we fix our attention on this leaping, springing, tumbling, flowing watercourse, this stream rushing downhill and strewn with blossoms from the flowers on its banks, we catch sight of a girl, one who is about to have a part in the story that is about to be told. For the moment, however, her intention is to take her time emerging into view:

For first she springs out of two marble rocks  
On which a grove of oaks high mounted grows,  
That as a girlond seems to deck the locks  
Of some faire Bride, brought forth with pompous showes  
Out of her bowre, that many flowers strowes:  
So through the flowry dale she tumbling down  
Through many woods and shady covert flows  
That on each side her silver channel crown  
Till to the plaine she come, whose valleys she doth  
drowne.

It may be impossible for you to step into the same stream twice, but Molanna just is that stream all the time—and she is also a girl, who takes steps. The point of the Heraclitean maxim is not to mystify the thing but to demystify it: you *can* step into the same stream twice, and also you *can't*, depending

on your concept of the thing. Heraclitus's maxim illustrates the provisional nature of things in category three. But the poetic or visionary thing goes beyond this and seems to exist in its own right, reassuring us of our own existence, which also seems provisional, until Molanna comes along.

In poetry, the thing isn't a myth; it isn't a scientific fact or a scientific theory; and it isn't an artifact of how we see the world. The thing in poetry is a vision. Is it possible to go further, and to say that for poetry all things are a vision, or that poetry can give us back the world we are losing every day?

The most famous stanza of the poem, Nature's judgment, would have us think so. In the face of universal decay and change, in the face of Mutabilitie, this sonorous stanza affirms that all things, "turning to themselves at length againe / Do work their own perfection so by fate." The ambivalence of Neoplatonism is rushed to the scene of the cosmic emergency. Note that Nature's judgment is not there for the sake of poetry and vision, for the sake of Molanna, or Belphoebe; it is there for the sake of phenomenological things, such as my birdcage, or your dish-drainer, or the sick elm in the yard. Do we really want them back? Are they not all, finally and irrevocably, trash? Would it not be good to be rid of them at last, these experiential, phenomenological things? Wouldn't being rid of the paraphernalia, the things we have to carry alongside us in life, leave more room for the higher things of vision? Nature's judgment is severely qualified. Three of the four remaining stanzas in *Mutabilitie* cast doubt on Nature's claim to metaphysical closure, that is, to the claim by which the phenomenological coincides with the metaphysical, so that everything that is for us is—my birdcage, your dish drainer, the sick elm in the yard, all lifted up to the stars and crowding the heavens, like space junk. When I say that three of the four remaining stanzas cast doubt on Nature's judgment, I am not excepting the final stanza of the poem from that statement. These stanzas *should* cast doubt on Nature's raising up everything to the status of poetic vision. They should do so because Spenser is a poet.

It is of course true that poetry confers identity, firmness and outline on the fleeting world of experience. But if we try to use the visionary power of poetry to pursue the truth too far, to make things more real than in truth they are, then Nature's words to Mutabilitie may be directed to poetry, too: "Thy decay thou seekst by thy desire." Even so, we cannot ever rid ourselves of the metaphysical desire expressed in Nature's judgment. I repair my birdcage, you repair your dish drainer, and not for reasons of economy, though that is how we explain our actions to ourselves. We do it because we want the world to last.

Consider the similarly rickety materials of the poetic art, that birdcage of song: diction, meter, rhythm, rhyme, enjambment, syntactical variation from the norm,

decaying and re-forming images, stanzas that fail to stand but like Molanna tumble into one another and down into the flowery vale, structures, as we call them, that aren't really structures but pulsing swellings in the onrushing steam, stories that, like the streams Alpheus and Arethusa, flow in and out of literature all the time, and of course visions, such as that of Molanna emerging from those marble rocks, under the shade of oaken boughs, high up on the mountainside. Out of that obscurity she leaps into the light, a stream at first and then a girl, a vision. It is in the very nature of those unstable and, as I called them, rickety materials always to be longing to become something other and better than themselves, such as the truth. But even as those words, rhythms, and images strive to do so, they continually return to their mutable, slippery selves. Our lot is cast with *lubrica mutabilitas*, lubricious mutability, slippery unthingliness, the mucus membrane that keeps us alive for a time—but for a purpose that is other than itself. Reading *Mutabilitie*, for example.

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#### ABSTRACTS

### 40.21

"Timing, Accident, Coincidence, and Design: The Disingenuous Cunning of the *Mutabilitie Cantos*"  
James Nohrnberg, U of Virginia

Making the claim that *Mutabilitie* are both the last instance of *FQ*'s sixteenth-century redaction history and the first of its seventeenth-century reception history, this paper again notes that the Cantos' two last lines hide the dedicatee's Christian name in plain sight, repeating it from the funeral urn of the dedication itself, "in a final supplement to a supplement to a supplement." This paper then looks at the "matter" of the Two Cantos from the point of view of the history of thought, developing a contrast between Boethius/Aquinas, on "the chain of fate," on the one hand, and Calvin/Bacon—on accident and necessity—on the other. "For Bacon accidents enable new and rare discoveries; for Calvin there are plenty of surprises, but no accidents." Appealing to Nature's God, the Titaness petitions a higher court, and calls for a reappraisal and expansion of the actual, elemental, material stuff of mundane experience, in light of the erosion of the dubious distinction between the sublunary and superlunary world. Nature is thus seen as developing "a seventeenth-century double in *Mutabilitie*, with the change from an

Aristotelean cosmos to a neo-Lucretian one.” “But *Mutabilitie*’s form leaves us at sixes and sevens — literally.” The paper thus turns to the very date/year of the Two Cantos’ publication, in relation to the dates/years of earlier and very different installments of *FQ* as a clue to Two Cantos’ topical and “Elizabethan” content (i.e., the menopause, “climacteric,” and late—and, for Spenser himself, posthumous—eclipse of the author’s Diana-esque queen). The form was read as a supplement comprising a “whole fraction:” one internally represented by its own fractions, Time’s included. Only God lasts forever, but 400 years is a long time, ten times as long as that since Nature came to an end again, forty years ago, with man stepping on the moon.

## 40.22

“The Pervasive Influence: On Reading Lucretius in Spenser”

Gerard Passannante, U of Maryland, College Park

In a 1920 article that concerns the presence of Lucretian echoes in *Mutabilitie*, the critic, Edwin Greenlaw, writes indirectly of the influence of Lucretius as a “difference in the point of view in regard to this philosophy of change [that is] something rather difficult to prove; it is a pervasive thing, not a matter of concrete illustration.” My paper concerns the idea of this elusive form of influence and what it means to talk about a thing that is invisible and everywhere—an influence that by its very nature seems to resist literary criticism. In attempting to read the pervasiveness of Lucretius in Spenser, that is, to bring it from the realm of feeling into the realm of the analytical, I demonstrate first why the critic had so much difficulty pinning it down, and secondly how this difficulty might be instructive for re-thinking our idea of the poet’s “method” and the problem of matter and form at the heart of the Cantos.

### OTHER PAPERS PRESENTED AT THE MLA

#### SPENSER AND CHARACTER

Wednesday, 30 December

1:45–3:00 p.m., Liberty Ballroom Salon C, Philadelphia Marriott

Program arranged by the International Spenser Society

Presiding: Andrew Escobedo, Ohio U, Athens

## 40.23

“*Persuasion*, Character, and *FQ* Book III”

Paul Hecht, Purdue U North Central

Consider this Spenserian moment in Jane Austen’s last completed novel, *Persuasion*. Our hero-knight, Anne, has been threading her way through Regency England fairly well until she runs into the charming Mr. Elliot, who quickly begins to court her, and makes substantial progress. But at last his “character” is revealed to her, with written evidence, to be “black! hollow and black!” The Mrs. Smith who aides in this revelation is a sort of Una with Red Cross Knight and Despair, or Palmer with *Furor* and *Opportunity*. This sense of character plays out like Spenserian allegory in that it reveals seeming-humans to be dimensionless figures, immutable abstractions personified, or false Florimell-like characters, puffed up around a hollow or daemonic core. But the further implication is that all humans, though perhaps to varying extents, have something immutable at their centers, which is named by this thing “character.” That is both terrifying and cause for celebration, and the twin sides of the concept glow most decidedly, in Austen, with the undecidability of *Mutabilitie*.

In this essay I explore the way a novel fascinated with the various senses of “character” can be illuminated by Spenserian thinking, such that among other things, one begins to see the realistic glow of the English landscape in Austen start to take on the hue of a Fairy Land that is populated with creatures who might be less human than they appear. Austen’s Spenserianism, I argue, reveals productive ways of thinking about character in Spenser. By understanding the valences of the term in a place where all those valences are acknowledged and meditated upon, one can turn to Fairy Land more fully equipped to avoid anachronism and misplaced imputation of fullness where only flatness resides. As test cases, I focus on what seems like the most un-Austenian kind of allegorical movement, the metamorphosis of Malbecco, along with the very few, but fascinating, instances of the word “character” in *FQ*, at the unavoidable end of Book III

## 40.24

“Straunge characters’ and Spenser’s Psyches”

Elizabeth D. Harvey, U of Toronto

In Book III of Spenser’s *FQ*, Busirane holds Amoret captive, bound fast to a “brasen pillour.” The “vile Enchaunter” sits in front of her, “Figuring straunge characters of his art, / With liuing bloud he those characters wrate, / Dreadfully dropping from her dying hart (III.xii.31). Spenser’s use of the word “character” twice in this passage would seem in the first instance to mean alphabetic letters, graphic symbols of writing. Or it might gesture to the etymological sense of the word, an instrument used to inscribe, engrave, or stamp a distinctive mark, a tool which could be cognate with the “deadly dart” that transfixes Amoret’s “trembling hart.” It is these “characters” that Britomart forces Busirane to “re-verse,” to read backwards, in order to undo the magical elements of the spell that would bind Amoret’s heart to his. In this paper, I explore how this literal sense of character as a graphic mark moves towards a fuller, more encompassing concept of character that begins to suggest some of the complex distinguishing features of human subjectivity. The spatialization of the body in this passage is crucial to this movement, for the qualifier “strange” evokes connotations of foreignness elicited by its Latin root, *extraneus*, external. To take the heart out of the body and to write in blood is to turn the body inside out, to expose, make foreign, and manipulate its hidden interior. It is this traffic between inside and outside, domestic and strange, figuration and ontology that my consideration of character aims to map. I explore the relationship between the marks of characters—names, distinguishing features, allegorical signs—and the inner qualities that begin to define our sense of “personhood” as a dialogue about early modern subjectivity, particularly as these issues are elicited by love and magic. I will focus in particular on Amoret and Busirane and the representation of the early modern heart as the seat of the passions, the progenitor of vital spirits, and for some thinkers, the putative house of the soul. I examine some early modern theories of the soul, which frequently saw the soul as an animating principle that figured the rational “character” of the human. That the discourse of character in this episode is bound up with magic and the cryptic suggest how intertwined questions of literary character are with Busirane’s dark art, the project of versing in characters the psyche and the heart’s interior.



## Lectures

# Una's Evil

Hugh Maclean Lecture, International Spenser Society  
29 December 2009

Richard Halpern

### 40.25

In this paper I undertake to rescue Una—not from the clutches of Sansloy or a dragon, where I surely wouldn't be of much use, but from a critical consensus, or near-consensus, that seems to have settled around her.<sup>1</sup> This consensus holds that Una is a Very Good Girl, and it has the unintended consequence of rendering her dull.<sup>2</sup> Piti-able, admirable even, but still rather dull. I want to argue that Una may in fact be a bad girl, and thus interesting. Una is too often reduced either to allegorical furniture in Red Cross Knight's spiritual quest or to the somewhat pathetic victim of his inconstancy. To address the first of these: if Una is allegorical furniture, embodying either the invisible Church or the Christian Truth to which Red Cross Knight should aspire, then she is an odd sort of furniture in that she wanders off on her own for whole cantos at a time, unlike those other allegorical beings who exist only in their direct interactions with Spenser's titular heroes. And if she is the spurned object of Red Cross Knight, loyally seeking a knight who wishes only to avoid her, than I will merely point out that her posture in this respect rather resembles that of Archimago, likewise a dauntless pursuer of Red Cross Knight.

Let's begin with Una at her most complex and interesting—indeed, at one of the most interesting and, to my mind, well-night inexplicable moments in Book I. Canto III finds Una and her lion taking shelter with Abessa and Corceca. That night, Kirkrapine arrives and demands entrance—with (for him) unfortunate results:  
Thus long the dore with rage and threats he bet,  
Yet of those fearefull women none durst rize,  
The Lyon frayed them, him in to let:  
He would no longer stay him to aduize,  
But open breakes the dore in furious wize,

And entring is; when that disdainfull beast  
Encountring fierce, him suddaine doth surprize,  
And seizing cruell clawes on trembling brest,  
Vnder his Lordly foot him proudly hath suppress.

Him booteth not resist, nor succour call,  
His bleeding hart is in the vengers hand,  
Who streight him rent in thousand peeces small,  
And quite dismembred hath: the thirstie land  
Drunke vp his life; his corse left on the strand.  
His fearefull friends weare out the wofull night,  
Ne dare to weepe, nor seeme to vnderstand  
The heauie hap, which on them is alight,  
Affraid, leas to themselues the like mishappen might.

Now when broad day the world discovered has,  
Vp Vna rose, vp rose the Lyon eke,  
And on their former iourney forward pas,  
In wayes vnknowne, her wandring knight to seeke,  
With paines farre passing that long wandring Greeke,  
That for his loue refused deitie;  
Such were the labours of this Lady meeke,  
Still seeking him, that from her still did flie,  
Then furthest from her hope, when most she weened nie.  
(1.3.19-21) 3

Let us temporarily put aside allegorical considerations and consider this moment purely from a narrative perspective. During the night, Una's lion has loudly dismembered the admittedly somewhat discourteous Kirkrapine. Loudly enough, certainly, that Abessa and Corceca spend the remainder of the night cowering in terror. Yet Una, who occupies the same one-room shack with these two, seems oddly unaware that anything has occurred. Even to exit the cottage presumably requires stepping over the exsanguinated sack of bone and guts that was once Kirkrapine. Yet oddly, Una doesn't seem to register that anything at all has happened. Departing, she offers Abessa and Corceca, her

hosts for the evening, not so much as a contrite “I’m so sorry my pet lion dismembered your friend!”

Of course, it is only fair to admit that the violence committed here is not directly Una’s but the lion’s. Yet I’m not sure this matters much, because the lion becomes to some degree a psychic projection of Una.<sup>4</sup> Thus, when she first wishes to enter Corceca’s cottage, the lion intuits her wishes and rips the locked door open. (It isn’t clear to me, by the way, who repairs the door in time for Kirkrapine to barge his way in later.)

Now at this point allegory rushes to our aid. Kirkrapine is a church robber, as his very name announces, and thus deserves his cruel punishment, we think. But Una doesn’t know his name—indeed, she knows nothing about him, and she shows surprisingly little curiosity about the victim of her lion’s murderous rage. Her state upon leaving the cottage hovers somewhere between blithe indifference and hysterical blindness. I am tempted to call it ethical syncope—a momentary blacking out of her moral apparatus, akin to the more literal form of fainting she is habitually given to at moments of stress. Faced with evidence of horrifying slaughter committed in her name against an unknown victim, she simply decides not to see it. In this respect she seems to embody the very moral failing—blindness of heart—that her allegorical hostess Corceca represents. Nor should this surprise us. When a Spenserian hero arrives at a particular locale, we generally understand the place to embody his or her spiritual condition at that moment. Thus, for instance, Red Cross Knight finds himself at Lucifer’s palace because he has already fallen prey to the sin of pride. Arrival is a sign of one’s moral state. But for some reason, we are hesitant to apply the same protocols of reading to Una. If we did, we would have to assume that Una arrives at Abessa and Corceca’s cottage because of some subterranean connection with them. She comes to this place because, at a spiritual level, she is already there.

One question that arises here is *why* Una tends to be exempted from the protocols of reading we have been taught to apply to all other Spenserian characters. I suspect that a kind of misplaced courtliness is at work here—a sense that it would be as wrong for us to doubt Una’s essential goodness as it was wrong for Red Cross Knight to doubt it back at Archimago’s house. We just don’t want to attribute murkiness of motive to this adorably wronged character. But as with most forms of courtliness, this one conceals a subliminal sexism. We feel compelled to save Una from her own complexity, to maintain her (in fantasy) as the perfectly admirable and victimized woman we want her to be. And the result is that we have to suspend our own critical apparatuses at crucial moments in order to sustain this fantasy. If Una undergoes a moment of ethical syncope when she exits

Corceca’s cottage, we as readers undergo a moment of interpretive syncope at the same time, our analytical faculties momentarily blacking out in order to avoid an unacceptable form of knowledge. We too are threatened with blindness of heart—and of mind—at this juncture.

I don’t want to leave this fascinating episode before taking note of the simile in stanza 21 comparing Una to Odysseus, that “long-wandering Greek.” Guileful in Homer and positively repugnant in the Greek tragic playwrights, Odysseus provides a potentially troubling point of ethical reference. True, Spenser’s simile celebrates Odysseus’ virtuous desire to return home to Penelope from Calypso’s pleasurable isle. But Odysseus has nevertheless been unfaithful with Calypso, so the simile offers a rather vexing parallel for the supposedly chaste Una. Moreover, it seems to me that the whole Corceca episode bears distant resemblances to Odysseus’ adventure at Polyphemus’ cave, where neither antagonist displays a particularly strong grasp of host-guest etiquette. What are we to make of this comparison to Homer’s wily, philandering hero?

I want to turn now to three early instances in Book I when Una speaks, because each instance shows her saying something either disturbing to the reader or potentially harmful to Red Cross Knight, or both. The first instance occurs at stanzas 12 and 13, when Red Cross Knight and Una, having gotten lost in the Wandering Wood, arrive at Error’s cave. Una wisely cautions Red Cross Knight to be careful. But when he responds that it would be shameful to retreat, Una in turn replies “Yea but (quoth she) the perill of this place / I better wot then you, though now too late, / To wish you backe returne with foule disgrace.” And she then announces plainly that “This is the wandring wood, this *Errours den*” (1.1.13.1-3, 6). What exactly does Una mean when she claims to know the peril of this place better than Red Cross Knight does? Why is Una familiar at all with Error’s cave? And if she does know this place, why has she allowed herself and Red Cross Knight to arrive here? What she says in effect is: “I know how dangerous this place is, but since you’re here already, it’s too late to go back.” I can’t help finding something slightly ominous and uncanny about Una’s claim to understand the dangers of Error’s cave before the monster has even put in an appearance. And I likewise can’t help wondering what Spenser’s original readers, unequipped with critical annotations as they wended their way through the opening canto of Book I, would have made of this as-yet unnamed maiden accompanying Red Cross Knight on his quest.

Una speaks again in stanza 27, right after Red Cross Knight has defeated the Dragon Error:

His Lady seeing all, that chaunced, from farre  
Approcht in haste to greet his victorie,  
And saide, Faire knight, borne under happie starre,

Who see your vanquisht foe before you lye:  
 Well worthy be you of that Armory,  
 Wherein ye have great glory wonne this day,  
 And prou'd your strength on a strong enimie,  
 Your first aduventure: many such I pray,  
 And henceforth euer wish, that like succeed it may.

(I.i.27)

Una's words of encouragement are doubtless comforting to Red Cross Knight but for that very reason unhelpful. In the now standard reading of this episode, Red Cross Knight's first victory is really his first defeat, since the ease with which he dispatches Error causes him to rely disastrously on his own martial valor, even as the allegorical obviousness of Error blinds him to the subtler forms of error he will soon encounter. This being the case, Una's happy pronouncement that he is "well worthy of that Armory/Wherein ye have great glory won this day" can only feed Red Cross Knight's dangerous sense of heroic self-sufficiency, thus setting him up for his imminent fall at the hands of Archimago. I am not claiming that Una acts with evil intent here—though I'm also not claiming that she does not—but her gushing praise has a damaging effect nevertheless.

Una's next utterance occurs a mere five stanzas later. By this point she and Red Cross Knight have encountered Archimago in disguise. When Red Cross Knight asks the apparently harmless old man if he knows of any adventures to pursue, the enchanter replies that he can tell Red Cross Knight of a strange man who is laying waste to the countryside. Indeed, he can lead Red Cross Knight to him—but the fellow lives far off. At this point Una pipes up:

Now (saide the Ladie) draweth toward night,  
 And well I wote, that of your later fight  
 Ye all forwearied be: for what so strong,  
 But wanting rest will also want of might?  
 The Sunne that measures heauen all day long,  
 At night doth baite his steedes the *Ocean* waues emong.

Then with the Sunne take Sir, your timely rest,  
 And with new day new work at once begin:  
 Vntroubled night they say gives counsell best.  
 Right well Sir knight ye have aduised bin,  
 Quoth then that aged man: the way to win  
 Is wisely to aduise: now day is spent;  
 Therefore with me ye may take vp your In  
 For this same night. The knight was well content:  
 So with that godly father to his home they went.

(I.i.32.4–I.i.33.9)

Here I wish once again to invoke that mythical first reader of *The Fairie Queene*, unaided by annotations that would identify Una and Archimago. Such a reader might be forgiven not only for thinking Archimago merely a courteous stranger at

this point, but even for thinking that Una and Archimago collude in convincing Red Cross Knight to spend the evening at the latter's home. Such a reader might even find formal confirmation of this in line four of stanza 33: "Right well Sir knight ye haue aduised bin"—a line which at first seems to be uttered by Una as part of her speech. That is, until the next line begins "quoth then that aged man," at which point the reader is informed retroactively that the previous line was actually spoken by Archimago. In fact, the longer I look at this exchange, the less sure I am of where Una stops speaking and Archimago begins. I *think* her last statement is line 3 of stanza 33, but I can't be completely sure that Archimago doesn't begin speaking at the very start of stanza 33. In either case, this momentary uncertainty of attribution, which blurs the dividing line between Una's and Archimago's speech, points to a deeper difficulty in distinguishing Una's motives from those of the wicked enchanter. Even if Una utters her speech in complete innocence, it once again has a very unfortunate effect, coaxing Red Cross Knight into spending the night with Archimago.<sup>5</sup> Exactly how many innocent yet harmful things must Una be allowed to say before we begin to doubt that her presence in the poem is entirely beneficent?

Now I should here admit that these intimations of possible evil in Una occur mostly in the Book's initial cantos, and that they aren't born out by the rest of the story. Una single-handedly rescues Red Cross Knight from the clutches of Despair and proves a loyal companion to the very end, when the two are wed. Perhaps we should then attribute the uncertainties I've been tracing to the epistemological murk that envelops the early cantos of Book I and confuses us in our attempts to distinguish friend from foe. Is Una's evil merely a mirage on the part of the initially disoriented reader? Maybe so. But I find things to disturb me even in that final canto.

There, in the midst of the pre-wedding festivities, a messenger appears and delivers a letter, purportedly written by Fidessa, claiming that Red Cross Knight is not free to marry Una because he has already betrothed himself to her. When questioned about this by Una's father, Red Cross Knight responds with a distressingly weaselly speech in which he doesn't exactly deny the claims made against him, but doesn't admit to them either. Rather he disclaims ethical responsibility by insisting that, whatever happened, Duessa's magic would have inveigled any mere mortal.

It is distressing enough to hear the victorious and (supposedly) ethically cleansed Red Cross Knight engage in this kind of self-serving pettifoggery. Surely we are not meant to believe that Duessa's sorcery somehow relieves our knight of all moral responsibility for his philandering. But it is equally distressing to see Una then step in and derail the entire inquiry by pointing out—correctly but irrelevantly—but this supposed messenger is really Archimago in disguise. I say "irrelevantly,"



because neither the identity of the messenger nor that of the supposed victim has any bearing whatever on the truth status of the claims being made against Red Cross Knight. We thus find Una once again in her old role of enabling Red Cross Knight's moral lapses.<sup>6</sup> While in exposing Archimago she seems to foil his plot, at a deeper level it could be said that she nevertheless serves his purposes in abetting the ethical confusion that somehow persists in Red Cross Knight.

So in what sense is Una "evil"? She is never revealed to be a villain, in the manner of Archimago or Duessa. Which is to say that an evil interiority, initially hidden from view, is never exposed to the light of day. Indeed, I haven't adduced anything to convince us that Una possesses an evil interiority of this sort. Rather, she seems to have a knack for perfectly innocent acts and sayings that somehow have bad effects. Here I am tempted to invoke the Leninist notion of "objective guilt" recently revived by Slavoj Žižek. As he paraphrases this claim: "your intentions may be good and your desire to help people sincere, but, nonetheless, objectively, what you claim means, in this precise moment of the struggle, a support for the reactionary forces..."<sup>7</sup> In the same way, Una's intentions may be good and her desire to help people sincere, but her actions nevertheless often objectively serve the purposes of evil, regardless of her subjective state. Though on the other hand, I'm also trying to claim that we can't really know about that subjective state either, and that we tend therefore to project an *a priori* sort of goodness onto Una that a careful reading of the poem can't necessarily sustain. In this sense, I am at least provisionally endorsing the Stalinist turn on "objective guilt" also described by Žižek: "while Lenin remained at this level, claiming the access to the 'objective meaning' of the events, Stalin made a fateful step further and re-subjectivized this objective meaning. In the Stalinist universe, there are, paradoxically, ultimately no dupes, everyone knows the 'objective meaning' of his/her acts, so that, instead of the illusory consciousness, we get direct hypocrisy and deceit: the 'objective meaning' of your acts is what you REALLY WANTED, and your good intentions are merely a hypocritical mask."<sup>8</sup> I'm not conducting a Stalinist show trial, of course, but I am suggesting that Spenser's moral cosmos, obsessed as it is with "direct hypocrisy and deceit," may allow for a similar re-subjectivizing of Una's objective guilt—the difference being that it all remains constitutively fuzzy and inferential, in good Spenserian fashion, and not "clear" as in a Stalinist trial.

I think we can bring Una's ethical status into better perspective by returning to the concept of the "ethical syncope" I raised earlier, in which Una's evil is not a positive choice but rather a kind of momentary blacking out of her moral consciousness. Evil is here a mere absence or void rather than a positive presence. It does not achieve the status of

being but rather points to something absent from Una's being. I am phrasing the problem this way in order to invoke St. Augustine's notion of evil as privation. For Augustine, evil is not a counter-principle to God, an adversarial party subverting the goodness of creation from within, but merely the effect of distance from, or privation of, the full being with which God's goodness invests creation.<sup>9</sup> Evil is thus an emptiness at once ethical and ontological. It seems to me that this Augustinian notion does a better job of describing Una's evil than does any positive account of evil intent on her part.

At the same time, though, Augustine's notion is better adapted to describing evils suffered than evils perpetrated. Blindness, for instance, can easily be understood as the privation of sight. Augustine likewise sees the choice to commit evil acts as a turning away from the good, but the theory of privation has a harder time explaining how the will toward evil originates. In other words, Augustine's concept of lack or privation can help describe evil actions but it cannot obviously explain or account for them in any causal sense, as if the will to commit evil resulted from some pre-existing lack in the self. If there is some connection between evil as privation and an evil disposition, then, Spenser will have to think it through or invent it.

It might be fair to ask, first of all, whether the notion of evil as privation has any purchase in Spenser at all. I think that it does, and that Book I illustrates it in particularly vivid form. The paradigm here might be Orgoglio, the muscle-bound giant who turns out to be a kind of inflated bladder. Once pricked he collapses into nothingness. Duessa, when stripped of her gorgeous apparel, is likewise less than human rather than superhuman. Evil in Book I is more often than not a grand show concealing emptiness. Privation likewise afflicts the Sans brothers, defined by their lack of joy, faith, and law; and Abessa, whose name may suggest not only "abbess" but also the Latin *ab-esse*.<sup>10</sup> (Her ecclesiastical absenteeism ends up being doubled by Una's ethical "absence" with respect to Kirkrapine's murder.) Even the ambiguous satyrs are defined by their pagan lack of access to revealed truth.

Una, too, is a character shaped largely by privation, though first in the sense of evils suffered rather than evils done. Her condition is more or less defined by mourning, first for her parents, then both for her parents *and* Red Cross Knight. It is as if Una collects new forms of lack in the course of her journey. One possible path in this case from evils suffered to an actively evil will might be to convert loss into a secret source of enjoyment—to luxuriate in, or fetishize, privation itself. We needn't bother ourselves trying to imagine what this would look like in Spenser, since he depicts it for us directly as the practices of Catholic monasticism. It is thus once again no accident that Una, dressed rather like a nun from the very start of the poem, finds herself wandering into

the precincts of Abessa and Corceca. They are her specific temptation, the secretly pleasurable sin that may conceal itself beneath her mourning.

Of course, the attempt to attribute lack, much less a sin, to Una seems to be contradicted by her very name, which implies an unimpeachable integrity. Allegorically, Una is the “one” true faith or *una fides*, which is complete in itself and thus shuns admixture with other faiths, a completeness represented by her chastity. But even Una’s name is complicated. In Latin, *una* can be an adverbial form meaning “in one” or “together,” “unanimously.” As an adverb, *una* indicates not something complete unto itself but rather something that forms a unified whole precisely by combining or mixing with something else. The character Una is similarly incomplete; she must conjoin with Red Cross Knight in order to free her parents, and falls into mourning when left alone. She is deficient without him, as he is without her. Likewise, as we have seen, Una displays a characteristically Spenserian tendency to assimilate to her surroundings, as when she becomes blind of heart at Corceca’s house or when she reluctantly indulges the pagan idolatry of the satyrs.

Whether adjective or adverb, the Latin *una* is a modifier, not a substantive. It must attach itself to a grammatical entity, for it can designate only a quality or attribute, not a thing or person. Una’s name therefore points to the way in which her chaste and integral unity is shadowed by a promiscuous unity. That is, the unity that stands apart from others is accompanied by a tendency to unify with them, and thus to drift into strange propinquities with evil. This is not a “positive” evil on Una’s part, but a lack-in-being that afflicts her, and turns her into a kind of clinging vine. When Archimago conjures up dreams of a promiscuous Una in Red Cross Knight, then, he may not only be playing on the knight’s perverse wishes and fears but revealing a hidden dimension that really pertains to Una.

When I use the phrase “lack-in-being” to describe Una, I am invoking the standard English translation of Jacques Lacan’s term *manque-à-etre*—a phrase which, it seems to me, he must be adapting from Augustine. In the broadest sense, Lacanian “lack-in-being” designates the way in which the subject’s accession to language is simultaneously an alienation in language, which hollows out our real or bodily being and cancels the *jouissance* of our primordial connection to the maternal body.<sup>11</sup> While this Lacanian concept is not intrinsically or necessarily gendered, it does open up some issues of gender that may be pertinent, and allows us to ask: to what extent is Una’s “lack-in-being” connected with the fact that she is a female character? To put it bluntly: is what Una “lacks” the phallus, and is this the source of her evil? This question now seems painfully old-fashioned even to me, and I don’t intend to answer it. But I would at least like to flesh

it out a bit. Here we may turn from Lacan back to Freud, who in his 1925 essay, “Some Psychic Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction between the Sexes,” poses the relation between castration and female ethics in brutally direct form:

In girls the motive for the demolition of the Oedipus complex is lacking. Castration has already had its effect, which was to force the child into the situation of the Oedipus complex. Thus the Oedipus complex escapes the fate which it meets with in boys: it may be slowly abandoned or dealt with by repression, or its effects may persist far into women’s normal mental life. I cannot evade the notion (though I hesitate to give it expression) that for women the level of what is ethically normal is different from what it is in men. Their super-ego is never so inexorable, so impersonal, so independent of its emotional origins as we require it to be in men. Character-traits which critics of every epoch have brought up against women—that they show less sense of justice than men, that they are less ready to submit to the great exigencies of life, that they are more often influenced in their judgements by feelings of affection or hostility—all these would be amply accounted for by the modification in the formation of their super-egos which we have inferred above.<sup>12</sup>

For Freud, what determines the ethical character of women is not the lack of a phallus—at least not directly—but rather the lack of a castration complex. Because women are “already” castrated, Freud theorizes, the threat of future castration does not hang over their heads (or other bodily parts) as it does for men. Deprived of this capacity for punishment, the female superego is thus less inexorable in its demands, and women are consequently less strict in their moral outlook than men. I adduce Freud’s views here not in order to offer a psychoanalytic reading of Una’s “lack” but rather to show how St. Augustine’s intertwining of ethical and ontological privation can be given a gendered turn. If Freud has any explanatory value, it is simply as an inheritor of a long tradition in which Spenser also participates.

For me, the more interesting possibility is that Una’s ethical “lack-in-being” results not from her status as a female character but from her status as a fictional one. The fact is that Una doesn’t just lack a particular body part—she lacks a body altogether, since she is merely a literary construct. But Lacan’s claim that our lack-in-being results from our alienation in language is really just a way of saying that, at some level, we are all literary characters, composed of signifiers to which no real core of being corresponds. Allegorical personages of the type that Spenser creates, being conspicuously “hollow” from a characterological perspective, may be particularly well suited to depicting this dilemma. And the state of being “merely literary” may have an ethical dimension insofar as “lack” is a

synonym for “want.” To want in the sense of lacking is the condition for wanting in the sense of desiring. Una’s status as modifier lacking a substantive installs that promiscuous tendency toward connection or mixture that renders her as likely to couple with Archimago as with Red Cross Knight.

For Una, oneness is never an actual state but only an aspiration. But this is of course a generalized affliction for the characters of romance. Arthur, for instance, is left with only an empty place in the grass and an equally empty space in his heart after his dream of the Faerie Queene ends. The fullness of that dream paradoxically scoops him out, thus supplying the lack or desire that fuels his quest. If Spenser installs a hermeneutic of suspicion centered on Una, this may be simply to deny us the saving illusion that there are any exceptions to the rule. And if we are hesitant to face the possibility of Una’s evil, this may simply be because we are equally hesitant to face our own. We would all like to be the exception, the one whose ethical solidity shows up the hollowness of the others by contrast. The last thing we want to feel, therefore, is that we are at one with a threatening or disappointing Una. Whence arises our literary critical sin with respect to Una: the desire to convert her into a kind of allegorical museum-piece, the good but rather dull girl with which I began. I will end by offering a Spenserian name for this literary-critical sin: idolatry.<sup>13</sup> Perhaps the episode of Una among the satyrs could thus be retitled “Una among her Readers.” It seems to me, at least, that the salvage nation’s reaction to her is not so very distant from ours:

They in compassion of her tender youth,  
And wonder of her beauty soverayne,  
Are wonne with pity and unwonted ruth,  
And all prostrate upon the lowly playne,  
Doe kisse her feete, and fawne on her with countenance fayne.

(I.vi.12.5-9)

The satyrs are not wrong to note these attractive qualities in Una; but they are wrong to deify her on account of them. Being beautiful and pitiful does not a goddess make. (That their religious veneration is subtended by animal lust should also give us pause.) The satyrs simply can’t hear, or at least can’t understand, Una’s insistence that she is no god after all but merely human, all too human. Although our knees do not bend backward, it seems to me that some readers of *FQ* are still too quick to bow down before Una. We might therefore try to do a better job of attending to the demurrals that emanate from Una’s own lips—some intentional, but the more telling ones not so. What she is telling us is not that she is evil but that, like every other character in Book I, she *has* her evil—and a very interesting flavor of evil it is.

## Notes

1. I wish to thank the audience at the 2009 meeting of the International Spenser Society for their helpful and probing questions after the talk. I especially wish to thank Katherine Eggert and Judith H. Anderson who continued the conversation by e-mail, and provided invaluable references and suggestions.
2. The consensus position is well represented by Richard A. Levin, “The Legend of Redcross Knight and Una, or of the Love of a Good Woman,” *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 31:1 (Winter 1991), 1-24. A rare note of criticism is sounded in Dorothy Stephens, *The Limits of Eroticism in Post-Petrarchan Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998), which notes that “Una’s very innocence of intrigue leaves her unprepared to recognize its subtler shapes” (115). But even here it is an excess of goodness (as it were) that gets Una into trouble. There is a line of criticism that explores the theological instabilities caused by Una’s gender, but this is not the same as the kind of ethical criticism I will engage in here. See chapter two of Claire McEachern, *The Poetics of English Nationhood, 1590-1612* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 34-82, and the response by Harry Berger in “Sexual and Religious Politics in Book I of Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*,” *English Literary Renaissance* (2004), 201-242.
3. All quotations of Spenser are taken from Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A.C. Hamilton, revised second edition (Harlow: Pearson-Longman, 2001).
4. See Katherine Walls, “Abessa and the Lion: The Faerie Queene 1.3.1-12” *Spenser Studies* 5 (1985), 17: “At first, Una and the lion are a dramatically contrasting pair, but gradually they become indistinguishable.”
5. Judith H. Anderson points out to me that Una’s observations are timely in a good way, since this is night after all and Red Cross Knight does indeed need rest. This is true, but it would have been better if she hadn’t made the point just now, in the presence of Archimago.
6. Harry Berger, Jr. makes a similar argument in “Archimago: Between Text and Context,” *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 43:1 (Winter 2003), 19-64. See 54.
7. Slavoj Žižek, “Stalinism,” <http://www.lacan.com/zizstalin.htm>
8. *ibid.*
9. See Augustine, *On the Nature of the Good*, iii-xxiii; *Enchiridion*, xi-xv; and *On the Morals of the Manicheans*, ii-viii. For a useful corrective to common misunderstandings of Augustine’s position—as well as a critique of its philosophical

adequacy—see G. Stanley Kane, “Evil and Privation,”  
*International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion* 11:1 (1980),  
43-58.

10. See Michael O’Connell, *Mirror and Veil: The Historical  
Dimension of Spenser’s Faerie Queene* (Chapel Hill: U of North  
Carolina P, 1970), 50.

11. See Bruce Fink, *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language  
and Jouissance* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1996), 51-54.

12. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of  
Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey. 24 vols. (London: Hogarth  
Press, 1953-1974), 19: 257-58.

13. Harry Berger similarly describes Una as “the image of nar-  
rative idolatries” in “Sexual and Religious Politics,” 10.

