Book Reviews and Notices

41.01

Baseotto, Paola. *"Disdeining life, desiring leaue to die": Spenser and the Psychology of Despair.* Stuttgart: ibidem-Verlag, 2008. xiv + 184 pp. ISBN 3-89821-567-9. 24.90 € paperback.

Despite the subtitle, Paola Baseotto's short study is more about death than despair, since almost all of what she says about despair is closely linked to death and dying: death-wishes and suicidal feelings, deathless life and the despairing desire to escape life's pains, bereavement, mutability, decay, and the melancholy inspired by ruins. Death, Baseotto observes, is omnipresent in Spenser's works, but what makes Spenser's use of the motif distinctive is "the way in which death becomes a crucial test of the moral and spiritual condition of his characters" (2). Death offers the temptation of release; life, not death, haunts Spenserian characters as something to be endured. It is an *ars vivendi*, Baseotto argues, rather than an *ars moriendi*, that Spenser offers in his narratives of death, as another means of educating his readers in virtuous and gentle discipline through all his works.

The book has four chapters. In the first, Baseotto offers a summary of classical and Christian attitudes to mortality—the latter derived exclusively from the writings of reforming churchmen such as John Calvin, Thomas Becon, William Perkins, and Hugh Latimer, apart from one gloomy passage drawn from Ecclesiastes. If she intends this summary to serve as a portrait of Spenser's own attitudes about mortality, then Baseotto has no doubts about the nature of Spenser's Protestantism, to judge by the sources she employs. Baseotto observes that unlike most of his contemporaries, Spenser never dwells upon the decay of the body in his works. Spenser's talk of graves, worms, and epitaphs (such as it is) instead emphasizes the horrors of life and a consequent desire for death. The summary of the theological ground of Spenser's view of mortality seems overly pessimistic, however, and selectively pruned for the purposes of Baseotto's argument.

The second chapter concerns *The Faerie Queene*, which Baseotto calls "a rich gallery of portraits of utterly dejected people" (76). As one would expect, Baseotto devotes much of her analysis to Red Cross Knight's encounter with Despair, quite properly extending her discussion to the contrasting perspective offered the knight by Contemplation. In the struggles Red Cross Knight endures with his own desire for death, Baseotto sees a quintessentially Spenserian balancing act between encouraging sympathy in the reader for the character seeking an escape from despair through suicide, and demonstrating the impious horror of such an act. She considers Phedon, Pyrochles, and Timias more briefly and dispatches poor Amavia quickly. Looking ahead to her next chapter, Baseotto sees similarities between Red Cross Knight, Alcyon, and Timias not only in showing the usual outward marks of melancholy, but also in their being "immured in the life of the flesh that is death" (88), living too much as the old Adam and too little as the new. Baseotto is at her clearest and best in considering this dilemma. She rounds out her discussion by considering Maleger and Malbecco as embodiments of the unregenerate "old man" Spenser urges his readers to cast off.

Baseotto then turns to the "November" eclogue of *The Shepheardes Calender* and to *Daphnaïda*, arguing that while the first represents an ideal response to bereavement, the second demonstrates the perils of a too fleshly response to loss. "November" offers the reassurance that through faith, everything, "even tragedy, is endowed with meaning, as a bulwark against despair." In contrast, *Daphnaïda* is "an anthology of wrong attitudes and responses" (109). Baseotto's discussion of the later elegy is lengthy and fruitful. She addresses Alcyon's character in relation to the intended genre of the poem and in relation to the struggle between earthly and divine perspectives on loss she sees in *FQ*. Why has *Daphnaïda* received so much more attention in recent years than it has in most of the past four centuries? Our relationship with grief in the western world is dichotomous: gone are the public trappings of bereavement (widows weeds, black armbands, periods of mourning), yet we are treated to regular public confessions in word and deed of celebrity and semi-celebrity despair. Perhaps *Daphnaïda* does indeed have lessons to teach the emotionally saturated.

Baseotto closes her book by considering the contrasting visions of ruins and "Sabaoths sight" (*FQ* VIII.18). She usefully reminds her readers of the pervasiveness of complaint in Spenser's corpus. Small

quibbles: I wondered whether the essay collection on Spenser, Milton, and death edited by Jane Bellamy, Patrick Cheney, and Michael Schoenfeldt appeared too late for Baseotto to make much use of it (under such circumstances, one can easily imagine the despair inspired by its appearance in the author of a book largely about death); she relegates the book to footnotes in the introduction. I also noticed a confusion over which Cheney (Donald or Patrick) wrote one of the pieces she cites. It is a pity Baseotto did not draw Montaigne and Donne into her discussion of suicidal urges.

Baseotto argues that "Spenser's texts dramatize as a hell on earth the experience of those who, immersed in life's troubled water, often fail to keep 'Saboaths sight' in view" and that Spenser "focuses more on the psychological than on the spiritual consequences of this attitude" in his works (137). Are these not the same thing for Spenser? Overall, Baseotto persuasively describes a Spenser who sympathizes with those who suffer from the pains of living, yet urges his readers to keep in view the larger perspective of permanence free from sorrow promised in "Sabaoths sight" as a remedy for earthly (and earthy) mindedness. If this is indeed Baseotto's central argument, then it surely would strike Spenser himself as a measure of the secularity with which his works are now most commonly read that we should need a scholar to explain the state of being in the world, but not of the world—a state, I think, Baseotto proves that Spenser takes for granted.

Sean Henry teaches in the department of English at the University of Victoria, British Columbia. He has published on Spenser, and is in the midst of a long-term investigation of the permeation of natural history (and animals in particular) as a symbolic vocabulary throughout Spenser's works and the function culture has in creating early modern perceptions of the natural world.

Book Reviews and Notices

41.02

Staines, John D. *The Tragic Histories of Mary Queen of Scots, 1560-1690.* Burlington: Ashgate. 2009. vii + 278 pp. ISBN 978-0-7546-6611-0. $99.95 hardcover.

John D. Staines's rich study of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century writings of the tragic history of Mary Queen of Scots and their role in the development of the modern British public is an important work that breaks new ground and will be of value to a wide range of scholars. In his book, Staines follows the retelling of Mary's history from her lifetime through the Restoration of the late seventeenth century. Staines's book builds on the work of J. E. Phillips's book *Mary Stuart in Sixteenth-Century Literature* (1964). Staines also positions his work as a response to Jayne Elizabeth Lewis's *Mary Queen of Scots: Romance and Nation* (1998) by insisting on the importance of doing close readings that also put texts in careful political cultural contexts. Staines's book works as a fine companion piece to John Watkins's *Representing Elizabeth in Stuart England: Literature, History, Sovereignty* (2002).

Staines demonstrates how writers in England, France, and Scotland used Mary's tragic fall in a persuasive effort to move their audiences towards political action by manipulating the passions generated by her tragedy. Staines suggests that not only did the printed texts forming Mary's tragic histories produce emotions such as pity and anger, but that these emotions also moved the audience to publicly participate in the politics of the period. Staines discusses how the mobilization of popular sentiment became feasible with the development of the printing press along with a growing literate public. These developments transformed the state of politics as writers and politicians used written rhetoric to move audiences. That much of this rhetoric during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries focuses on Mary Queen of Scots points to the sharp ideological divisions permeating the period, and reemphasizes the Tudor and Stuart conflicts between Catholics and Protestants, royalists and republicans, and Whigs and Tories.

Mary's tragedy was a controversial narrative that underwent numerous versions throughout the early modern period. Staines examines the practice of rhetoric by studying how writers use narrative to create accounts of Mary's character and her fall that seek to shape the reader's response to the text. These texts move public audiences to political action by appealing not only to their reason but to their emotions. Through his examination of the retellings of Mary's tragedy, Staines discusses the emergence of two literary traditions that grow out of her history: one conservative, sentimental, and royalist, and the other radical, skeptical, and republican. Writers of each tradition represent Mary's tragic history to the public in ways that not only justify one side of a cause but also move the public to join said cause.

Staines continues his study with an examination of early accounts responding to Mary's execution and the resulting passions unleashed from her death. Due to Mary's self-presentation as both a martyr to the Catholic cause and an alternative to the Protestant Elizabeth, the rhetoric surrounding her life after her execution became even more polarized. Both Protestant and Catholic writers of Mary's death presented the public with narratives that sought to evoke tragic passions for political uses. Protestants attempted to falsify Mary's status as a martyr and portrayed her demise as a logical end to a threat against England, whereas Catholics responded to Mary's execution by focusing only on her tragic death in an attempt to evoke pity while overlooking the events that brought her to the scaffold.

Staines's discussion of Mary's tragedy in Book V of Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* is particularly insightful. He points out that historicist criticism often assumes that Spenser's allegory of Mary's trial reproduces the position Elizabeth and her government took against Mary. Through his exploration, however, Staines suggests that Spenser's retelling of the Elizabethan propaganda campaign against Mary actually casts a skeptical eye upon Elizabeth's government and her own public self-representation. Spenser uses Mary's tragic history to comment upon the deceitful practice of public rhetoric and representation in the public politics of Elizabeth's reign. Staines argues that Spenser was growing increasingly

frustrated with Elizabeth and women rulers, that he was arguing that monarchy should not have absolute or independent authority. Thus, Staines positions *FQ* as a founding text of the republican traditions of Mary Stuart's tragic presentations.

Upon Elizabeth I's death and James VI's ascension to the English throne, the political and rhetorical significance of Mary's tragic history underwent a transformation. Staines's work concludes with an examination of the changes occurring in the written rhetoric generated during the reign of Mary's son James VI followed by her grandson Charles I. With the shifting political climate of the seventeenth century writers formulated new accounts of the Queen of Scots that built sympathy for Mary's tragedy as a means of garnering support for the political and religious agenda of her son James, while political writing during the Civil War used Mary's tragedy as a way to attack Charles's character and politics.

Staines examines a variety of public print discourse that recounts the tragic history of Mary Queen of Scots such as government propaganda, ballads, political treatises, plays, and poems. Staines's innovative study is elegantly written and remarkably well researched with an impressive array of historical and literary sources to support his argument. His work not only reveals how contemporaries viewed Mary's tragic life, but also how literary representations of her tragedy are important in understanding British culture and politics in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This book is theoretically sophisticated but written in an accessible manner and will be of interest to those interested in rhetorical analysis, literary criticism, and history.

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Carole Levin is Willa Cather Professor of History and Director of the Medieval and Renaissance Studies Program at the University of Nebraska. She has published a number of books, including most recently *Dreaming the English Renaissance* (2008) and, co-authored with John Watkins, *Shakespeare's Foreign Worlds* (2009).

Book Reviews and Notices

41.04

Engel, William E. *Chiastic Designs in English Literature from Sidney to Shakespeare.* Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate. 155 pp. ISBN 978-0-7546-6636-3. £50 cloth.

William E. Engel's *Chiastic Designs* develops the interest in the philosophy of literary form and in early modern mnemonic culture pursued in his previous works, *Mapping Mortality: The Persistence of Memory and Melancholy in Early Modern England* (1995) and *Death and Drama in Renaissance England: Shades of Memory* (2002). His thesis in his latest book is that the aesthetic of chiasmus "provided authors with a basis for composition and reflection that opened the way to a place where literary revision and spiritual reformation became viable and—aided by art—realizable," and his method is a showcase of the implications of "thinking through" form (Engel 13-14). First, Engel thinks through and produces sustained literary readings: his analysis of the ring structure of Sidney's *Arcadia* via a close study of the Eclogues, for example, is able to demonstrate how the so-called *New Arcadia*, Mary Sidney and Fulke Greville's continuation of the unfinished romance, elaborates and clarifies Sidney's intended mnemonic scaffolding. (And who could resist the title of this chapter: "Echo in Arcadia"?) Secondly, Engel understands rhetorical figures, and in particular chiasmus, as a vehicle of and for thought: they encode and enable, rather than merely present, thinking. In discussing the rhetorical effectiveness of chiastic structures at the local, syntactical level as in humanist understandings of the name of King David, or at the larger level of the literary architectonics of the work—the divided geography and affect that is the structural crux at the heart of *Antony and Cleopatra*—he is also adept at demonstrating their self-reflexivity. Chiasmus can be a simple echo formula, but the trope extends its reach far beyond ABC-CBA schemes. In Engel's analysis it also carries the resources to imitate patterns of divine creation and thus to recuperate and restore mortal temporality. It is through this deeper signification that chiasmus presents itself as the master metaphor for early modern understandings of mortality and transcendence.

A closely argued chapter on the role of chiasmus in engaging the reader's memory theatre in religious poetry takes David as an ethically and rhetorically exemplary figure, via DuBartas and Quarles. In his most assured chapter, Engel focuses on the Eclogues in the *Arcadia*, demonstrating their aesthetic and ethical significance to Sidney's poetic practice. The repositioning of the double sestina "Ye goat-herd gods," and its numerological and chiastic patterning, is discussed as central to the architecture of the overall narrative structure. Engel sees the design of the *Arcadia* as deeply conscious of an affinity between rhetoric and memory arts, which its opening paragraph apostrophe to "Remembrance, Remembrance, restlesse Remembrance" establishes through repetition and echo. Diagrammatic depictions of the work's chiastic design make Book I look like a kind of "Easter Wings" shape poem. Readers of the *Spenser Review* will naturally be particularly interested in the chapter on Spenserian allegory, presented as a version of chiastic design, although this is not the book's most original section. Engel identifies the figure of the scrine, or storage chest, as a metaphor for accessing cultural and personal memory. Here, he builds on existing work that identifies Eumnestes' chamber as a memory site counterbalancing the drowsy amnesia of the Bower of Bliss. After a close analysis of the rhyming of scrine with "nine," he zooms back from this formal detail to consider Lodowyck Bryskett's description of *The Faerie Queene* as a "goodly cabinet." It is in such expert shifts of interpretative scale, from micro to macro, that Engel's readings are most compelling.

The book's final section is on "Shakespearean Triads," and focuses in particular on *The Two Noble Kinsmen* and *Pericles*. Engel draws out the shadow of myths of Diana and identifies the integration of women into communal structures as the project of the romance plays. Chiasmus—linguistic and structural—here "gives coherence to the chaos of human passions," and Engel makes interesting use of recent productions to highlight the work of the visual in this mnemonic schema (123). Including the music of *Pericles* as an example of its rhetorical patterning makes for an impressively integrated reading of the play's rhythm and dramaturgy. It is striking that Engel's chapter on Shakespeare concludes with examples from *Love's Labor's Lost*, long implicated in School of Night

esoterica. Identifying the play's "self-consciously artificial chiastic machinery" helps explain its strangeness, but for Engel what is at stake ultimately is the "place of the virgin huntress" in Shakespeare's work (131, 133). He suggests that this might be extended to investigate wronged heroines: Hero, Helena, or, more unexpectedly, Mariana (rather than Isabella), in *Measure for Measure*. Perhaps it is disappointing that Engel has focused his attention here on less familiar Shakespearean texts, since this material might have provided more purchase for pedagogical readings. (It is noteworthy that Engel describes his selection of texts as "those that lent themselves to practical classroom teaching;" it would have been wonderful to have some tips about how his careful illumination of often rather recalcitrant early modern works might be adapted by other teachers (viii).)

Twisting back on itself, chiasmus's structure of regress might seem to present a hermeneutics of impossibility, an understanding of self-canceling rhetoric which would demand a methodology derived from poststructuralism rather than from the Warburg school of intellectual history. Engel's critical vocabulary comes from Cassirer and Panofsky, and his aesthetic categories from Virgil, Ovid, and Aristotle: his is a "Renaissance," not an "early modern," reading. And he carries it all off with great erudition, lucidity, and commitment to his texts as wrought, purposive, and susceptible of exegesis. If his category of chiastic design becomes more capacious and elusive in the process, absorbing some of the reverberating implications of echo, mirroring, rhetoric, musical structure, pattern, memory, allegory, then his final words, "The hunt continues. The game is afoot," suggest that we have not yet had his final word on this absorbing subject (140).

Emma Smith is a fellow and tutor in English at Hertford College, University of Oxford.

Book Reviews and Notices

41.03

Kitch, Aaron. *Political Economy and the States of Literature in Early Modern England.* Surrey: Ashgate, 2009. 228 pp. ISBN 978-0-7546-6756-8. $99.95 cloth.

Aaron Kitch's innovative new book, *Political Economy and the States of Literature in Early Modern England*, situates early modern literary works in the context of sixteenth-century debates about trade, credit, and currency. Each chapter combines archival research, historical narrative, and sensitive close reading to recover the complexity of early modern economic theory and practice. In examining the connections between economic and literary discourse, Kitch contributes to a vibrant field of research established by Marc Shell, Jean-Christoph Agnew, Douglas Bruster, and Theodore B. Leinwand. *Political Economy* thus joins more recent books by Blair Hoxby, Jonathan Gil Harris, Richard Kroll, Valerie Forman, and others to show that there is a great deal yet to be said about the centrality of economic thought to early modern culture. In addressing an ambitious array of genres—epic, epyllion, tragedy, problem play, masque, civic pageant, and city comedy—Kitch adds significantly to this field of study.

Spenserians will be especially interested in chapter one, which not only offers a fascinating reading of Spenser's views on trade and wealth but also positions Spenser as a foil against which the characteristics of other writers emerge with particular clarity. Kitch argues that *The Faerie Queene* revises both the anti-acquisitive philosophy of its Virgilian models and the asceticism of certain strains of Protestant thought. Rather than reject the pursuit of wealth, Spenser develops a model of "heroic commerce" that understands vigorous trade as an important means of advancing the Protestant cause in Europe.

In chapter two, Kitch proposes that Marlowe, Chapman, and Shakespeare favor an Ovidian pursuit of pleasure over the Virgilian quest for power endorsed by Spenser. Yet, as Kitch shows, for all of these authors, sexual pleasure (like the economic and poetic pursuits to which it is analogously linked) is valuable only to the degree that it is understood "in terms of a humanist utility that is [. . .] firmly rooted in ideals of service to the state" (72). Accordingly, Marlowe "uses sexual love as a model for spiritual expression" (58); Chapman directs desire toward socially sanctioned marriage (64); and Shakespeare depicts Venus and Adonis's relationship "as an explicitly profit-oriented contract" (67).

The third chapter focuses on Thomas Nashe's *Lenten Stuffe*, which Kitch reads as a critique of the mercantilist dream of capitalizing on England's abundant supply of herring. Both Elizabeth I and James I encouraged this project by urging the consumption of fish during Lent and fasting days. Nashe, however, celebrates local autonomy against such centralized regulation. Kitch links this centrifugal economic argument to Nashe's attempts to replace patronage networks with the commodification of writing as a means of determining literary "value": like mercantilism, patronage interferes with the free market and discourages individual innovation.

In chapter four, Kitch traces the responses of Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* and Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* to an emergent definition of a Jewish nation based on trade. As Kitch shows, both Barabas and Shylock raise fundamental questions about the relationship between religion, trade, and national identity. Marlowe, Kitch argues, represents religious identity as a performance of acts, rather than an essential being. Shakespeare demonstrates the tensions between a Christian universalism that assumes shared religious and cultural practices and an economic nationalism based on the pursuit of profit.

Chapter five focuses on Middleton's city comedies to explore the difficulties that arise when financial relations depend on the appearance of good character. As Kitch shows, in the absence of systematic methods of accounting and evaluating risks, creditworthiness was determined according to social status and honest behavior—both of which can be faked. Middleton's rejection of formal closure registers the paranoia and endless testing that such an association of credit and character can generate.

The final chapter proposes that court masques and civic pageants offered competing economic and literary models. The civic pageant, Kitch argues, "employed didactic modes of poetry to instill the virtues of thrift

and honesty" (160). By contrast, the court masque "cultivated aristocratic virtues of magnificence and liberality" (160) and developed lengthy antimasques to satirize challenges to royal prerogative. As this chapter persuasively demonstrates, economic, political, and literary concerns continued to intersect in seventeenth-century thought.

As engaging and persuasive as Kitch's book is, it is not without a few shortcomings. The most troubling of these is Kitch's tendency to pursue his thesis with such single-mindedness that nuances, contradictions, and counterarguments sometimes go conspicuously unacknowledged. Although generally sensitive to generic issues, Kitch conflates romance and epic with disconcerting ease in his discussion of Spenser. One instance of this failure to note the imprecision of these generic categories occurs when Kitch asserts that "[c]onventionally epic poetry regards trade as an obstacle to heroic virtue" and cites as examples Homer's *Odyssey*, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Chrétien de Troyes's *Cligés*, and Luis de Camões's *Lusiad* (28). Kitch perhaps means "epic" to be loosely synonymous with "heroic" here, rather than in any strict generic sense. But since genre is so central to his argument, a more careful definition of terms would have been helpful, as would at least a brief discussion of important work on the relationship between epic and romance by such scholars as Colin Burrow, Patricia Parker, and David Quint. To cite another example, Spenserians might raise an eyebrow when Kitch asserts that "Nashe's juxtaposition of popular oral forms of culture with numerous literary styles challenges the closure and unification of Spenser's epic" (79). Such a claim overlooks the conflicting generic investments, deferred conclusions, and influences of popular culture that have long occupied critics of *FQ* (I'm thinking here of scholars like Burrow, Parker, Harry Berger, Jr., Jonathan Goldberg, and Mary Ellen Lamb, to name just a few). Kitch also occasionally reduces complex writers into simplified straw men, as when he argues that when Marlowe and Milton link poetry to trade they "deny the fantasy of transcendence at the heart of Sidney's aristocratic vision of poetry, which revels in playfulness and leisure as ways of forgetting material obligations" (72). Those familiar with studies by Blair Worden, Robert Stillman, and others who have treated Sidney's aesthetic theory as an expression of his humanist principles and Protestant conviction may be surprised to hear Kitch unceremoniously dismiss Sidney's poetics as pleasure-seeking escapism. Finally, a number of typographical errors—duplicated sentences, missing and misspelled words, and stray punctuation marks—create unnecessary distractions, making one wish for more careful editing.

On the whole, however, Kitch's *Political Economy* is an important contribution to our understanding of both economic and literary history. It more than repays the reading.

Melissa E. Sanchez is an Assistant Professor of English at the University of Pennsylvania. She has published widely on gender, sexuality, and politics in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century literature, and she is the author of *Erotic Subjects: The Sexuality of Politics in Early Modern English Literature* (Oxford UP, forthcoming).

Articles: Abstracts and Notices

41.05

Herron, Thomas. "Edmund Spenser's 'Cleopolis' and Dublin." *Dublin in the Medieval World: Studies in Honour of Howard B. Clarke.* Ed. John Bradley, Alan J. Fletcher and Anngret Simms. Dublin: FCP 2009. 448-56.

Spenser's poetic topography is predominantly rural but cities do appear, real and imagined, often in idealized form. Spenser's imagined cities include real places such as London and, as this paper will argue, Dublin: specifically, Dublin may be allegorized in the shining but flawed Cleopolis that is nostalgically evoked by Red Cross Knight in *The Faerie Queene* I. Topographical coincidences between the poem's description and Dublin's early modern landscape bolster this reading. Cleopolis emblematizes Spenser's New English aspirations for renewing Ireland's civic polity, beginning with its capital, where his illustrious and problematic career flourished before he moved on to the Munster plantation in the late 1580s. The paper is based on one delivered at the 2001 International Spenser Conference in Cambridge.

41.06

Herron, Thomas. "Irish Archaeology and the Poetry of Edmund Spenser: Content and Context." *Plantation Ireland: Settlement and Material Culture, c.1550–c.1700*. Ed. James Lyttleton and Colin Rynne. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2009. 229-47.

Appearing in a collection of historical and archaeological articles, this essay argues that Spenser's poetry has much to offer the archaeologist and archaeology the Spenserian. It stresses how insights into the material and cultural significance of the Munster plantation, and its colonial *mentalité*, are gained by emphasizing the Irish content and context of some of Spenser's later poetry, in particular *FQ* and *Epithalamion*. Spenser is not simply anxious about buried Irish ghosts, as Philip Schweizer suggests. Insights into Spenser's vast poetical oeuvre continue to come to light through study of the general and minute particulars of Ireland's post-medieval archaeology and settlement history, itself at an exciting time of growth. In particular, recently published work on Spenser's Kilcolman Castle, County Cork, and the Munster plantation by Eric Klingelhofer offers an exciting opportunity to study Spenser's landscape features and use of the pastoral genre from the point of view of material culture.

Abstracts of Conference Activities

41.07

Brad Tuggle, Instructor at Spring Hill College
"Thinking about Fiction and Reality in the House of Busirane"
Kalamazoo Spenser Sessions Abstract

The House of Busirane episode of *The Faerie Queene* presents readers with what Mary Carruthers calls a "ductus," or path, through a series of encounters with "persons." The ekphrastic descriptions of Busirane's house progress from the least life-like, two-dimensional figures in the tapestries of the first room, to static three-dimensional figures like the bas-reliefs and the statue of Cupid, and then to the animated three-dimensional figures in the Masque of Cupid. But the masquers are themselves wraith-like allegories, not human persons. Finally, in the inner chamber of Busirane's unholy temple, Britomart meets her living counterpart, Amoret, and the vile magician, Busirane himself. But though life-like, these three figures are themselves, as James Joyce would write, "signs on a white field," specters of literary imagination rather than "real-life" humans. If the progression from non-living to living is to continue, then the poem must allow readers to make a final leap from representation to reality, from character to person, from fiction to world. Spenser's poem thus presents a complex thought experiment about literary character and personhood.

Current and recent analytic philosophers, such as Noel Carroll, Kendall Walton, and Richard Rorty, have attempted various answers to the so-called problems of fiction: why do we respond with real emotions to fictional events? what can we "know" about fictional persons? and why do we enjoy tragedies and horror films? In other words, how do our responses to and knowledge about fictional entities resemble our responses to and knowledge about the real world? These very questions might also be helpful in interpretation of Spenser's thinking in the House of Busirane. In literary criticism, a similar debate arose in the twentieth century over the reality of literary characters. A. C. Bradley, L. C. Knights, and A. D. Nuttall offered different perspectives on the verisimilitude (or lack thereof) of Shakespearean characters such as Lady Macbeth and Falstaff. For example, Bradley famously posed the question, "How many children had Lady Macbeth?" an essentially unanswerable question, but one that reveals a treatment of fictional characters as if they were somehow real. In Spenser studies, critics including Maureen Quilligan, Lauren Silberman, and Harry Berger, Jr., interrogate Britomart's own problematic status as literary character. I want to go further and ask questions such as, "Where is Britomart's mother?" I argue that these interrogations should begin with the presentation of persons in the artwork of Busirane's house. As Spenser eases Britomart and her readers through a hierarchy of personhood, he also interrogates the very notion of personhood. Drawing on these insights, I show how Spenser's philosophical puzzlement about fictional personhood is one of the chief driving forces behind Spenser's thinking in the House of Busirane, ultimately with consequences for readers' thinking about their ethical relationships with real persons. Spenser's meditation, and his readers', begins with art, but ends in life.

Conference Activities

Spenser at MLA 2011 in Los Angeles

41.08

Friday, 07 January
196. "The Poet's Poet: A Spenser Roundtable"
8:30–9:45 a.m., Platinum Salon B, J. W. Marriott
Program arranged by the International Spenser Society
Presiding: Jeffrey A. Dolven, Princeton U.
Speakers: Roland Greene, Stanford U; Joseph Foster Loewenstein, Washington U; James Carson Nohrnberg, U of Virginia; Colleen Rosenfeld, Rutgers U, New Brunswick; Germaine Warkentin, U of Toronto
The topic is Spenser's influence on the history of his craft, and each of our five speakers will single out one gift that Spenser has gave to a subsequent poet, some element of the Spenserian poetics, be it tropological, metrical, structural, imagistic, whatever. By means of these five brief lessons we hope to substantiate the familiar claim that Spenser is the poet's poet. The panel will be as attentive to usefulness as to influence, taking the techniques we discuss not just as evidence for the construction of literary histories, but as potentially live properties for future poetry. What are Spenser's signature moves? How do they work? What did Milton, Stevens, Dickinson, Merrill, or others do with them? And even, what's next?

41.09

Saturday, 08 January
499. Luncheon Arranged by the International Spenser Society
12:00 noon, location to be announced
For reservations, email Rhonda Lemke Sanford (Rhonda.Sanford@fairmontstate.edu) by the 18th of December. Jennifer Summit will present the MacLean lecture this year. Her talk is entitled, "'Bequeathed Care': Rethinking Spenser's Contemplation."

41.10

Sunday, 9 January
783. Spenser and Marlowe: Authorship, Aesthetics, Influence
12:00 noon–1:15 p.m., Platinum Salon F, J. W. Marriott
"Spenser and Marlowe: Authority, Aesthetics, Influence," co-sponsored by the International Spenser Society and the Marlowe Society of America.
Presiding: Bruce R. Smith, U of Southern Califormia
Speakers:
"Spenser and Marlowe: English Authorship and the Early Modern Sublime." Patrick Cheney, Pennsylvania State U
"It's Tough Being a Genius: Bees, Butterflies, and Poetic Stockpiling in Marlowe and Spenser." Meghan Davis, U of Southern California
"Duelling Poets: Marlowe vs. Spenser in *The Merchant of Venice* and *Measure for Measure*." Lauren Silberman, Baruch College, CUNY