

'Another Game in Vew':
The Representation of the Poet in *The Faerie Queene**

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ABSTRACT

Many recent critics of *The Faerie Queene* have established an artificial distinction between the narrator of *The Faerie Queene* and Spenser, one which posits an olympian detachment of the author from the work, and of both from the historical circumstances in which the work was written. An analysis of the poem reveals the limited sense in which a distinction between the narrator and the implied author may be drawn, and shows how the incompleteness of the work and some of its structural and thematic tensions are due to its changing significance as a political project undertaken by Spenser.

SHELLEY: Artegall argues with the giant: the Giant has the best of the argument; Artegall's iron man knocks him over into the sea and drowns him. This is the usual way in which power deals with opinion.

PEACOCK: That was not the lesson which Spenser intended to convey.

SHELLEY: Perhaps not; it is the lesson he conveys to me. I am of the Giant's faction.

A discussion of the representation of the author in a literary text should begin with a study of the narrative voice and a definition of the relation between the implied author and the narrator. There are two main conflicting views on the subject of the narrator in *The Faerie Queene*. In blunt terms, either there is or there is not a narrator, understood as a persona different from the poet. As it ought to be expected, the answer will depend on how different from the poet the speaker must be, or different in which respect, to deserve to be called a persona.

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The classical view makes no distinction between the poet and the narrator. It is Spenser who narrates his stories. This is true only in the most obvious way: in the same sense we may say that Virgil is the narrator of the *Aeneid* except for cantos II and III, which are narrated by Aeneas. But "narrator" does not necessarily mean "intradiegetic narrator"¹ or narrator-character. The term need not be restricted to a persona whose identity is different from the poet. In this sense, it is clear that Spenser has not created such a persona, and that there are many elements which stress that the narrative "I" is, at least in some sense, Edmund Spenser. Such lines as "My mother Cambridge" or "And Mulla mine, whose waues I whilom taught to weep" leave little room to doubt.² In an obvious sense, Spenser is speaking as the court poet, and there are no doubts about his identity. But let us look at the opening of the poem. The first passages of a work usually have a crucial importance in establishing the narrative decorum, the set of conventions which will determine the contact between the author and the reader. The latter's expectations on what he is likely to find are derived mainly from the first few passages, unless challenged by subsequent developments, which have to be rather drastic:

Lo I the man, whose Muse whilome did maske,
 As time her taught, in lowly Shepheards weeds,
 Am now enforst a far vnfitter taske,
 For trumpets sterne to change mine Oaten reeds,
 And sing of Knights and Ladies gentle deeds;
 Whose prayes hauing slept in silence long,
 Me, all too meane, the sacred Muse areeds
 To blazon broad emongst her learned throng:
 Fierce warres and faithfull loues shall moralize my song.

This is a self-conscious setting oneself in a tradition, in a way which had already been prefigured in *The Shepheardes Calendar* ("October"). It means to be an imitation of Virgil, as it is modelled on the lines usually prefixed to the Renaissance editions of the *Aeneid*.³ These lines emphasize the systematic nature of the Virgilian work, which was seen in the Renaissance to mime in its threefold aspect (the *Georgics*, the *Bucholics* and the *Aeneid*) the very structure of reality.⁴ Spenser's pastoral stands here both for Virgil's *Bucholics* and the *Georgics*, and it conflates the political submission of the lower classes with a carefree, idealized private life.⁵

Everybody knows that Spenser is the shepherd poet; so, the poet arrives on the scene already with a thinly elaborated narrative persona. According to Hamilton, in this stanza "there is a startling transformation for the lowly pastoral poet into one who throws off his disguise to thrust his work among the Muses" (p. 27). But it is not so much a question of the poet's revealing his true self under the lowly disguise as one of having to assume a new one. Already in this stanza, the poet presents himself as someone who has been entrusted a mission too high, and who is unequal to the task. This is merely the first of many protestations in this sense.

In his invocations Spenser asks for the poetic force he lacks; this is in the line of the Renaissance "divine madness" (Spenser's "goodly fury," VI.i.2.6). A sense of the poet's inadequacy is implicit in the very idea of an invocation to the Muses. The insufficiency of the poet is a classical literary topos: commendation through ineffability. But Virgil uses the invocation twice or three times in the whole of the *Aeneid*. With Spenser, this is pushed to an extreme: the anxiety of influence seems at times to

become mere anxiety as ineffability becomes the standard form of commendation. Objects of description are declared to be beyond the poet's ability:

My narrow leaues cannot in them containe
The large discourse of royall Princes state (I.xi.14).

Such was the beauty of this goodly band,
Whose sundry parts were here too long to tell (VI.x.14.1-2).

The blazing brightnesse of her beauties beame,
And glorious light of her sunshyny face
To tell, were as to striue against the streame.
My ragged rimes are all too rude and bace,
Her heauenly lineaments for to enchace (I.xii.23).

How shall fraile pen descriue her heauenly face,
For feare through want of skill her beautie to disgrace? (II.iii.25)

On the "golden age" of Britain's past:

O ioyous memorie of happy time,
That heauenly grace so plenteously displayd;
(O too high ditty for my simple rime) (II.x.50).

Or, in another version of the same, the poet's writing is not an enhancing or even a faithful rendering of the reality he describes, but an inadequate rendering of it, a defective mirror:

The which O pardon me thus to enfold
In couert vele, and wrap in shadowes light,
That feeble eyes your glory may behold,
Which else could not endure those beames bright,
But would be dazled with exceeding light (II.pr.5).

An allegory is for Spenser a "darke conceit." Spenser seems to conceive of the surface of poetry as a hard shell which must be cracked before you reach the nut. That is, the poetic form is not a way of teaching more efficiently (as Sidney had argued in his *Apology*) but a difficulty in the way of the reader and a potential source of obscurity. Its efficacy as an educative device would seem to be somewhat doubtful, if we see it in this light. But maybe the difficulty and the inadequacy *is* Spenser's point.⁶

This view of poetry is rather naive: Spenser does not seem to have developed an elaborate abstract conception of poetry. The relationship between form and content posited by the Letter to Raleigh is nearer to Boccaccio's conception than to Sidney's *Apology*. But Spenser agrees with Sidney to the extent that he sees poetry as a vehicle for truth. In the proem to book II he half-jokes about the reality of his Land of Faerie, implying that it is to be found if the reader looks carefully for it,

By certine signes here set in sundry place
He may it find; ne let him then admire,
But yield his sence to be too blunt and bace,
That no'te without an hound fine footing trace (II.pr.4).

That is, Faerie Land is to be found in England itself, but not in the surface: probably Spenser would agree with Sidney's conception of the golden world of poetry as the product of the poet's direct communion with the Idea that is the ultimate source of the defective real world.

In V.iii.3, we find another statement of the role proper to the poet. Spenser is not a "herald," he tells us; it is not his role to tell everything in his tale, "But for so much as to my lot here lights,/That with this present treatise doth agree,/True vertue to aduance, shall here recounted bee" (7-9). This may make us think of the claims made by Sidney and other Renaissance theorists on the priority of poetry over history: history is mere fact, it has no intellectual (moral) impulse organizing it. Poetry is not a mindless accumulation of data: rather, it selects the best materials and combines them in such a way that it will afford a close representation of the ideal. As Tasso put it, "The idea of an artistic product is formed after the consideration of many things, among which that one is best which most closely approximates to the idea."⁷ Spenser likes to pose as if this achievement were beyond his ability. The lowly shepherd inside the poet is not done away with so easily, and indeed Colin Clout will reappear as an alter ego of the poet, who thereby manages to be at once inside his tale and outside it (VI.ix.41; x.16). According to Hamilton, "nowhere else in the poem -and in what work by any poet?- does the poet himself under his well-known *persona* enter into the fiction to reprimand one of his own characters for his stupid voyeurism as Spenser does in Calidore at x.2, and prophesy unhappiness for him" (p. 621). Although, of course, this maneuver is much like Virgil's when he poses as Tityrus in his eclogues.

The first stanza seems to present us with the poet assuming a narrative persona. The view that there is such a persona in the poem is most forcefully argued by Jerome S. Dees, who holds "that the narrator of *The Faerie Queene* is a character within the poem and that in the poem at large, as well as in respective books, he is represented, like the main character of the legends he relates, as changing in response to the poem that he narrates."⁸ Now this shows some signs of going to the other extreme. The word "character" will have to be used carefully.

The narrator does appear as a character in the sense that his activity is constantly thematized, it is continually becoming its own subject under the eyes of the reader. There is a constant concern of the poem with the narrative act which brings it into being: one of the subjects of *The Faerie Queene* is its own progress, both as composition (from the point of view of the writer) and as reading matter (for the reader). The two are conflated in a variety of images which present us the poet at work. A common image of the poet is that of the ploughman (III.xii.47; IV.v.46.8-9), with the narrative threads as furrows (V.III.40). As Judith Anderson has noted in *The Growth of a Personal Voice*, there is in this image another intertextual reference to Spenser's fellow-allegorist Langland and *Piers Plowman*. This also points to the fact that the poet's relationship to the poem is one of lived experience: the writing of the poem is his personal quest.⁹ The most elaborate instance of this image is found at VI.ix.1:

Now turn again my teme thou iolly swayne,
 Backe to the furrow which I lately left;
 I lately left a furrow, one or twayne
 Vnplough'd, the which my coulter hath not cleft:
 Yet seem'd the soyle both fayre and frutefull eft,
 That so rich frute should be from us bereft;

Besides the great dishonour and defame,
Which should befall to *Calidores* immortal name.

Here a whole range of analogies can be established: the field is Faerieland, the soil is the matter of the poet previous to its elaboration, and the fruit is at once the finished work and the benefit which derives from it. The coulter is the poet's pen, and "cleaving" is writing. As I have said, the furrows represent the diverse narrative threads, and the maneuvers involved in the change of thread, the discursive introductions which are not the actual story-telling, are represented by the team's having to stop, turn around, and start a new furrow. Hamilton (p. 681) sees the muses as the poet's team (an uncouth image if there is one!). Now, who is the "ioily swayne"? He is not the poet himself, but he is leading the team who belongs to the poet and ploughing the poet's field, subject to the instructions of the poet. He is the one who does the actual ploughing, but in fact he is only a servant of the poet. Is he not the narrator? It is tempting to say so. Still, it may be useful to keep in mind that this self-representation is a fleeting one: it occurs only in this verse.

The poet may also be presented as an explorer or a traveller in Faeryland:

The waies, through which my weary steps I gujde,
In this delightfull land of Faery,
Are so exceeding spacious and wyde,
And sprinkied with such sweet variety,
Of all that pleasant is to eare or eye,
That I nigh rausht with rare thoughts delight,
My tedious trauell doe forget thereby;
And when I gin to feele decay of might,
It strength to me suplics, and chears my dulled spright (VI.pr.1).

As Cornelius Cronin observes,¹⁶ the voyages of the characters become an analogue of the poet's own voyage through his creation. Besides, most good characters become storytellers at one moment or other.

According to Dees, the narrator is a character in the sense that his comment is not fully reliable; it reveals a "slight off-centeredness" which is designed to stimulate the reader's reaction to the episode in question: "The narrator is a poetic device, a means of focusing on the significance of that developing action. And he throws this significance into relief by the inadequacy of his commentary" (p. 555). There is something Fishy in this conception of the reader's activity: too much deliberation has to be assumed on the part of the poet.

Cronin notes that very little of the criticism of *The Faerie Queene* recognizes the existence of a narrator as a fully developed character who is not the poet, and not merely a rhetorical device. Cronin shares Dees's views to the extent that he believes that there is one, and that his character is not static: it develops from one part of the poem to another, and this is especially noticeable in the poems. The narrator's attitude is uncertain at first, and he is especially nervous about his relationship to the Queen. He becomes more comfortable in later books, especially in IV, when he defends the poem against (probably) Lord Burleigh's disapproval and assumes Chaucer's mantle as England's storyteller, although he always recognizes the limitations of his skill. In Book VI, the poem is seen under severe attack before it is even finished (Cronin). However, all this does not prove that the narrator is a fully developed personality distinct from the poet; rather the contrary. This evolution is not necessarily that of a

fictional persona: it sounds suspiciously like the story of Spenser's shifting attitude towards his work.¹¹ Dees, too, tends to interpret as a deliberate fictional construction many things which look rather like a spontaneous result of Spenser's project. For instance, he notes that "Spenser's narrator seems aware of, and somewhat nervous about, strata in his audience" (p. 539). Surely it is a deliberate poetic choice to refer to the audience, but seeming nervous about it looks like an unwelcome and unintentional by-product. The audience the narrator refers to is merely the rhetorical image of the poet's actual audience.¹² Dees's conception would need a poet who is in control of every effect produced by his narrator, who carefully designs his shifting attitudes as the poem progresses. A superhuman poet, without any social position or constraint, who can afford to play with any kind of inconsistency because the reader will recognise the underlying moral from the story in the face of the narrator's attitude. Such premises will always work, because Dees has posited not only a limited narrator but also an unlimited reader (himself) who is determined to find moral coherence and a deliberate design even in the most obvious instances of poetic mismanagement, as in the scenes of books V and VI he comments (pp. 546 and 566). Dees sees only one thing, a deliberate inadequacy of the narrator's comments, where I tend to see two: 1) an easily identifiable use of rhetorical devices (understatement, focalization, metalepsis, etc.) and 2) an ideological disagreement between Spenser and his interpreter, something for which there is no place in Dees's system, but which is to be expected.

For instance, Dees believes that there is a moral progress in the narrator's concept of justice "from an earlier belief that 'vaine it is to deeme of things aright . . . Unless it be performed with dreadlesse might' (V.iv.1) to a later belief in a power 'That seeks to save the subject of his skill,/Yet never doth from doome of right depart' (V.x.2)" (Dees, p. 566). I cannot bring myself to see anything but a difference in rhetorical convenience between the two "concepts of justice." Surely it is the first that Artegall enforces throughout Book V by means of "his yron groome." The representative figure of the second is not Artegall: his gesture of "pittfull regard" towards Radigund in V.v.13 is plainly shown to be an error; mercy mixed with love, or lust. It is significant that there is no pure act of mercy in the poem. If we accept that there is in Radigund an allusion to Mary Stuart (as proposed by O'Connell) then we can see that an analogy is established between the two beheadings she suffers in book V (as Radigund and as Duessa) at the hands of two Elizabeth figures, Britomart and Mercilla. Britomart does not hesitate a moment to chop Radigund's head off; Mercilla reaches the same result after some nauseating sighs and tears.¹³ Now, Mercilla is the representative of mercy in the logistics of book V; nay, she is the very allegorical figure of mercy. The narrator's claims about the benefits of mercy come just before his curious evasiveness about the result of Mercilla's trial. The passage is so clothed with the praise of mercy that it has to be read twice before we realize that there has *not* been any mercy shown. Therefore Dees's example is badly chosen. Spenser has led us to think that he was going to show us mercy tempering justice, but instead he has shown that even the merciful have to be stern if they want to be just. This second concept of justice comes to converge with the first: mercy is all right, but whenever there are real interests at stake, only force will do. That was also Spenser's attitude towards the Irish rebellions: he repeatedly called for widespread military campaigns or made plans for the genocide of the Irish population in *A View of the Present State of Ireland*. Lord Grey's and Spenser's own doings in Ireland stand behind the concept

of justice which is delineated in book V. It should not come as a surprise to find that "the narrator's" attitudes are sometimes inadequate.

This does not mean that Spenser does not use fictional images of the self as a narrative device. It means that he uses no single set of such images.¹⁴ The narrator is at times ironic, naive, solemn, sentimental.¹⁵ Marre has shown that cantos III and IV are unified by a pervasive use of an ironic tone of false humility; like the subject-matter of the cantos itself, this tone shows the influence of Ariosto.¹⁶ And the common basis of all these attitudes is not a fictional character but the conventionalized image of the poet himself. The difference between the poet and his persona is not one of identity or ideology. The narrative persona is a simple role assumed by the poet. But it would be too much to say that there is no way of parting narrator from poet, that "when we speak of one, we speak of both."¹⁷ Because once we have agreed to call "narrator" the speaker of the poem, by "the poet" we can mean only what in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* Wayne C. Booth calls the implied author. In the case of *The Faerie Queene*, the implied authorial stance could be described as a reference-system of values and knowledge which becomes accessible to us by evaluating the adequacy of the narrator's attitudes to the action of the poem with what we take to be Spenser's attitudes, filtered through the literary conventions available to him. This sounds like, and often is, a tricky thing to do. It is tricky when Hinton does it, in spite of the inseparability of narrator and poet he had started with: "The narrator's attempts to freeze bits and pieces of the story and frame them in conceptual terms serve to emphasize their resistance to such categorization" (p. 176). This is risky because, as Alpers observes, "abstract categorization" may be reviled now, but it was favoured in the sixteenth century to an extent that Hinton and other critics who favour the theory of the unreliable narrator¹⁸ do not recognize. The divergence between the narrator's and the poet's attitudes is never carried to the extent of making an unreliable narrator of him; at least not the kind of unreliability which involves a consistent world-view as much as reliability does. There may be ambiguous phrases or adjectives, but as Alpers notes these often represent the point of view of some of the characters involved in the scene. Alpers agrees to some extent to concept of an "unfolding" narrator when he observes that "the hallmark of Spenserian narration is confidence in locutions which are at the same time understood to be provisional" (p. 27). But he warns against the immanentist tendency to separate the narrator from the poet.

There is clear evidence that to some extent the attitudes of the narrator do not always fit squarely with those of the implied author. This happens, for instance, in the more emotional reactions of the narrator to the story. Because this narrator is not a mere reporter. He reacts emotionally to what he tells. He is the first victim of his own tale. Sometimes this threatens the legibility of the text: the poet's heart "is empassioned so deepe/For fairest *Vnaes* sake, of whom I sing/That my fraile eyes these lines with teares do steepe" (I.iii.2.1-3; cf. also III.viii.1 and IV.i.1). Or he may (rarely) interrupt the narration to show that he is not above the allegorical meaning he is showing, selling us its significance together with his personal concern: "The wondrous workmanship of Gods owne mould,/ . . . euen dead we honour should./Ah dearest God me graunt, I dead be not defould" (I.x.42). At times he is carried away by his story and addresses the characters to comfort or rebuke them: "Ah gentlest knight, that euer armour bore,/Let not thee grieue dismounted to haue beene,/And brought to ground, that never wast before" (III.i.7). That is, the narrator reacts in the way the poet thinks his ideal reader ought to react.

That the narrator is in a certain sense the reader of his poem may be pushed to a literal sense: Dees sees in the narrator a kind of intermediary between the source of the story in the Muse or the "antique documents" and the public. He sees the story unfolding before him, and he reacts to it like the reader. This may be an overstatement, but it is a useful observation in one sense: the narrator is not omniscient in the sense that he does not know, or does not raise the problem of, the end of his stories. The only prophecies in the poem come from within, from characters such as Merlin.

Another way of dividing the narrator from the poet would be, therefore, their different attitude to the fictionality of the story. According to Stan Hinton (p. 170 and ff.), the narrator takes the allegory literally, and believes in the historical truth of his sources. He derives the story from "antique rolles" (I.pr.2); "it in bookes hath written bene of old" (III.ii.18); "as we in records reed" (IV.xi.8.5); "I haue found it registred of old,/In *Faery Land* mongst records permanent" (VII.vi.2). Indeed, the reader may visit himself the places the poet describes, if he wishes (III.iii.8). All this is not elaborated further in a way that would individualize the narrator, give him a story of his own, apart from the poet. These jokes would not force us to accept a narrator with an identity different from the poet's; we could as well argue that it is the narrator who is joking. That is, the narrator is not consistent on this point, either, because at times he presents the whole story like an invention, a poetic fiction (e.g. III.pr). These are narrator's mannerisms, rather than a consistent motivation of the narrative as is often found in 18th-century Gothic novels which use a similar device. Spenser's motivations of the narrative, even when are repeated several times, are local phenomena, rhetorical rather than fictional.

Metalepsis is one of the devices which foreground the narrator's activity. Genette defines it as an "illegitimate" transition from a narrative level (for instance, that of the narrator to that of the characters).¹⁹ In *The Faerie Queene* it is often used in a mild version to foreground the shift from one narrative thread to another (e.g. in III.viii.43). For instance, the poet starts canto xi of Book IV with a shift to the story of Florimell:

Bvt ah for pittie that I haue thus long
Left a fayre Ladie languishing in payne:
Now well away, that I haue doen such wrong,
To let faire *Florimell* in bands remayne. . .²⁰

The poet's neglect of Florimell in the discourse is seen as the cause of her continuing imprisonment in the story. The time of reading and the time of the story are therefore equated. Metalepsis can also be used in choosing to stay in the same narrative thread: "But let them pas, whiles wind and weather right/Do seue their turnes: here I a while must stay,/To see a cruell fight doen by the Prince this day" (II.xi.4). We may find a second, more modest, type of metalepsis when the narration of the Squire of Dames to Satyrane is subsumed under the main narrator's, and there is a sudden jump to Satyrane's reaction (III.ix.6). Satyrane smiles at the narration of the squire, but he is seen smiling at the situation itself, not at its narrative mediation. Such maneuvers always imply a foregrounding of the narrative activity.

The shift in narrative thread is most often arbitrary, and then it is usually accompanied by a metalepsis: the poet "leaves" one character. However, there may also be a partial motivation of the shift.²¹ In III.v.12-13 there is such a shift from Arthur's story to that of his squire. The shift is justified by Arthur's missing the squire. Another possible motivation for the shift is the alleged curiosity of the reader:

But well I weene, ye first desire to learne
What end vnto that fearefull Damozell,
Which fled so fast from that same foster stearne,
Whom with his brethren *Timias* slew, befell (III.vi.54).

There are also instances of the purely gratuitous, non-motivated (but commented on) shift:

But by what means that shame to her befell,
And how thereof her selfe she did acquite,
I must a while forbear to you to tell;
Till that, as comes by course, I doe recite,
What fortune to the Briton prince did lite (VI.vi.17.1-5).

A metalepsis of physical distancing is often used in the selection of narrative threads: "There leaue we them in pleasure and repast" (V.iii.40.1); "There to their fortune leave we them awhile,/And turne we backe to good Sir *Calidore*" (VI.ii.40.1-2). This kind of phrasing constructs a kind of fictional perception on the part of the narrator-focalizer, and contributes to give him at least a local existence.

The point of view or the 'knowledge' of the narrator seem at times not to coincide with that of the poet. Kathleen Williams notes, for instance, that the narrator does not know what lies ahead of the poem. She even argues that the narrator "experiences his poem as the simplest of readers might do."²² But, even taking for granted that Spenser himself knew what lay ahead of the poem as he composed it,²³ what is actually relevant is not what the narrator knows, but what he tells. It is perhaps more useful to use the concept of focalization, or the selection of the feelings and perceptions of some characters so as to orient the reader's sympathy.²⁴ In the scene between Britomart and The Red Cross knight at II.ii.4-16, there is a crucial moment at which we side with Britomart. It is only *her* thoughts and feelings, and not The Red Cross knight's, which are reported by the narrator; as a result, it is she who is perceived as the central character in the scene. Focalizer characters may also be used as sources of reliability. An instance can be found in the surprisingly non-sequential meeting of Arthur and his lovesick squire (IV.viii.42-47). Arthur is needed merely to confirm the poet's words on the changed appearance of the Squire.

The most elaborate representation of the narrator is his portrayal as a seafarer. Spenser develops Ariosto's image of the epic poem as a sea voyage, to fit the structure of his own work: the narrator compares his poem to a ship which lands some passengers in a harbour which is not its final destiny:

There this faire virgin wearie of her way
Must landed be, now at at her iourneyes end:
There eke my feeble barke a while may stay,
Till merry wind and weather call her thence away (I.xi.1).

There is more than a suggestion of a metalepsis here. The narrative movement coincides, as is befitting, with the end of Una's quest. The suggestion is reinforced when later on in this canto the same image is used by Una's "royall Pere" to describe The Red Cross knight's achievement: ". . . neuer liuing man, I weene, so sore/In sea of deadly daungers was distrest;/But since now safe ye seised haue the shore/And well arriued are . . ." (I.xii.17). The enterprise of the poet and that of his characters are

linked through this device; all have reached the end of their enterprise, which is thereby implied to the same; indeed, both The Red Cross knight and the poet see this only as a partial achievement: both must attend to a central concern: "He [The Red Cross knight] nought forgot, how he whilome had sworne/ . . . Vnto his Faire Queene backe to returne" (I.xii.41). The poet must also return to his. And he further develops the image of the sea voyage:

Now strike your sailes ye iolly Mariners,
 For we be come vnto a quiet rode
 Where we must land some of our passengers,
 And light this wearie vessell of her lode.
 Here she a while may make har safe abode,
 Till she repaired haue her tackles spent,
 And wants supplide. And then againe abroad
 On the long voyage whereto she is bent:
 We may she speede and fairely finish her intent (I.xii.42).

Ariosto travelled alone, a simple image. But Spenser is fonder of his images, and likes every detail of his allegories to be significant. Spenser has passengers (the characters), cargo (subject matter) and even 'mariners,' who presumably are the readers.²⁵ Undoubtedly he reserves for himself the place of the captain, but it is curious that he assigns such an active role to the reader. It is the characters who are the relatively passive passengers, while the reader must labour together with the author.

The last image of the poem as a sea voyage reveals, according to Dees, a change of mood towards pessimism:

Like as a ship, that through the Ocean wyde
 Directs her course vnto one certaine cost,
 Is met of many a counter winde and tyde,
 With which her winged speed is let and crost,
 And she her selfe in stormie surges tost;
 Yet making many a borde, and many a bay,
 Still winneth way, ne hath her compasse lost:
 Right so it fares with me in his long way,
 Whose course is often stayd, yet neuer is astray (VI.xii.1).

This is striving to be optimistic, but it does sound like false optimism in the face of evidence. In this book Spenser has done his best to keep the hero out of sight. He has him back only to make him abandon the quest without any definite purpose in view and he has badly blurred the moral of the whole with his ambivalence towards the meaning of the Blatant Beast. He has proposed us an image of Arcadian happiness, an eclogue in the middle of his epic, a move which amounts to a regression, an undoing of the first stanza of the poem. But then it is an eclogue with an injection of blood, and all the shepherds are killed, presumably including Colin Clout himself (!). And at the end of the book the Blatant Beast is loose again without any hope of its ever being subjected. As Dees notes, Calidore "has constantly to fight against the temptation to truancy, as had the narrator to struggle with the impulse to give up his work" (p. 567). But Dees goes on to approve of the narrator's approving of Calidore's truancy, and compares his vision on Mt. Acidale to Redcrosse's vision of the heavenly Jerusalem (I.x.55ff). Some critics have noted that Calidore's pastoral interlude resembles The Red Cross knight's truancy in Book I, but they immediately propose a

thematic link of the episode to others of a more dignified nature: Calidore is not giving up his quest, he is undergoing "an education in the operation of courtesy."²⁶ This is an acceptable reading, of course, but I see the episode in a different light. In ignoring the disturbing elements which the episode brings to mind, this reading justifies the legitimacy of the opposite reading (one which ignores the positive associations) by a critic who is not determined to find coherence in Spenser. I would not favour either of these readings. We may accept that Spenser used the episode as a metaphor of harmony, but we need not blindfold ourselves against the inadequacies we perceive. He also used it as a way to vent his anger against the oppressive world of the Elizabethan court. Spenser experienced his employment as a colonial officer in Ireland as a kind of exile, and resented the forces which opposed his advancement. Spenser felt that his political ideas were not paid enough attention to. His *View of the Present State of Ireland*, in which Spenser supported the brutal colonial policies of his patron, Lord Grey, and advocated measures such as the mass starvation of the Irish population, was (fortunately) held from publication by opposing parties which also brought along Grey's downfall. Lord Burleigh, Elizabeth's chief minister, apparently frowned on Spenser's performance as a self-appointed Poet Laureate, and the very idea of writing a *dynastic* epic at a moment when it became clear that Elizabeth would never marry and a change of dynasty was imminent put Spenser's project, to say the least, in a very shaky position.

The two proposed senses of the Calidore episode, irresponsible truancy and commendable lucidity, are not easily reconciled. The narrator himself draws our attention to the knight's responsibility in actually pursuing the Beast. He does so just before Calidore meets the shepherds: "Ne rested he himselve but natures dew,/For dread of daunger, not to be redrest,/If he for slouth forslackt so famous quest" (VI.ix.3.3-5). The ship has gone astray indeed: Calidore plays truant as he abandons his quest, and the poet (not merely "the narrator") plays truant too when he supports him with a rhetorical legerdemain. The stanzas are worth quoting in full:

Who now does folow the foule *Blatant Beast*,
 Whilest *Calidore* does follow that faire Mayd,
 Vnmyndfull of his vow and high beheast,
 Which by the Faery Queene was on him layd,
 That he should neuer leaue, nor be delayd
 From chacing him, till he had it attchieued?
 But now entrapt of loue, which him betrayd,
 He mindeth more, how he may be relieued
 With grace from her, whose loue his heart hath sore engrieued.

That from henceforth he meanes no more to sew
 His former quest, so full of toile and paine;
 Another quest, another game in vew
 He hath, the guerdon of his loue to gaine:
 With whom he mindes for euer to remaine,
 And set his rest amongst the rusticke sort,
 Rather then hunt still after shadowes vaine
 Of courtly fauour, fed with light report
 Of euery blaste, and sayling alwaies in the port (VI.x.1).

As J. C. Maxwell observes, it takes an effort "*not* to identify the hunt after *shadowes vaine* with the quest which Calidore abandons."²⁷ It does indeed, because not to do so

runs directly against the intention of the narrator and the author at this point. In the purest *beatus ille* tradition, Calidore is taking refuge in a pastoral land which is at once opposed to the corruption and vanity of the court: pursuing the Blatant Beast is now a metaphor for the rat race of a courtier's career. This disturbs the harmonious picture of the court of the Faerie Queene as it has been presented so far in the poem. The Beast is not a rebellious force against the ideal Faeryland, but rather the product of the Faery court itself. Spenser has sacrificed the coherence of his overall plan for the sake of a private quarrel, a classical topos, and the fluidity of the poetic image, which appears thus to be infinitely malleable, and can be put to a diversity of uses which need not be logically compatible.²⁸

There are many other instances of such inadequacies. We may be puzzled when Belphoebe is associated with the Bower of Bliss (III.v.35), when Artegall contradicts his own standards of justice in V.xi.41-46 and V.xii.19 (Hamilton, p. 609); when he abandons his shield at V.xii.22.7-8, just after this action had symbolized Burbon's ignominious giving up the true faith. We may wish to read the implications of the passage in a way Spenser would not appreciate: as a symbol of the moral duplicity involved in Spenser's own attitude towards the Irish. In his dealings with them it is not the Christian moral standards that Spenser is upholding.

Spenser's narrative is notorious because of its tendency to drive the allegorical meaning against itself. This was noted, for instance, by Thomas Warton²⁹ or by Sir Walter Scott: "What are we to understand by Britomart overthrowing Arthegal, if we regard the lady as representative of chastity, and the knight as that of justice?"³⁰ Spenser's allegories are not fixed, and the same motif may acquire different meanings in different contexts. This is a source of vitality which nevertheless has its shortcomings, as in these examples. It is facile to note them, but it is misleading not to do so. They are a part of any reader's experience. Such observations are not meant to be an overall judgement of allegory as a poetic device. They merely point out that allegory pays a price. And indeed sometimes this is consciously exploited by Spenser. An example may be found in the theme of Art and Nature in the Temple of Venus. This refers us directly to the positive Garden of Adonis episode, which has in its turn *two* undesirable associations: the Bower of Bliss and the story of Venus and Adonis as depicted in the tapestries in Malecasta's castle (III.i.34-38). It is clear that the Bower of Bliss looks like the Garden of Adonis; it is clear too that a closer reading of both passages shows a clear if subtle difference between them.³¹ The Bower of Bliss is an imitation of nature by art, a product of "daytiest fantasie."³² Here the change of roles between art and nature is unnatural and vicious, the product of disharmony and displacement:

One would haue thought (so cunningly, the rude,
And scorned parts were mingled with the fine,)
That nature had for wantonnesse ensude
Art, and that Art at nature did repine (II.xii.59).

In the Temple of Venus,

. . . all that nature by her mother wit
Could frame in earth, and forme of substance base,
Was there, and all that nature did omit,
Art playing second natures part, supplied it (IV.x.21.6-9).

As Hamilton notes, "Nature and art are here in harmony," as opposed to "their rivalry in the Bower of Bliss" (p. 499). And we should be suspicious about Venus and Adonis in the tapestries, since they are the product of a dissembling art. In both cases, the reader is forced to direct his attention to the relevant differences. But I think this cannot be generalized into a law that would allow us to find an Aristotelian structure in *The Faerie Queene*.

The poem is not merely incomplete: it seems to be unwittingly heading towards incompleteness. Hurd saw the structure of *The Faerie Queene* as a conflict between a "Gothic" and a "Classical" principle of order, and he regarded the latter as an intrusion.³³ I agree with this view insofar as I see in the last books a dissatisfaction of Spenser with his original "Classical" principle, the consistent allegorization of virtues and the unifying theme of the Faerie Queene and Arthur. Indeed, this theme has split into Arthur's and Gloriana's, since Arthur's dream in Book I is the first and the last attempt to bring them together. Given the allegory and its historical circumstances, the idea was probably a stillborn from the beginning.

Since the early sixties, there has been a dominant tendency to regard *The Faerie Queene* as complete work.³⁴ This is undoubtedly the consequence of New Critical modes of approach, which are uncomfortable with the idea of an unfinished work, and need to posit a comprehensive structure. More recent deconstructive readings, like those by A. Leigh de Neef or Kenneth Gross,³⁵ also tend to overemphasize the deliberateness and the self-consciousness of the structures they find in the poem, and to make of Spenser a deconstructor in stockings and jerkin.

For Jane Brown³⁶ or Bowers, *The Faerie Queene* is a fragmentary poem. Brown notes, nevertheless, that it is a common technique in this poem to present a fragmentary narrative which is left for the reader to complete. Such is the case with the vision of Jerusalem in Book I, which leaves the reader unsatisfied and waiting for more. In this respect, I think, the conclusion of the Mutabilitie Cantos, in which the poet asks God for the "Sabaoths Sight," is asking (given the present state of the poem) to be read as the structural equivalent of that first passage in the poem at large. However, it is not an actual gaze on the center of being, but a prayer that it may be granted; it still pushes us further toward the ultimate vision which never comes. In this sense the poem is deliberately unfinished, and we can always make the best of this: "the ordered structure of Spenser's poem points beyond these disorderly fragments to the potential completed *Faerie Queene*, beyond the broken realm of the everyday to the holy. In this way, Spenser tests the boundaries of language and art to show at once their limitation and their power" (Brown, p. 4.402a). Anyway, I think that there are other factors, apart from ineffability, and even apart from the excessive ambition and inadequacy of Spenser's original plan, which explain the unfinished state of the poem. Ronald Horton observes that "recent formalist criticism . . . characteristically regards the poem as complete in its present state or as 'theoretically endless.'"³⁷ This is rounding off the poem in a deliberate way, and making a virtue of necessity. A middle term is missing. Such approaches and those who find a carefully constructed narrator who learns the author's truth just as the characters do spring from the same conception, one which deliberately ignores the relationship of the poem to its author, his life, projects and historical circumstances.

I would conclude by saying that there is a narrator in *The Faerie Queene* in the sense that our response to the poem is intended to be fuller than that explicitly provided by the narrative voice. This voice acts in a variety of ways, serving as a

reliable guide or receding into ambiguity. But the narrator can be reduced to the poet's use of rhetorical devices; he is never given an independent personality. And there is an evolution in the mood of the narrator from the first to the last cantos, but it is not the product of a deliberation. There is no sense in trying to apply to the Renaissance epic a concept which is only made possible by the relationship between the novelist and his public in a later age. A "developing narrator" as someone different from the poet is a conception best reserved for the experimental novel. The courtly epic poet is not facing an anonymous, independent audience. He knows who will read him, and his self-portrayal in his writing is tied to his assumptions as to his role in the court. Robert Weimann³⁸ opposes the point of view of the popular epic (naive, communal, assuming a fundamental identity between the poet and the public, without a fictive narrator) to that of the novel, in which the narrative situation is always a problem which must be solved in a manner peculiar to an author, age and work; where the narrator, in a manner of speaking, is always fictional. It is clear that the kind of epic Spenser is writing does not fall into any of these categories. Rather, it represents the intermediary stage that made possible the transition from one to the other: there is an ever-present tension between the more widely communal values of Christianity and the aristocratic mould in which they are presented. The evolution of *The Faerie Queene* reflects the growing anxiety of Spenser about his poem, an anxiety which is due to an increasingly difficult position of the poet.³⁹ As the first Poet (quasi-)Laureate, he was breaking ground and in constant danger of overstepping the mark, which must not have been a very clearly defined one. As a writer of a dynastic epic, he found himself in a delicate position when the end of the dynasty was seen to be at hand; as a civil servant, proprietor, and family man he was pursued by the nightmare of bloody uprisings in Ireland, and his fears break more and more often into Books V and VI. As C. S. Lewis noted, Spenser's false position in Ireland corrupted his imagination, even as it corrupted his morality. It is generally acknowledged that the first three Books of *The Faerie Queene* are poetically superior to the second half of the poem. This is not the result of a deliberate design. In his later years, Spenser was no longer comfortable inside his poem, which was growing more and more awkward. He gradually turned to "another quest, another game," and could reach past heights only by abandoning the plan altogether, as in *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe*, or by merely pretending to follow it, as in the *Mutabilitie Cantos*.

Notes

1. Gérard Genette, "Discours du récit," in *Figures III*, chapter 5, "Voix."
2. Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. by A. C. Hamilton, book IV, canto xi, stanza 34, line 7, and IV.xi.41.9. All further references to the poem will be to this edition and will follow this notation.
3. Michael O'Connell, *Mirror and Veil: The Historical Dimension of The Faerie Queene*, p. 4; A. C. Hamilton, in his edition of Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, p. 27.
4. A late and elaborate development of this tradition can be found in Thomas Hobbes's "Answer to Davenant's Preface to *Gondibert*."
5. It is significant that the poet abandons here his shepherd's clothes to don, so to speak, the knight's armour, while Calidore will do the opposite in Book VI. The unconvincing resolution of that episode points to some extent to the shipwreck of the project announced in the opening stanza.

6. We may compare this conception of art with the one underlying the *ekphrastic* passages in *The Faerie Queene*, the description of pictures, tapestries, etc. These passages actually are, or become, insertions of narrative set pieces. This is common enough in the epic tradition: there is an enormous mobility in Achilles' or Aeneas' shields, as well as in comparable passages in Ariosto or Tasso. At the start they are static, but soon they become animated, and unfold their own story for the perceiver (e.g. the Venus and Adonis tapestry in III.i.34-38). Cf. also II.xii.45 and II.xii.60 (here the use of "seem" makes us share the perspective of the characters who contemplate the works of art). In III.xi.29-49, the tapestry is "so liuely and so like, that liuing sence it fayld" (III.xi.46.9). There is a curious assumption at work here: while the narrative almost invariably claims to be unable to render its subject in an adequate way, the image (painting, tapestry or sculpture) is not insufficient. It succeeds in reproducing the object perfectly, and it is not impaired by its immobility: it looks as if it were moving, and it is described accordingly. As C. S. Lewis notes, "Everywhere . . . Spenser uses art to suggest the artificial and its bad sense -the sham or imitation" (*The Allegory of Love* [Oxford University Press, 1936], repr. in J. P. Alpers, ed., *Edmund Spenser: A Critical Anthology*, pp. 190-212, esp. p. 200). Perfect reproduction is treacherous... Spenser ignores that the treacherous mimesis of *ekphrasis* is only possible because of the narrativity which is infused into the image by the viewer -that is, by the narrative movement of the poem. On *ekphrasis* in *The Faerie Queene*, see Robert R. Wilson, "Narrative Allusiveness: The Interplay of Stories in Two Renaissance Writers, Spenser and Cervantes."

7. Torquato Tasso, *Discourses on the Heroic Poem*, p. 6. The main intellectual influence behind this notion is, of course, Aristotle's contention that poetry is a more philosophical and serious discipline than history.

8. Jerome S. Dees, "The Narrator of *The Faerie Queene*: Patterns of Response," p. 537.

9. But, as Anderson notes, it is convenient to see in the "narrator" simply the "narrative presence" of the poet: "the terms *poet* and *narrator* are virtually interchangeable as they apply to Langland's and Spenser's poems" (*Growth*, p. 26). That is, the narrator's quest is not that of a fictional being: it is the very real one of Spenser's dedication to his work, and the references to the progress of the work have also to be read as the thematization of the actual process of composition.

10. Cornelius A. Cronin, "To Tread an Endlesse Trace, Withouthe Guyde": The Developing Narrator in *The Faerie Queene*."

11. Cf. Jeanne Murray Walker, "Metaphors of Art in Spenser's *Faerie Queene*."

12. Most often, the audience is an unspecified general reader (cf. the "mariners," or the "thou" in III.iii.8). Although at times there is a direct address to the Queene (e.g. II.x.4, II.i.1, III.ii.3); at times she is explicitly identified with Gloriana, the Faerie Queene (VI.x.28). He also may address a specific section of the audience, like the "Faire Ladies" in III.i.49 or the "Redoubted knights, and honorable Dames" (III.ix.1), "Lordings" (III.ix.3), usually to prevent misinterpretation. Sometimes this is anticipated and forestalled (IV.viii.29, where the narratee is "some rash witted wight," or in V.vi.1.1-2, where "Some men, I wrote, will deeme in *Artegall*/Great weakness, and report of him much ill"). He may also address even one of his characters: "Now God thee keepe, thou gentlest Squire aliuie" ([III.v.26] or an allegorical principle ("False loue" in III.x.4). The poet himself defines the ideal reader of his work, rejecting potential misreaders (IV.pr.). Or, alternately, Spenser refreshes the narratee's memory (which is always a welcome move in this poem): "Here neede you to remember, how erewhile/Unlouely *Proteus*. . ." (IV.xi.2.1-2). "With that he gan at large to her dilate/The whole discourse of his captiuance sad,/In sort as ye haue heard the same of late" (V.vi.17.1-3).

13. Elizabeth's original sighs and tears may have been nauseating or they may not; they inevitably become so when they are publicized and turned to her credit in a courtly poem.

14. Cf. Paul Alpers, "Narration in *The Faerie Queene*," p. 21.

15. Cf. Marion W. Copeland, "The Voices of *The Faerie Queene*: The Development of a Poetic Technique."

16. Louis A. Marre, *Ironic Historian: The Narrator of Books III and IV of The Faerie Queene*.

17. Stan Hinton, "The Poet and His Narrator: Spenser's Epic Voice," pp. 165-166.

18. See Harry Berger Jr., Kathleen Williams, Dees.

19. Cf. "Discours du récit," en *Figures III* (ch. 5, "Voix"), "Métalepses."

20. Hamilton (p. 507) notes that Spenser had left the story of Florimell with similar words.

21. Meir Sternberg defines "motivation" as "the explicit or implicit justification, explanation or dissimulation of an artistic convention, device, or necessity either in the terms of artistic exigencies, goals, and functionality (aesthetic or rhetorical motivation) or in terms of the referential pattern of the fictive world (realistic or quasi-mimetic motivation)" (*Expositional Modes and Temporal Ordering in Fiction*, p. 247).

22. Kathleen Williams, "Visions and Rhetoric: The Poet's Voice in *The Faerie Queene*," p. 139.
23. The divergences between the text as it stands and Spenser's plan in the "Letter to Raleigh" might lead to the conclusion that this was not always the case.
24. Cf. Mieke Bal, *Narratologie*, chapter 1, "Narration et focalisation."
25. Cf. Mark Rose, *Spenser's Art: A Companion to Book One of The Faerie Queene*, p. 156.
26. Donald Cheney, *Spenser's Image of Nature: Wild Man and Shepherd in The Faerie Queene* (New Haven, 1966), p. 217; qtd. in Hamilton, p. 623. Cf. John D. Bernard, "Calidore, Acidale, and Spenserian Narration," p. 11.
27. J. C. Maxwell, "The Truancy of Calidore," p. 146.
28. Both Calidore and the poet eventually resume their duty, and the episode on Mount Acidale can be read as a formative one. But it is significant that even this episode reveals an escape from the public into the private, from the patriotic epic to an intimate pastoral. That Spenser is aware of this can be seen in Colin Clout's address to Gloriana (VI.x.28), which, incidentally, is perhaps the most daring mixture of narrative levels in the whole poem. The dissociation of poetic vision from the epic action and its turn towards the personal sphere may be traceable to earlier sections. See Judith H. Anderson, "Whatever Happened to Amoret: The Poet's Role in Book IV of *The Faerie Queene*."
29. *Observations on The Faerie Queene of Spenser*, 1754 (2nd. ed. 1762) II, 95-97. Rpt. in Alpers, *Edmund Spenser*, p. 109. Warton criticises, for instance, one of the images entailed by the allegory at Alma's castle (II.ix.26): the teeth bow to the soul.
30. From a review of Robert Southey's edition of *The Pilgrim's Progress* (*Quarterly Review*, 43 [September 1830]); rpt. in Alpers, *Edmund Spenser*, pp. 150-152, p. 151.
31. Cf. C. S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love*, pp. 324-333; rpt. in Alpers, *Edmund Spenser*, pp. 198-204.
32. II.xii.421; cf. Sidney's condemnation of *phantastiké* in his *Apology* or Spenser's own depiction of the unruly chamber of Phantastes in Alma's House (II.ix.49-52).
33. Richard Hurd, *Letters on Chivalry and Romance*, letter 8.
34. See John Edward Bowers, "The Importance of the Epic Simile in the Rhetorical Structure of *The Faerie Queene*."
35. A. Leigh de Neef, "'Who Now Does Follow the Foule Blatant Beast': Spenser's Self-Effacing Fictions"; Kenneth Gross, *Spenserian Poetics*.
36. Jane Wiseman Brown, "The 'Sabaoths Sight': Narrative Method in Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene*."
37. Ronald Arthur Horton, *The Unity of The Faerie Queene*, p. 6.
38. Robert Weimann, "Erzählersstandpunkt und Point of View," pp. 390-396.
39. According to Margaret Arculus, "it is the author's inability to achieve a unified authorial identity that is the major cause of the unfinished state of the *New Arcadia* or *The Faerie Queene*" (p. 1283a).

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