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The Unfulfilled Form of *The Faerie Queene*: Spenser's Frustrated Fore-Conceit

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Résumé de l'article

Cet article propose une reconstruction des intentions autoriales d'Edmund Spenser, au moment où il compose un poème épique en douze livres. Afin d'atteindre cet objectif, l'auteur y réexamine le processus compositionnel qui a donné lieu à la forme « inachevée » de l'oeuvre. Elle fait valoir que la structure en six parties de l'édition de 1596 a vu le jour à travers la révision et l'adaptation par Spenser de son plan architectonique, développé au début de son travail d'écriture. L'article montre que la conception préliminaire qu'avait Spenser du contenu et du propos du poème reposait sur la prévision d'un mariage royal entre Elizabeth Tudor et un courtisan protestant militant, le candidat le plus probable étant Robert Dudley, comte de Leicester. Suivant ce plan, le poème aurait pris fin avec un épithalame royal pour le mariage d'Arthur-Magnificence et Gloriana-Gloire, une union qui aurait également représenté un triomphe millénaire pour la réforme protestante, dirigé par l'église anglaise militante. L'article montre également comment, étant donné que la prévision ne s'est pas réalisée et que l'histoire n'a pas répondu à l'intention de Spenser, le poète a changé et adapté le texte, afin que, dans l'édition de 1596, le poème exprime la déception et la désillusion qui a résulté du refus de la reine de se marier et, de façon générale, du « compromis élisabéthain » qui a maintenu le contrôle sur la faction militante de la cour.

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This essay is an attempt to recover the political and formal intentions that moved Edmund Spenser to conceive and begin composing what was to be a twelve-book epic poem. In order to make these speculations, we must reconsider the compositional process that resulted in the "unfinished" form of *The Faerie Queene*.[1] One way to analyze the six-part structure of the 1596 edition is to see how its form came about as a revision and adaptation of Spenser's architectonic "fore-conceit" — the initial arrangement for the epic, as he imagined it when he first began writing the poem. It is my claim

that the poet's preliminary conception of his poem's content and purpose was based upon the prediction of a royal marriage between Elizabeth Tudor and a militant Protestant courtier — the most likely candidate being Robert Dudley, the earl of Leicester. According to this plan, the poem would have ended with a royal epithalamion for the marriage of Arthur-Magnificence and Gloriana-Glory, a union that would also signify a millennial triumph for the Protestant Reformation, led by the English Church Militant. I want to show how, as history failed to fulfill the prophecy of Spenser's "whole intention," the poet changed and re-purposed his text, so that, in the 1596 edition, the partial poem was reshaped and reconceived to express the disappointment and disillusion that resulted specifically from the queen's refusal to marry and generally from an "Elizabethan compromise" that held back the militant faction at court.[2] The failure of Spenser and his patrons to achieve their ambitions is the topical, political reality that came to disrupt the order of Spenser's original formal plan. This shift in form and purpose restructured the poem as an intentionally "endlesse" text, exhibiting the sense of crisis and resembling the partial and tentative modality of signification that we have come to associate with postmodernity, rather than the finished balance and wholeness of a neo-classical structure modelled on Virgilian epic.[3] What seemed, at first, to be the beginning of a new, chiliastic age, in which the Protestant Church Militant would rise and throw off papal falsehood and tyranny, became a test of faith. As Spenser and other militant Protestants saw it, Elizabeth's refusal to marry delayed the messianic process.

The Faerie Queene of 1596 represses and reevaluates the premature pre-diction of a Protestant triumph — a victory that seemed possible in the early years of Spenser's career. The high-toned prophecy which suggested that an English "elect nation" would follow the providential victory over the Spanish Armada with further success dissolves into a more cynical and world-weary poetic strain. The hopes for an apocalyptic Protestant victory in Europe, for the union of Glory and Magnificence, are not abandoned completely, but by the end of Book VI such proclamations of transcendent unity are interrupted by the disorganized noise of the Blatant Beast.[4]

Nonetheless, the presaged union of Gloriana-Elizabeth with a British Protestant bridegroom (a latter-day Arthur) provided Spenser with the poli-tical basis and prophetic origin of his epic undertaking.[5] This was Spenser's original conception of the poem as a whole (what Philip Sidney, in The Defence

of Poesy, calls the poet's "fore-conceit").[6] As time revealed that the queen would never marry, the meaning of the forecast marriage changed and developed in several different ways. First, the anagogical meaning of the marriage of Arthur and Gloriana remained and was stressed: millennial and messianic prophecies predicted the marriage of Magnificence and Glory, but the prophecy's significance was increasingly a matter of faithful fortitude and continued struggle, rather than an immediately achievable goal of a worldly, material nature.[7] Second, Spenser's praise of procreative sexuality was increasingly accompanied by implicit criticism of Elizabeth's virgin state. And third, Spenser came to emphasize the idea that deferral, delay, and denial of closure are the essential features of politics, art, and language.

The way in which Spenser managed to revise and refigure the central "conceit" of his epic attests to a poetic agility that can be fully appreciated only if we are aware of how *The Faerie Queene* evolved under the pressure of the Elizabethan marriage question. If Elizabeth had married Leicester, perhaps Spenser would have spent his time at court, completing his epic instead of working for the English administration in Ireland. Such a marriage would have encouraged Spenser to fulfill his plan by bringing Gloriana and Arthur together in an epithalamic conclusion. As it was, the ambitious project that Spenser conceived in the late 1570s was never completed: Spenser was only willing or able to finish six books. Nonetheless, we should not dismiss Spenser's fore-conceit as insignificant or irrelevant to our interpretation of *The Faerie Queene*. An examination of Spenser's epic framework, taking into account the dynamic evolution and improvisational modification of that framework, is important to our understanding of the epic because the very dissolution and contraction of that greater plan produced the form of the poem as we know it. The traces of the fore-conceit remain as a defining element in the poem's final structure.

Spenser's fore-conceit was a premise that defined Elizabeth Tudor's virginity as a temporary state, during which English noblemen would "court" or woo the queen, proving themselves through their heroic deeds and offering their service as Petrarchan lovers.[8] Presumably, one suitor would then pass through the trials of desire and achieve kingship by marriage. Thus, Spenser's celebration of monogamous sexuality was directly relevant to the political situation of the time, in particular, to a court where a female monarch remained unmarried instead of joining in the sacred cycle of life, sex, and procreativity that was at the centre of Spenser's work.[9] What historians have called the Elizabethan

"marriage question" was a matter of personal ambition for courtiers like Robert Dudley who might have married the queen; for both court and Parliament it became an increasingly anxious question about the political future of England, the Tudor succession, and political stability. Spenser's advocacy of wedded love was produced within the historical context of the Elizabethan marriage question, and it was initially conceived as a poetic intervention in that debate.

Spenser's glorification of chaste marriage is closely linked to his patrons' demand for a marriage between the queen and an English Protestant courtier. In this sense, the glorification of "chastity" in *The Faerie Queene* was directed toward Elizabeth herself. Such a royal marriage was a real possibility during the years that Spenser began composing *The Faerie Queene*. Even after a royal match no longer seemed possible, when the Queen was too old to bear children, Spenser continued to use the promise of a royal marriage as a plot-shaping principle in the composition of his epic. In effect, Spenser's thwarted desire for such a wedding produced the narrative pattern of promise and deferral that shapes the entire epic.

During Spenser's entire career as a poet, the uncertain future of the Tudor line presented an urgent political problem. The marriage question (including the corollary issue of succession) occupied English politics from Elizabeth's accession in 1558 until the final years of her reign.[10] At first, the most obvious solution to this problem was for Elizabeth to marry and give birth to heirs. For some time, the possibility of such a marriage shaped the ambitions of Spenser's patron Robert Dudley, the earl of Leicester, who was Elizabeth's greatest favourite during the first two decades of her reign. A royal marriage with Leicester seemed most likely during the early 1560s, but this hope was frustrated and then all but extinguished in 1579 when Leicester's secret marriage with Lettice Knollys was revealed to the queen.[11] Dudley died in 1588, not long after the defeat of the Spanish Armada. Following Leicester, there were other favourites (Raleigh, then Essex) and other potential marriages. The queen continued to negotiate for a possible marriage with the Duc d'Alençon until 1581, despite the fact that she was probably no longer able to bear children.[12] After that, there was little hope of a royal marriage, though the problem of royal succession remained unresolved. The Parliaments of 1559, 1563, and 1566 had all submitted formal demands to the queen urging her to marry as soon as possible. During the first 25 years of her reign, the queen responded to the many heated requests for a royal marriage by promising, delaying, and defending her prerogative to

choose her own husband. After 1582, it became clear that she would never wed, but Elizabeth retained the political strategy and Petrarchan propaganda that she had established as a marriageable monarch: she continued to encourage and solicit the "courtship" of male aristocrats, favourites, and clients.

The limited information available about Spenser's career at court, along with what we can determine from his poetry, reveals a man who was highly ambitious but had limited success in his bid for power and position.[13] Though we do not know many details about Spenser's political activities during the 1570s, it is clear that the late 1570s form a crucial point in his career, during which he came to commit himself and his poetry to a group of patrons who hoped that the question of succession would be resolved by Elizabeth's marriage to an English Protestant nobleman. Spenser's political loyalties were primarily to the Dudley and Sidney families (these two groups were allied by marriage), but his poetic aspirations were also aimed at the queen herself. For an ambitious young poet and scholar seeking service at court or with the queen, the marriage question must have been a topic of constant speculation and debate. Would the earl of Leicester become royal consort? If not, who would be Elizabeth's husband?

We have solid evidence that Spenser began writing *The Faerie Queene*, which he formally dedicated to Queen Elizabeth, at least as early as 1579. Probably, some sections of the poem were composed even earlier. Given our knowledge of the lengthy process by which courtly poetry like Spenser's was composed, presented to friends and patrons, and then gradually distributed beyond the first circle of readers, we can postulate that Spenser first conceived and wrote partial drafts of his epic poem during the mid-1570s, when the marriage question was still very much alive. Early versions or portions of the poem may have had an important audience at court long before the first three Books were printed in 1590 and made available to the book-buying public.

In the dedicatory epistle that is prefixed to the *Shepheardes Calender* (1579), E. K. is already referring to Spenser as an accomplished writer and author of "sundry" works. E. K. hopes that these other works will also see the light of print, that the publication of the *Shepheardes Calender* will lead Spenser "to put forth divers other excellent works of his, which sleep in silence, as his Dreams, his Legends, his Court of Cupid and sundry others…."[14] These "lost" works and others mentioned elsewhere are thought to have been incorporated into Spenser's later publications, especially *The Faerie Queene*.[15]

E. K.'s "Court of Cupid" most likely became the "maske of Cupid" that appears during Britomart's visit to the House of Busirane at the end of Book III. It also seems likely that parts of the epic's second installment were written very early on and then circulated in manuscript as separate texts before being added to the later books of the evolving epic. For example, the marriage of the Thames and Medway in Book IV apparently preexisted separately as the *Epithalamion Thamesis*. Spenser gives a detailed account of this text in an April 1580 letter to Gabriel Harvey — a description that fits perfectly the marriage of the Thames and Medway in Book IV of *The Faerie Queene*.[16] In the same letter, Spenser refers to a poem that he has recently sent to Harvey which he calls "my Faery Queene," as if it were already, in some sense, a coherent and substantial body of verse.[17] Thus, we should think of the conception and development of *The Faerie Queene* and its political allegory as an extended process that can be traced back to Spenser's early career.[18]

During 1579/80, Spenser's career hopes were at their high point: he had finished his studies at Cambridge and was seeking preferment at court. By late 1579, it is likely that Spenser was employed in the household of the earl of Leicester. In a letter he wrote to Harvey in October of 1579, Spenser reports that he may be sent to France on a diplomatic mission by Leicester. In the same letter, he tells Harvey about his contacts with important patrons, including Philip Sidney, Edward Dyer, and Leicester. Spenser reports that "little news is here stirred: but that old great matter still depending. His honor [Leicester] never better."[19] "That old great matter" clearly alludes to the queen's possible marriage. It was just at this time that Elizabeth, now 46, had reopened negotiations with the French for a possible marriage with Alençon. Leicester and the other courtiers in his faction were intensely involved in opposing that match, and though Leicester was now married himself, he helped lead the fight to prevent Elizabeth from choosing a French Catholic as her consort. Opponents of the match on the Council resisted it vigorously for a two-year period, from 1579 to 1581, until the queen finally gave in to the pressure. Spenser must have been thinking of this issue as he began to plan and compose his epic.[20]

That Spenser had been carefully planning ahead for his epic poem is also indicated by some of his comments in the "Letter of the Authors" to Sir Walter Raleigh that was included in the 1590 edition of *The Faerie Queene*. The "Letter to Raleigh" provides Spenser's readers with a blueprint of the poem's full form, extending far beyond *The Faerie Queene*'s first three books.[21] There

are many clues in the "Letter" and in the text of *The Faerie Queene* that may help us to surmise the shape of the imagined but unfulfilled whole.[22] The "Letter to Raleigh" was published with the three-book edition of 1590 but was removed from the six-book version of 1596. Possibly, Spenser felt that he could not live up to its sweeping claims; more likely, by 1596 his concept for the poem had already changed. In 1590, however, Spenser was able to describe the projected framework of the poem as if it were essentially complete. Platonically speaking, the intended "idea" of the epic was already established in his mind: it required only the elaboration of "particular purposes or by-accidents" to give it material form.[23] The "Letter" describes "the whole course" of Spenser's twelve-book cycle, which will follow the circle of the solar year during which twelve questing knights venture forth from the court of the Fairy Queen and return at the end of the year to her annual feast.[24] Arthur's virtue of magnificence will contain all of the twelve subordinate virtues: "In the person of Prince Arthur I set forth magnificence in particular, which virtue for that … is the perfection of all the rest, and containeth in it them all … . But of the xii other virtues, I make xii other knights the patrons, for the more variety of the history." Each book will have its patron knight, and the last book will lead the reader back to the origin of all the knights' quests:

> The beginning…of my history, if it were to be told by an Historiographer, should be the twelfth book which is the last, where I devise that the Faery Queene kept her Annuall feast xii. days, uppon which xii. severall days, the occasions of the xii. severall adventures hapned, which being undertaken by xii. severall knights, are in these xii books severally handled and discoursed.[25]

Presumably, the twelfth book of Spenser's first epic cycle would describe the origins of the twelve quests and would prepare the way for the reunion of the twelve virtuous knights at the next banquet a year later. The completion of their quests would also allow for the accomplishment of Prince Arthur's quest: his search for Gloriana, the Faery Queen, would end with their reunion and wedding — and his coronation. As King of Britain, Arthur would lead a Protestant-Christian army against Rome in a second twelve-book cycle that would describe a series of battles against the forces of "that proud paynim King" (FQ, I.xii.18), and would culminate in the "retaking" of the imperial capital.[26]

Spenser's allegory of Magnificence and Glory refers both to the course of sacred history and to contemporary politics. The mystical meaning implied in Spenser's references to the union of Arthur and Gloriana has a historically specific grounding in the identification of Gloriana with Elizabeth I. The allegorical marriage of Arthur and Gloriana in *The Faerie Queene* was conceived by Spenser as referring, in part, to the possible marriage of Elizabeth to a Protestant English courtier. However, the meaning of Arthur's projected marriage to Gloriana was not limited to the level of topical or political allegory: it also refers to the mystical marriage of Magnificence and Glory — a union with apocalyptic implications. Through his allusions to the future marriage of Arthur and Gloriana, Spenser was attempting to incorporate the central political dilemma of his generation within his poem's prophetic treatment of Christian history.

In his allegorical account of Gloriana, Spenser presents an imaginary version of Elizabeth who may yet be destined to marry and produce heirs. The union of Arthur and Gloriana — which is the objective of Arthur's quest — is the central goal of Spenser's prophetic poem: it is in this promised end that religious and historical allegories merge most audaciously for Spenser the would-be prophet. Here, it seems, Spenser had initially imagined the future of Elizabeth Tudor, the Virgin Bride of the Elect Nation, as the bride of an English Protestant king. A hint of this is found in her name, Tanaquill, first mentioned in the Proem to Book I. This name refers to Caia Tanaquil, the Etruscan wife of the fifth Roman king, Tarquinius Priscus. According to legend, she was a strong woman, gifted with prophetic powers, who predicted that her husband had the makings of a king and urged him to go to Rome to seek power. Through her prophecies and actions, she succeeded in bringing both her husband and his successor, Servius Tullius, to the Roman throne. According to one Roman source, she took the name Gaia Caecilia upon her arrival in Rome, and by this name she was thought to be the source of various Roman wedding customs.[27] This name, then, was chosen by Spenser for his Elizabeth figure, the Faery Queen. But why? Spenser usually selects or creates names for his characters that serve his allegorical purpose in some meaningful way. The choice of Tanaquill only makes sense if we see it as a name that encodes his desire to see Elizabeth Tudor as a royal wife and kingmaker. If Tanaquil-Gloriana is to be identified with Elizabeth (and Gloriana is never seen directly in the poem, though she is invoked and addressed many times), then with whom do we identify her more

visible male counterpart, Prince Arthur? Does Arthur, like Gloriana, stand for a living person? And does Arthur's search for Gloriana correspond to any real attempt to woo and win Elizabeth herself? In the original conception of his epic, Spenser hints at an allegorical association between his sometime patron, Robert Dudley, and his central hero, Arthur.

Like the Arthur of chivalric legend, Dudley was a man who would be king. He was a nobleman who hoped to draw the sword of militant Protestantism from the stone of the queen's pacifism and lead the nation in victory against Britain's Roman (Catholic) enemies.[28] Dudley rose to prominence at the beginning of Elizabeth's reign. It was Dudley whom the Spanish ambassador referred to as "the king that is to be" as early as January 1560, and who continued to make himself available to the queen during the 1570s (despite three clandestine marriages).[29] In 1564, Dudley was created earl of Leicester by the queen, and she granted him extensive economic powers. He was a skilled horseman, excelled at jousting, and for many years was the leading champion in Elizabeth's neo-chivalric tournaments.[30] He was a great patron of arts and letters: "At least 98 books were dedicated to him," by one count.[31] All of these qualities and privileges made him a figure of Magnificence at court.[32]

Perhaps the most dramatic instance of Leicester expressing his magnificent patronage in an effort to praise the "Glory" of Elizabeth and gain her favour was the extended visit of the queen to Dudley's estate at Kenilworth in the summer of 1575. Over a period of eighteen days, Elizabeth's host provided elaborate entertainments: according to Susan Frye, these expensive events "incorporated nearly every allegorical, narrative, and festive form conceivable."[33] To take just two examples, the welcoming device that was staged at the entrance to Kenilworth included multiple assertions of a mythic lineage to be traced back from the earl of Leicester to King Arthur. And secondly, although it was never enacted, Dudley had sponsored and prepared for performance a masque of Diana and Iris written by George Gascoigne. The printed text of this masque reveals that it was to be a debate between the virtues of virginity and those of marriage in which the Queen was cast in the role of a nymph "Zabeta" whom Juno intends to elevate "on Hymen's bed." Spenser may well have been aware of the Arthurian role taken on by Leicester, and of his continuing efforts to question or challenge the queen's cult of virginity during the 1570s.

As Susan Frye has shown, Dudley and Elizabeth's relationship was marked, not only by the queen granting him favour, position, and privilege at

court, but also by Dudley's long struggle to increase his power and influence by leading the Protestant cause in an arena beyond the borders of England — and Elizabeth's concomitant efforts to control and limit his power and ambition. As early as the mid-1570s, Dudley and the militant Protestants at court had called for English intervention in the Low Countries to help push back against Spain, but Elizabeth resisted the cost and risks and prevented any major commitment of resources. Near the end of his life, however, Leicester was finally given a chance to direct the English in battle against a Spanish, Roman Catholic force when, in 1585, he was appointed to command the English army that was sent to oppose Spanish aggression in the Low Countries.

The political allegory of the 1596 *Faerie Queene* refers to these events and confirms Leicester's identification with Arthur. In the Belge episode of Book V, canto x, Arthur's defeat of Geryoneo is clearly identified with Leicester's expedition against Spanish forces in the Low Countries in 1585/86. In fact, when Dudley arrived in the Low Countries to take command of a combined Anglo-Dutch army, "the preliminary spectacles that greeted Dudley represented a symbolic marriage with Elizabeth in which their personal impresae were joined with the inscription '*Quoa Deus coniunxit homo non separet*' — whom God hath joined together, let no man put asunder."[34] While he remained in the Netherlands, Dudley was received by his Dutch allies as a prince who might become the ruler of the Protestant States General. At his entry to The Hague on January 6, 1586, he was hailed in verse: "mighty Arthur, ruling Britain, drove out those who persecuted the people, with an eternal honour which does not fade, and protected the orthodox of his time, for he is remembered as a glorious prince: we hope that you will be a second Arthur."[35] When Elizabeth discovered that Dudley was pursuing his own ambition and engaging in negotiations without her consent and beyond what she had authorized, she called for him to return home.

It is hard to imagine that Spenser's association of Dudley and Arthur does not recall these events and these earlier poetic comparisons. But does this mean that in *The Faerie Queene* Spenser was presenting his fictional Arthur as a stand-in for Dudley? That throughout the poem Arthur "is" Dudley?[36] Such questions seek to reduce and underestimate the complex signifying operations of Spenser's allegory, a form of representation that does not convey its meanings by means of a direct or single-layered correspondence of character to historical person. Allegory is a highly polysemic mode of discourse, and by focusing on

one aspect of the poem's topical allegory (albeit a crucial, formative one), I do not mean to occlude or repress other layers of meaning that form a part of the text's overdetermined signification. And in any case, the identity of Arthur had to remain shadowy: at first, because Spenser could not afford to commit himself to any one potential husband for Elizabeth; later, because there was very little likelihood of a royal marriage. The shadowy mirror of allegory allowed the poet to maintain a safe distance from any direct representation or interpretation of powerful persons at the English court.[37]

Spenser was shrewd enough to come up with a conceptual blueprint for his prophetic project that would be adaptable to changing political conditions.[38] Spenser's hero, Arthur, remained unidentified because the shifting dynamics of court faction and favouritism could render identification with any one courtier obsolete, which would in turn make Spenser's poem unacceptable, even unprintable. However, at the time that Spenser first conceived his epic (as we have seen, probably during the late 1570s), Dudley was still the most likely candidate. Spenser would accomplish quite a coup if his partial prophecy were made whole. The marriage of Elizabeth Tudor and Robert Dudley would confirm *The Faerie Queene*'s status as a true dynastic prophecy, and Spenser could then fill in the rest of the story (which would include an epithalamic celebration of the marriage of Gloriana-Elizabeth to Arthur-Dudley), in the hope that he would receive rich reward and further patronage as recompense for such a well-timed and celebratory prediction.

In Book I, Spenser's *Faerie Queene* presents a highly suggestive description of Arthur and his quest, which certainly would have made Elizabethan readers think of Leicester and his relation to Elizabeth. At the very beginning of the poem, the second stanza of the Proem may refer indirectly, through the allegorical narrative, to Leicester's attempt and failure to wed the Queen. Preserved in "The antique rolles" hidden in Clio's "scryne" — the secret space of national history — is the story

> Of Faerie knights and fairest Tanaquill,
> Whom that most noble Briton Prince so long
> Sought through the world, and suffered so much ill,
> That I must rue his undeserved wrong.
>
> <div align="right">(I. Proem. 2)</div>

The "undeserved wrong" suffered by Arthur/Leicester as Gloriana's unrequited Petrarchan lover and suitor is a strong sign at the outset of the poem that something is wrong in Fairyland. The poem employs the devices of epic invocation, but we should also recall that it begins with this political-Petrarchan complaint. The Proem to Book I invokes a power, looming over the whole poetic project, a power to be feared for its ability to inflict pain. The Proem's concluding reference to the poet's "afflicted stile" (I.Proem.4) places an odd stress on the cruel denial of desire that has thrown down both Arthur and the poet, so that they must now beg to be uplifted.

Later, in the ninth canto of Book I, Una asks Arthur to tell her of "his name and nation" (I. ix. 2.). Though Spenser's readers would know who the legendary Arthur was, the Prince himself does not yet know his own identity and lineage. As he says to Una, "both the lignage and the certain Sire, / From which I sprong, from me are hidden yit" (I. ix. 3). Arthur tells Una that when he asked his tutor, Merlin, "Of what loines and what lignage I did spring," Merlin was only willing to say that Arthur "was sonne and heire unto a king, / As time in her just term the truth to light should bring" (I. ix. 5.). For Spenser, Leicester's genealogy may also have been secretly traced to kings. In his published letter to Harvey of April 1579, Spenser makes a cryptic reference to a (now lost) panegyric on the Dudley family. He tells Harvey to keep it hidden: "Of my *Stemmata Dudleiana* and especially of the sundry apostrophes therein, addressed you know to whom, must more advisement be had, than so lightly to send them abroad."[39] It is known that at this point Elizabeth was thinking of marrying Dudley to Mary, Queen of Scots, and approving their issue as heirs to the throne of England. At the same time, she may still have been considering marrying Dudley herself. Her elevation of Dudley to an earldom at this juncture may have been a strategy to make him a more appropriate candidate for either of these royal marriages. The *Stemmata Dudleiana* probably included a genealogy that traced Dudley's pedigree to royal blood, thereby justifying his marriage into the royal line.[40] The mysterious addressee may have been Elizabeth herself.

The exact nature of Arthur's ancestry is to be hidden until his quest is accomplished. When Una asks him, "what high intent / Hath brought you hither into Faery land…?" (I. ix. 6.), Arthur tells her of his Ovidian and Petrarchan sufferings (his "fresh bleeding wound" and internal burning "flame") and of his quest to seek the Faery Queen. His love for the Faery Queen began, not with the visual enamourment that initially links the souls of most lovers in

Spenser's poem, but with a physically erotic experience. Like Chaucer's Sir Thopas and Shakespeare's Bottom, Arthur believes himself to have slept with the Faery Queen. Arthur tells Una that he was riding through "the forest wide" on a "courser free." He then stopped for a rest:

> For wearied with my sportes, I did alight
> From loftie steed, and downe to sleepe me layd;
> … by my side a royall Mayd
> Her daintie limbes full softly down did lay:
> So fayre a creature yet saw never sunny day.
>
> Most goodly glee and lovely blandishment
> She to me made, and badd me love her deare;
> For dearly sure her love was to me bent,
> As when just time expired should appeare.
> But whether dreames delude, or true it were,
> Was never hart so ravished with delight,
> Ne living man like words did ever heare,
> As she to me delivered all that night;
> And at her parting said, she Queene of Faries hight.
>
> When I awoke, and found her place devoyd,
> And nought but pressed gras where she had lyen,
> I sorrowed all so much, as earst I joyd,
> And washed all her place with watry eyen.
> From that day forth I lov'd that face divyne;
> From that day forth I cast in carefull mynd,
> To seeke her out with labour, and long tyne,
> And never vowd to rest, till I her fynd,
> Nyne monethes I seek in vain yet ni'll that vow unbynd.
>
> (I. ix. 13–15.)

This is the closest Gloriana comes to an appearance in the poem. Arthur's description of his nocturnal encounter with Gloriana alludes to the elusive quality of Elizabeth's erotically charged favour and to her ability to lead male courtiers on without satisfying their full desires for power and glory. Here, in

the space between dreaming and waking, Gloriana appears to take part in a male erotic fantasy that corresponds to Leicester's political ambition and gives meaning to Spenser's poetic prophecy. David Lee Miller has claimed that "In the story of Arthur's dream, Spenser inscribes this inaugural moment as the psychogenesis of *The Faerie Queene.*"[41] According to Miller, "Arthur makes a womb of his imagination; inseminated with glory by his visionary copulation with the Fairy Queen, he gestates and gives birth to the noble deeds that constitute a comprehensive exemplum of magnificence."[42] The allegory of Arthur's pregnancy refers figuratively to the performance of virtuous action, but it also alludes to the production of heirs that was imagined for the queen of England. Arthur's pregnancy would come to full term in his nuptial reunion with Gloriana. Many of Elizabeth's subjects hoped for a pregnant, married queen who, "Nyne monethes" after her royal wedding, would give birth to a Protestant heir to the English throne.

The question of inheritance, in the sense of the Tudor monarchs' past ancestry as well as their future succession, is raised again in Book III when Merlin delivers his prophetic account of Britomart and Artegall's "progeny" — a line of British rulers stretching from Arthur to the "royall Virgin" (III.iii.49), Elizabeth. At the conclusion of this narrative, Merlin praises Elizabeth for putting an end to civil strife and for bringing about a "sacred Peace" within her realm. He then predicts that she will do what Dudley and the militant Protestants were urging, launch an attack on Spanish power in the Low Countries: she will "Stretch her white rod over the Belgicke shore, / And the great Castle smite so sore with all, / That it shall make him shake, and shortly learn to fall" (III.iii.49). But in the next stanza, Merlin's speech is suddenly interrupted when his vision of the future arrives at Spenser's present moment:

> But yet the end is not. There Merlin stayd,
> As overcomen of the spirites power,
> Or other ghastly spectacle dismayd,
> That secretly he saw, yet note discourse… .
>
> (III.iii.50)

Andrew Hadfield connects these two "visions," Arthur's in Book I and Merlin's in Book III, in this manner: "Just as Arthur was not sure whether he actually spent the night with the Faerie Queene, the reader is unsure whether Merlin

actually sees a 'ghastly spectacle' and, if so, what it is or signifies."[43] Hadfield goes on to argue that in this passage and in Arthur's dream, "Spenser represents an abandoned alternative sexual history of the queen," and he states, "This longing for a powerful, sexualized queen complicates our understanding of the politics — and sexual politics — of the poem."[44] This sexual history is not so much "abandoned" as it remains central to the poem: here it persists as a striking reminder of how a royal marriage and the production of heirs could have continued the succession narrative of British kingship, and by doing so, have avoided the future horror of the unspeakable "ghastly spectacle" of disorder that Merlin presumably witnesses.

The spectre of the Virgin Queen's death haunts the poem to its end, including in the Mutability Cantos, where, in the figure of Cynthia, we see an image of the aging, childless queen:

> Even you, faire Cynthia, whom so much ye make
> Joves dearest darling, she was bred and nurst
> On Cynthus hill, whence she her name did take:
> Then is she mortall borne, how-so ye crake;
> Besides, her face and countenance every day
> We changed see, and sundry forms partake,
> Now hornd, now round, now bright, now brown and gray;
> So that as changefull as the Moone men use to say.
>
> (7.7.50)

The conspicuous difference between Spenser's cruel but immortal solar "Goddesse heavenly bright" in the opening of Book I, and the decaying, all-too-mortal lunar Cynthia of the Mutability Cantos, is a measurement of the bitterness and disillusionment that increasingly came to define Spenser's "afflicted stile."

When Spenser composed the "Letter to Raleigh," he wrote of that "dream or vision" of Gloriana that ravished Arthur and filled him with a resolve "to seeke her out."[45] While explaining, in the "Letter to Raleigh," what he intended to come after the first three books of his epic, Spenser also asks Raleigh to imagine the marriage of Magnificence and Glory which is located at the centre of the poet's epic fore-conceit. The 1590 edition hints at the coming of such a union and ends hopefully with the reunion of Scudamour and Amoret, whose

embrace is described as an ecstatic melting and merging of the two lovers into one flesh, "growne together quite" (III.xii.46). But this optimism — reflecting earlier hopes and ambitions — was eventually abandoned. Between the time that Spenser began writing *The Faerie Queene* and the publication of the second edition in 1596, Spenser's project was radically altered. Six years after the first three Books were printed, in the six-book edition of *The Faerie Queene*, readers found the "Letter to Raleigh" gone, along with the happy ending. The image of erotic union, "that faire Hermaphrodite" (III.xii.46), was replaced "with new affright" (III.xii.44), and the master plan for two twelve-book cycles was changed.

In fact, the compression of Spenser's epic from a projected 24 books to six (plus the Mutability Cantos) is really a three-step process of truncation. By the early 1590s, the initial plan is modified, when Spenser includes the public virtues that he may have been saving for the second cycle. In the *Amoretti* (printed in 1595), however, he refers, in Sonnets 33 and 80, to six completed books and reaffirms his promise to complete at least one twelve-book cycle. Spenser died in 1599 before he could fulfill this promise, and the Mutability Cantos were published posthumously as an "imperfete" seventh book. This outcome was, in some sense, that of a man who ran out of time in the face of his own mortality and had to settle for something less than the tremendous task he had set for himself in his younger days. As a result, Spenser's readers are left with a seven-part, sabbatical structure. For the preconceived epic order (modelled on the twelve-part pattern of Virgil's *Aeneid*), Spenser substitutes the endless, open-ended (re)production of romance plot.[46] That kind of structural (or anti-structural) principle had always been active in Spenser's poem-in-progress. Book I, for example, refuses tidy closure: the betrothal of Una and Redcrosse is celebrated in the Book's concluding canto, but we also discover that Redcrosse has made a vow to serve the Fairy Queen for six years in her struggle against "that proud Paynim king, that works her teene" (I.xii.18). The penultimate stanza of Book I makes clear that Redcrosse must break off the "blissful joy" of the occasion and return to the court of the Fairy Queen: "The which he shortly did, and Una left to mourne" (I.xii.41). The final stanza then states that the end of the Book is merely a brief stopping point in a "long voyage" (I.xii.42). While recognizing the valorization of Spenserian romance by post-structuralist critics like Goldberg and Parker, we should keep in mind that Spenser hoped to contain and enclose this romantic open-endedness within a twelve-book solar

epic-cycle that, in the end, would gather together and tie up the romantic open-plot threads at a reunion banquet that was meant to end where the plot began.[47] He planned and hoped for consummation and closure — for a royal marriage and a fulfilled epic form.

Spenser's failure to complete his original project of 24 books, and the compression of the poem into six (or seven, if one includes the Mutability Cantos), corresponds to a shift in his epistemological outlook — from an emphasis on the potential for achieving unity, fulfillment, and completion to an acknowledgment that the poet's effort to convey a stable and unified truth through his "continued Allegory, or darke conceit" (714) will be deferred and disabled. But this is not merely a disinterested philosophical change of heart. Though Spenser was certainly aware that he might not live long enough to write twelve or 24 Books (after all, life expectancy in Elizabethan times was not high, and Spenser held clerkships and other offices that would have taken up much of his time), it is not enough to simply say that Spenser ran out of time to complete his poem.[48] Rather, this truncation from 24 to six is connected to specific historical events that put pressure on Spenser and forced him to revise his initial prophecy.

When Spenser's first published writings (his translations of Van der Noot's poems in *A Theatre for Worldlings*) appeared in 1569, there was a sense that the great drama of religious struggle in England, France, and the Low Countries was reaching a crisis. Everywhere, the Protestant cause was suffering defeat, and in the next year Elizabeth I was excommunicated by Pope Pius V. Although Philip Sidney perished in 1586 while taking part in this struggle, Dudley lived long enough to participate in the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588, and the 1590 *Faerie Queene* was printed at a post-Armada time of high hope and anticipation, hope that was raised only to be dashed as disastrous events in Ireland (especially the Tyrone Rebellion, or Nine Years' War, that began in 1594 and drove Spenser from his home in 1598), along with plague, famine, and serious economic problems in England, brought on a general malaise that beset the final years of the old queen's reign as the war with Spain dragged on.[49]

In tracing the impact of these trials and disappointments on Spenser and his epic poem, I am referring not only to the general shift in tone from optimism and celebration to skepticism and complaint that has long been recognized by Spenserians.[50] I agree with those critics who see Spenser's darker vision in his second installment as an expression of his disillusion with the system of

court patronage, but I would also point to a very important non-event — the failure of the queen to marry — that directly affected the shape of *The Faerie Queene*. Not only did the disappointment of Spenser's hopes for patronage at court, in Leicester's household, or in some diplomatic post, modify his attitude toward his epic project, but the disappointed hopes of the political faction that he served also had an impact on the poem's evolving form. If the queen had married, as she promised, Spenser would have seen Tudor dynastic history in conformity with his personal ideal of chaste marriage. As it was, Spenser was caught between, on the one hand, his service to the queen and her cult of virginity and, on the other, his belief that the married state was the most perfect way of life.[51]

If Elizabeth Tudor is the first and foremost member of Spenser's intended audience (as he indicates in his proems), then Amoret in Book III is one of the mirror images held up to the queen. At the same time, Scudamour's overeager attitude, his "greedy will," "envious desire," and "threatfull pride" (III.xi.26) may well be a warning to Dudley or other courtiers not to presume too much or woo the queen too aggressively. According to Spenser's allegory, both Scudamour and Amoret are unready for their wedding night: Scudamour's willfulness and aggression must be chastened; and in order for her terrible wound to be healed, Amoret must accept the temperate course of chaste sexuality.

In addition to what the Amoret-Busirane episode says about early modern patriarchy and sexuality in general, it refers in particular to the sexual politics of Elizabeth and her court.[52] What happens to Amoret is not only a phallocentric representation of a reluctant virgin and a projection of male fears onto women — it is also an image of virginity being punished for resisting male sexuality. In this sense, it may be seen as an expression of frustration with Elizabeth's refusal to marry and with her brand of Petrarchan politics. For Spenser and other men at Elizabeth's court, the fantasy of "rescuing" the reluctant Virgin (Queen) from what they felt was a perverse and self-destructive course held a powerful appeal. To have Britomart save Amoret from Busirane is to save genuine love and sex within marriage from the perverse, painful, and threatening form of love produced by Petrarchanism.

In the Proem to Book III, Spenser announces his subject matter in this Book will be a procreative Chastity that encloses and supercedes the queen's virginity:

It falls me here to write of Chastity,
The fayrest vertue, farre above the rest;
For which what needs me fetch from Faery
Forreine ensamples, it to have exprest?
Sith it is shrined in my Soueraines brest.

Here, the inclusive and multivalent meaning of "Chastity" (as a process beginning with virginity but leading toward marriage and child-bearing) allows the poet to encourage marriage while, at the same time, lauding the queen's chaste virginity. While Elizabeth is praised here for her virginity, the word "Chastity" also stands for the chaste marriage and production of heirs that Spenser and his patrons desired for their queen. The trope of enshrinement hints at the (undesirable, heretical) containment or enclosure of a dead relic or thing (the "Forreine ensample" of the Catholic virgin-saint), a morbidity in tension with Spenser's definition of Chastity as a "living art" (Proem 1) embodying the potential for sexual activity and procreation. Following this Proem, Book III will go on to tell the tale of Britomart, the female knight of Chastity whose "virtue" is defined by her "famous Progeny" (III.ii. Argument) — the line of British kings, those "Most famous fruites of matrimoniall bowre" (III.iii.3) that will spring from her loins. As Merlin tells Britomart, "Renowmed kings, and sacred Emperours, / Thy fruitfull Ofspring, shall from thee descend" (III.iii.23). There is no need, these lines suggest, for "Forreine ensamples" of procreative queenship when we have the British Britomart. Once again, the hope for a married, "fruitfull" Elizabeth remains enshrined in the epic poem.

In the 1596 edition of *The Faerie Queene*, Britomart and Amoret emerge from the House of Busirane, to find Scudamour gone. Not only are Scudamour and Amoret kept apart in the 1596 edition, but so are Arthur and Gloriana. The poem's central hero, Arthur, whose "first quest" is to find the Faery Queen and be loved by her "as when just time expired should appeare" (I.ix.14), never sees his love except in a dream. The last time that Arthur appears in the poem is in Book VI, canto viii, where he rescues Mirabella from Disdaine and Scorne, only to be told that his efforts have been counterproductive.

We can measure *The Faerie Queene*'s shift in meaning by comparing Arthur's heroic performance in Book I — his epic-scale victory over Orgoglio and Duessa — with his radically diminished accomplishments in Book VI. In the last appearance of the poem's central hero, we see yet another expression

of Spenser's protest against Elizabeth and her cult of virginity. The Mirabella episode glances topically at the frustration of Leicester and others at court who had experienced the queen's disdain. Mirabella, like Elizabeth herself, values her own "liberty" above the welfare of her noble suitors. Mirabella is the proud, scornful Petrarchan Lady, the object of desire who enjoys a cruel and debilitating power over men: "She was borne free, not bound to any wight, / And so would ever live, and love her own delight" (VI.vii.30). Initially, she had scorned the true love "of many a worthy pere" (VI.vii.29), but ironically, even after her trial and punishment by the Court of Cupid, she continues to disdain the honourable service of a knight like Arthur. Mirabella functions as an analogue for the Virgin Queen who flirted with matrimony but was never "bound to any wight," and Mirabella's punishment at the hands of Cupid and his men is clearly — at the level of topical allegory — a fantasy about punishing the queen. It is a fantasy that also expresses the sense of frustration and dissatisfaction felt by some of the male courtiers surrounding the powerful queen, including Spenser's patrons.

Having granted Mirabella her "liberty," Arthur returns to his original purpose:

> But Arthure with the rest, went onward still
> On his first quest, in which did him betide
> A great adventure, which did him from them devide.
> <div align="right">(VI.viii.30)</div>

Is this perhaps a reference to Leicester's death? Whether it refers to Leicester's passing on to the afterlife, or merely to Arthur's continuing pursuit of Glory, these lines express once again the sense of deferred closure — even Sisyphean frustration — that comes to dominate Spenser's text.

It is not only Arthur who fails to accomplish his objective: the individual books of Spenser's epic romance do not end with the decisive completion of a quest. At first, this open-endedness would have been intended as a kind of structural suspense: the completion of the knights' quests was put off until the threads of the romance narrative would come together in the poem's conclusion. By 1596, however, what had originated as a structural concept that signified a movement toward wholeness, union, and completion became instead a highly attenuated and contingent form. Spenser's epic had been planned with a royal

marriage in mind and would have ended with an epithalamium, a song of songs for the union of Magnificence and Glory, but *The Faerie Queene* ends instead with the hellish barking of the Blatant Beast.

The prophecy of a marriage between Elizabeth Tudor and Robert Dudley never came true, but the failure of that forecast — the frustration of that audacious expectation — became a powerful negative force to shape the poem with its absence. The desire for fulfillment and closure remains, for the reader perhaps as it was for Spenser himself, only to be thwarted and deferred. Ultimately, this pattern of promise and postponement becomes an insistent cry of protest against the Petrarchan politics of Elizabethan court culture.[53]

In *The Faerie Queene* that we read today, the topical meaning of the Gloriana-Arthur match remains and persists in a vestigial form, underlying the other layers of allegorical signification — the attack on the Virgin Queen's courtly cult of Petrarchan love service, the moral allegory's assertion of wedded love against Petrarchan sterility, the fantasy of the Protestant church's triumph over Roman Catholicism, and the anagogic meaning of the anticipated marriage of Glory and Magnificence at the end of time. All of these layered meanings become edged with indeterminacy and elusiveness, finally rendered optative or utopian. While in the poem's first installment, deferral is accompanied by optimism, the second half of the epic identifies deferral as a necessary strategy in a political system that pays lip service to chivalric ideals and just rewards but delivers confusion, inconstancy, and slander. In the place of that prophecy which saw the glory of a royal marriage as lighting the way to the triumph of Protestant truth, Spenser comes to terms with a darker, fallen world of insufficient language and willful misinterpretation. The result is a poem that is not flawed or failed, but a poem that underwent a conceptual metamorphosis. The queen's promised marriage remains throughout as the formal and political basis of *The Faerie Queene*, and the fact that such a marriage never happened gives the epic its ultimate shape as a discontinuous and partial narrative. In the end, Spenser's poem becomes a text about the instability of meaning, the dangers of interpretation, and the illusory nature of closure and consummation.

Notes

1. To rely upon the concept of "authorial intention" here is not to commit what Wimsatt and Beardsley called "the intentional fallacy," or to make the case, as many critics once did, for the meaning of a literary text as an exact mirroring of its author's intended meaning. The author's intentions are, in the end, not something that can be fully recovered or reconstructed. But in this case, careful speculation about authorial intention, based on specific evidence, can help us to understand how Spenser's text was composed and how it functioned and produced allegorical meanings. In this sense, a new and more thorough understanding of Spenser's plans and intentions can help us to comprehend and interpret *The Faerie Queene* in new ways that we might otherwise miss. See William K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley, "The Intentional Fallacy," *Sewanee Review* 54 (1946), pp. 468–88; revised and republished in *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (University of Kentucky Press, 1954), pp. 3–18. For a more recent discussion of intentionality and its viability (or limitations) as a concept for literary studies, consult Kaye Mitchell, *Intention and Text: Towards an Intentionality of Literary Form* (New York: Continuum, 2011).

2. Spenser's plans for the final shape of his epic are included in what is usually called the "Letter to Raleigh," a letter that was printed in the 1596 edition of *The Faerie Queene* following this main title: "A Letter of the Authors expounding his whole intention in the course of this worke." It is reproduced in A. C. Hamilton, ed., *The Faerie Queene*, revised edn. (London: Pearson Longman, 2007), p. 714. I have used this edition for all citations from "A Letter of the Authors" and from *The Faerie Queene*. Quotations from *The Faerie Queene* are hereafter cited in the body of the article, and these citations will take the traditional form (book, canto, and line numbers).

3. Of course, this is a wholeness and unity that no text actually achieves since the nature of textuality ensures that all writing (including *The Aeneid* and other "finished" epic poems) is inevitably open, endless, "unfinished," et cetera. For Spenser as post-structuralist, see Jonathan Goldberg, *Endlesse Worke: Spenser and the Structures of Discourse* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981).

4. See the chapter on "Post-Armada Apocalyptic Discourse in Book V" in Richard Mallette, *Spenser and the Discourses of Reformation England* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), pp. 143–68.

5. On historical prophecy and providential history in *The Faerie Queene*, see Richard A. McCabe, *The Pillars of Eternity: Time and Providence in The Faerie Queene* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1989); Bart Van Es, *Spenser's Forms of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); and Bart Van Es, "Spenser and History," in Richard A. McCabe, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Edmund Spenser* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 538–52.

6. Spenser follows Sidney in advocating an idealist theory of aesthetics that values the ideal intention over the merely physical text. The declared "intention" or "end" in the "Letter to Raleigh" is a revelation of what Sidney calls the "idea or fore-conceit" of the poem. In a famous passage from *The Defence of Poesy*, Sidney uses these terms to denote the original conception in the poet's mind, to which he gives body in the writing of his poem:

    … any understanding knoweth the skill of each artificer standeth in that idea or fore-conceit of the work, and not in the work itself. And that the poet hath that idea is manifest, by delivering them forth in such excellency as he had imagined them. Which delivering forth also is not wholly imaginative, as we are wont to say by them that build castles in the air; but so far substantially it worketh, not only to make a Cyrus, which had been but a particular excellency as nature might have done, but to bestow a Cyrus upon the world to make many Cyruses, if they will learn aright why and how that maker made him. (*Sir Philip Sidney,* ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989], pp. 216–17.)

7. On the poem as anagogical prophecy, consult Angus Fletcher, *The Prophetic Moment: An Essay on Spenser* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), esp. pp. 3–14 and 37–53.

8. For the influence of Petrarch on Spenser, see Thomas P. Roche, Jr., *Petrarch and the English Sonnet Sequences* (New York: AMS Press, 1989). On the courtly cult of Elizabeth I and the Virgin Queen as a royal version of the Petrarchan love object, see Robin H. Wells, *Spenser's Faerie Queene and the Cult of Elizabeth* (London: Croom Helm, 1983); Catherine Bates, *The Rhetoric of Courtship in Elizabethan Language and Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Philippa Berry, *Of Chastity and Power: Elizabethan Literature and the Unmarried Queen* (London: Routledge, 1989); and Carole Levin, *The Heart and Stomach of a King: Elizabeth I and the Politics of Sex and Power* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994).

9. Spenser's endorsement of chaste matrimony is particularly clear in the *Amoretti*, the *Epithalamion*, and the *Prothalamion*, while in *The Faerie Queene* it is also praised but frequently delayed. See J. L. Klein, "'Let us love, dear love, lyke as we ought': Protestant Marriage and the Revision of Petrarchan Loving in Spenser's *Amoretti*," *Spenser Studies* 10 (1992), pp. 109–38.

10. A very useful and convincing exploration of the marriage question is Susan Doran, "Why Did Elizabeth Not Marry?" in *Dissing Elizabeth: Negative Representations of Gloriana*, ed. Julia M. Walker (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), pp. 30–59. Additional accounts of the political debates and diplomatic negotiations regarding Elizabeth's potential marriages may be found in J. E. Neale, *Elizabeth I and her Parliaments 1559–1581* (London: J. Cape, 1953); Mortimer Levine, *The Early Elizabethan Succession Question 1558–1568* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1966); Neville Williams, *All the Queen's Men* (New York: Macmillan, 1972); Paul Johnson, *Elizabeth I, a Study in Power and Intellect* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1974); and Wallace T. MacCaffrey, *Queen Elizabeth and the Making of Policy, 1572–1588* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981).

11. Richard Rambuss suggests that Spenser lost favour with Leicester because, at the time of Elizabeth's marriage negotiations with the Duc d'Alençon's representative, Jean de Simier, in October of 1579, Spenser revealed the secret of Leicester and Lettice Knollys's relationship to the Queen. He also claims that Spenser's topical allegory in *Virgils Gnat* refers to such an incident and Spenser's consequent fall from favour. See Rambuss's *Spenser's Secret Career* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 19–24 and David Lee Miller, "Spenser's Vocation, Spenser's Career," *English Literary History* 50 (1983), pp. 197–230.

12. For a full account of the Alençon matchmaking negotiations, consult MacCaffrey, pp. 243–66. MacCaffrey claims that Elizabeth was genuinely interested in this marriage, but that she was successfully pressured by the Privy Council to break off the match.

13. Alexander Judson, *The Life of Edmund Spenser*, in *The Works of Edmund Spenser: A Variorum Edition*, 9 vols. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1945), vol. 9, p. 179. Judson's biography is woefully inadequate in this regard. See S. K. Heninger's article, "Spenser and Sidney at Leicester House," in *Spenser Studies* 8 (1987), pp. 239–49, for a skeptical view of some of the assumptions about Spenser's career that were put forward by Judson and have gained acceptance over the years.

14. William A. Oram *et al.*, eds., *The Yale Edition of the Shorter Poems of Edmund Spenser* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), pp. 19–20.

15. See Joseph L. Black and Lisa Celovsky, "'Lost Works,' Suppositious Pieces, and Continuations," in *The Oxford Handbook of Edmund Spenser* (esp. p. 356). Also consult Philo M. Buck, "Spenser's Lost Poems," *PMLA* 23 (1908), pp. 80–99; Helen E. Sandison, "Spenser's 'Lost' Works and Their Probable Relation to His *Faerie Queene*," *PMLA* 25 (1910), pp. 134–51; and Josephine W. Bennett, *The Evolution of* The Faerie Queene (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942). For a skeptical view of the "evidentiary value" of the references to "lost works" in the *Letters* of 1580, see Jon A. Quitslund, "Questionable Evidence in the *Letters* of 1580 between Gabriel Harvey and Edmund Spenser," in J. H. Anderson, D. Cheney, and D. A. Richardson, eds., *Spenser's Life and the Subject of Biography* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), pp. 81–98.

16. See "Three Proper and wittie, familiar Letters …" reprinted in *The Works of Edmund Spenser*, vol. 9, p. 17.

17. *The Works of Edmund Spenser*, vol. 9, p. 17.

18. Josephine W. Bennett's *The Evolution of "The Faerie Queene"* is a study that attempts to reconstruct this process. However, Bennett is mistaken in positing that Arthur was a late addition to the poem. See James Nohrnberg, *The Analogy of "The Faerie Queene"* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), pp. 38ff, for a decisive refutation of her claim.

19. *The Works of Edmund Spenser*, vol. 9, p. 15. See Edwin Greenlaw, *Studies in Spenser's Historical Allegory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1932), chap. 3; and Judson, chap. 8.

20. On Spenser's possible involvement or entanglement in the factional tensions surrounding the French marriage negotiations, see Jean R. Brink, "'All his minde on honour fixed': The Preferment of Edmund Spenser," in *Spenser's Life*, pp. 45–64; Vincent P. Carey and Clare L. Carroll, "Factions and Fictions: Spenser's Reflections of and on Elizabethan Politics," in *Spenser's Life*, pp. 31–44; Bruce Danner, *Edmund Spenser's War on Lord Burghley* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011). Spenser's affiliation with Dudley and Dudley's nephew, Sir Philip Sidney, placed him with those militant Protestants at court who worked against the French marriage. The French marriage was strongly opposed by most Puritans because it would mean an alliance with the Roman Catholic Bourbon dynasty. Probably at the behest of Leicester or Walsingham, Sidney wrote in January of 1580 to the queen, begging her not to marry Alençon but still asserting that a Protestant marriage would be a good thing if it resulted in the birth of a child: "Often have I heard you, with protestation, say, no private pleasure nor self-affection could lead you to [marry];

but if it be both unprofitable for your kingdom, and unpleasant to you, certainly it were a dear purchase of repentance; nothing can it add unto you, but the bliss of children, which, I confess, were a most unspeakable comfort; but yet no more appertaining unto him, than to any other, to whom the height of all good haps, were allotted to be your husband; and therefore I may assuredly affirm, that what good soever can follow marriage, is no more his than anybody's." See the full text of the letter in Philip Sidney, "Letter to Queen Elizabeth, 1580," in *The Miscellaneous Works of Sir Philip Sidney, Knt.*, ed. William Gray (Boston: T. O. H. P. Burnham, 1860), pp. 289–303. Available online at http://www.luminarium.org/editions/sidneyeliza.htm (Anniina Jokinen, web ed.).

21. On the intended function of the "Letter to Raleigh," consult Gordon Teskey, "Positioning Spenser's 'Letter to Raleigh,'" in H. B. de Groot and Alexander Leggatt, ed., *Craft and Tradition: Essays in Honour of William Blissett* (Calgary, Alberta: University of Calgary Press, 1990), pp. 35–36; and chapter one of Jane Grogan, *Exemplary Spenser: Visual and Poetic Pedagogy in The Faerie Queene* (Burlington, VT : Ashgate, 2009).

22. Spenser's original plans for his epic poem have been hypothesized by various scholars, but the entire 24-book structure ("The whole intention of the conceit") has never been fully reconstructed. See Nohrnberg, *The Analogy of* The Faerie Queene, pp. 35–67; A. Kent Hieatt, "The Projected Continuation of *The Faerie Queene*: Rome Delivered?" *Spenser Studies* 8 (1987), pp. 335–42; "Arthur's Deliverance of Rome? (Yet Again)," *Spenser Studies* 9 (1988), pp. 243–48; and the response by Thomas P. Roche published with Hiaett's article in *Spenser Studies* 8.

23. Hamilton, p. 714.

24. Hamilton, p. 714.

25. Hamilton, p. 717.

26. Kent Hieatt connects this project to a longstanding tradition from the Matter of Britain which held that King Arthur had once fought against the Roman empire, freed Britain from Roman rule, and conquered Rome itself. See Hieatt, "The Projected Continuation of *The Faerie Queene*," pp. 335–42. See also Spenser, *Faerie Queene* II.x.49: "Thenceforth this land was tributarie made / T'ambitious Rome, and did their rule obay, / Till Arthur all that reckoning defrayd / Yet oft the Briton kings against them strongly swayd." This story is found in Caxton's edition of Malory's *Morte Darthur*: "he [Arthur] came into Rome and was crouned Emperour by the Popes hand, with all the ryalte that could be made, and sudgerned there a tyme, and establysshed all his londes from Rome into Fraunce…" (Sir Thomas

Malory, *Caxton's Malory*, ed. James W. Spisak, 2 vols. [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983], vol. 1, pp. 135–36).

27. She is mentioned by Cassius Dio in Book II of his *Roman History* and later by Boccaccio under the name Gaia Cyrilla: see *Giovanni Boccaccio's Famous Women*, trans. Virginia Brown (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), pp. 94–95.

28. See Roy C. Strong and Jan van Dorsten, *Leicester's Triumph* (Leiden: Brill, 1964).

29. See Alan Kendall, *Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester* (London: Cassell, 1980) and the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* entry on "Robert Dudley" for an account of his secret marriages and his long but fruitless quest for the queen's hand in marriage: H. C. G. Matthew, Brian Howard Harrison, and Lawrence Goldman, ed. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) http://www.oxforddnb.com/.

30. See Richard McCoy, *The Rites of Knighthood: The Literature and Politics of Elizabethan Chivalry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), on the neo-chivalric culture at Elizabeth's court and Leicester's participation in it.

31. "Robert Dudley," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. See also Eleanor Rosenberg, *Leicester: Patron of Letters* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955) and Alan Haynes, *The White Bear: Robert Dudley, the Elizabethan Earl of Leicester* (London: P. Owen, 1987). Haynes reports that Leicester was frequently "lauded as the Maecenas of [Elizabeth's] court" (95), and writes, "In his lifetime Leicester won a deserved reputation for princely generosity and cultivation" (95).

32. This does not mean that he was universally admired. Dudley certainly had his enemies and detractors, and we should balance the laudatory rhetoric often used to address him in printed texts with the harsh criticism and even ridicule that he sometimes encountered — most notably in the viciously satirical tract titled *Leicester's Commonwealth* and illegally printed in 1584. See *Leicester's Commonwealth*, ed. D. C. Peck (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1985).

33. Susan Frye, *Elizabeth I: The Competition for Representation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 62. See Frye, pp. 56–96, for an extended analysis of the competition between Dudley and Elizabeth to control the meaning of these aristocratic rituals.

34. Frye, p. 93.

35. Strong and van Dorsten, p. 48.

36. The question of whether, according to the poem's "political allegory," Arthur "is" Leicester was debated earlier in the last century. See Greenlaw; H. E. Cory, *Edmund Spenser* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1917), pp. 56–59; Isabel

E. Rathborne, *The Meaning of Spenser's Fairyland* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1937), pp. 235–36. See also Rosenberg, pp. 330–50, on Spenser, Leicester, and the identification of Arthur with Leicester. Documentary evidence for Spenser's ties to Dudley includes various dedications and references in Spenser's poetry and a single mention of a brief period in 1579 when Spenser was apparently employed in Dudley's household.

37. See William Rogers, "'The End Is Not Yet': Monarch, Choice, and the Problematic Binaries of Representation," *Early English Studies* 1 (2008), http://www.uta.edu/ english/ees/ (accessed 25 Feb. 2012). He argues that "Spenser creates a world in which the reader is forced to interpret the multivalent images of Elizabeth and thereby alleviates the perilous risks that accompany depiction of the monarch."

38. An example of this is the way that Spenser uses the character of Arthur to allegorize historical events that occurred after Leicester's death. In Spenser's political allegory of the Bourbon episode (V.xi.43–65), Arthur appears in a topical allegory referring to events that took place in France in 1593, long after Leicester's death.

39. *The Works of Edmund Spenser*, vol. 9, p. 18.

40. See commentary in *The Works of Edmund Spenser*, vol. 9, pp. 268 and 459. Indeed, the Dudleys were well connected. Leicester's brother had married Lady Jane Grey, briefly queen of England, and Leicester's father was a powerful, ambitious duke.

41. David Lee Miller, *The Poem's Two Bodies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 138. James M. Nohrnberg draws some connections between Arthur's dream and Elizabethan anxieties about a match between Alençon and Elizabeth I, in "Alençon's Dream/Dido's Tomb: Some Shakespearean Music and a Spenserian Muse," *Spenser Studies* 22 (2007), pp. 73–102. In an important and influential essay, Louis Montrose refers to another dream about a sexual encounter with Queen Elizabeth, one that is recorded in the journal of Simon Forman, an Elizabethan physician and astrologist. See Louis Adrian Montrose, "'Shaping Fantasies': Figurations of Gender and Power in Elizabethan Culture." *Representations* 2 (1983), pp. 61–94.

42. Miller, *The Poem's Two Bodies*, p. 129; and Miller's chapter, in that same book, entitled "Arthur's Dream," pp. 120–64.

43. Hadfield, "Duessa's Trial and Elizabeth's Error: Judging Elizabeth in Spenser's *Faerie Queene*," in *The Myth of Elizabeth*, ed. Susan Doran and Thomas S. Freeman (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 56–76. See also Andrew Hadfield, "Spenser and the Death of the Queen," in *Imagining Death in Spenser and Milton,*

ed. Elizabeth J. Bellamy, Patrick Cheney, and Michael Schoenfeldt (Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 28–45.

44. Hadfield, "Duessa's Trial," p. 61–62.

45. Hamilton, p. 716.

46. See Patricia Parker's excellent article on "Romance," in A.C. Hamilton, ed., *The Spenser Encyclopedia* (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1990), pp. 609–18, for an account of the complex signifying strategies of the romance form and the tendency of the romance tradition to produce structures of deferral in *The Faerie Queene.*

47. The Russian formalists, after Shklovsky, distinguish between *fabula* (or chronological "story") and *syuzhet* (i.e. "narrative" or plot). See Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. C. Emerson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1973), p. 12; Jonathan Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981), p. 171; and Jacques Derrida, "Living On – Border Lines," in *Deconstruction and Criticism*, ed. Harold Bloom *et al.* (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), pp. 94–100. Bakhtin, Culler, and Derrida all warn against allowing narrative to take priority over story. One way of talking about what happened to Spenser's plan is to say that at first he hoped that story would ultimately triumph over narrative in the grand closure of an ending that would merge and enclose all of the open narrative structures; but as time went on, the queen's failure to marry, the shortage of time, and other factors encouraged Spenser to give in to the messy momentum of romantic narrative and its resistance to closure. From the start, the poem's split generic valence, as both epic and romance, conveys both the structural symmetries of the epic tradition and the open-endedness and "entrelacement" of romance. For a definitive discussion of "entrelacement" in Spenser's allegory, see Rosamund Tuve, *Allegorical Imagery: Some Mediaeval Books and Their Posterity* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1966).

48. Spenser read widely in a variety of languages and would have known a number of cases where eminent authors proposed elaborate and lengthy fictions that they did not live to complete. Among his English precursors, the most obvious case would have been his partial model, Geoffrey Chaucer, who only completed a fraction of his full plan for *The Canterbury Tales.* (I owe these observations to the anonymous reader for *Renaissance and Reformation.*)

49. In his introduction to an excellent collection of articles on this subject, the editor, historian John Guy, refers to a "second reign of Elizabeth I" during the latter years

of her rule, characterized by "factionalism, self-interest," "instability" and "frustrated ambition" at court, a time when "England was several times threatened with encirclement by the superior forces of the Counter-Reformation." See Guy's *The Reign of Elizabeth I: Court and Culture in the Last Decade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 1.

50. For some important accounts of this late Elizabethan malaise and its effects on Spenser's writings, see Gary Waller, *Edmund Spenser: A Literary Life* (London: Macmillan, 1994), esp. pp. 136–88; Richard Neuse, "Book VI as Conclusion to *The Faerie Queene*" *English Literary History* 35 (1968), pp. 329–53; Harry Berger Jr., "A secret discipline: *The Faerie Queene* VI," *English Institute Essays* (1961), pp. 35–75; and, for an account that emphasizes the Irish context, Richard A. McCabe, *Spenser's Monstrous Regiment: Elizabethan Ireland and the Politics of Difference* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), esp. pp. 197–269.

51. Some good places to begin investigating the extensive scholarship on Spenser's patriarchal, Protestant ideal of chastity include chapter four, "Spenser's Art of Married Love," in John N. King, *Spenser's Poetry and the Reformation Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); Mallette, pp. 84–142; Chih-hsin Lin, "Amoret's Sacred Suffering: The Protestant Modification of Courtly Love in Spenser's *Faerie Queene*," *Studies in Philology* 106.3 (2009), pp. 47–73; and Theresa Krier's excellent summary of feminist work on Spenser, "Spenser and Gender Studies," in the *Oxford Handbook of Edmund Spenser*, pp. 757–74.

52. See Thomas P. Roche, *The Kindly Flame: A Study of the* Faerie Queene *III and IV* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964); and Harry Berger, "Busirane and the War between the Sexes: An Interpretation of *The Faerie Queene* III xi–xii," *English Literary History* 1 (1971), pp. 99–121. Thomas Roche and Harry Berger have explored the psycho-sexual aspects of this powerfully suggestive passage, but they have neglected its political significance.

53. For additional work on Spenser's adaptations of Petrarchanism, see Heather Dubrow, *Echoes of Desire: English Petrarchanism and Its Counterdiscourses* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995).