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## Spenser's Images of Society

This little exercise on Spenser's allegory of the world he lived in was originally directed to another occasion, but it has application to any reader who may commit himself to the humanist position, that one can learn from the past and the present at the same time. A lively dialogue with antiquity emerges as a comment on contemporary preoccupations. Time has a scythe but also a card index.

We have a double obligation to those monumental figures of the Renaissance: we have mined them for ideas, images, and prejudices; and we owe to them a basic educational concept, that intelligent persons cannot meet without a discussion which eventually reaches some general assumptions about the human condition, supported by apposite (though sometimes eccentric) documentation. The propositions should be stated, ideally, in a garden, where Thomas More put them, for a garden is a perfect image of civility. But we cannot always manage that.

The humanists were masters of the aside, the digression, the quotation which intrudes on the desk; as late as Gladstone a line from Virgil or an epigram from Cicero was next to mandatory in Commons debates. But it is no digression at all, by way of preface to Spenser, to say something about Elizabeth Tudor, the queen whom he served and conspicuously celebrated in his poetry.

She combined in her own person, so carefully preserved, the qualities of a consummate actress (in an age when acting emerged to power from exercises by schoolboys or popular buffoonery), and those of a careful bureaucrat. On ceremonial occasions she was Cynthia, as Richard Mulcaster (Spenser's schoolmaster) put it, she 'representeth the personage of the hole land, and therefor claimeth a prerogative in dewtie, both for the excellencie of hir place, wherewith she is honored, as our prince, and for the greatnesse of hir care, wherewith she is charged, as our parent.'<sup>1</sup> On semi-private occasions, she spent hours in committee work with her Council, dealing often with inconspicuous

matters within the royal prerogative. Her force in these discussions is disguised in the minutes, where were carefully edited to protect the Queen and everybody else involved.

That there was a habit of adulation we can have no doubt, cultivated in part by the passion of reaching the fountain of power, and its (rather limited) patronage — Mulcaster's 'Epistle' is directed to Leicester, an academic appeal at one remove — but Queen was the realm, the more because Tudor politics, both in popular speculation and professional intrigue, turned upon the succession, and she was indubitably there — *for the time*. 'Time hath brought me hither,' she said, and time took her away. She was an emblem of both power and mutability.

The two 'perspective' pictures of the Court in *Colin Clouts Come Home Again*<sup>2</sup> are well enough known. In the first, the Queen, 'image of the heavens in shape humane', is surrounded by courtly poets (duly catalogued) and a glowing circle of beautiful maidens; in the second, the court is contaminated by malicious place-seeking, and with idle talk of love 'whose mighty mysteries they do prophane'. This leads Spenser into a characteristic hymn to Love as creative power. The first picture of the court of Gloriana, 'the focus, fictively and symbolically of the entire poem', as Richard Neuse has pointed out,<sup>3</sup> is essentially created by the poet's imaginative power. The other picture is of a House of Pride (*FQ*, I, iv) presided over by a 'mayden Queene', whom throngs of people wait to catch a glimpse of, whose lords and ladies devise

Themselves to setten forth to straungers sight:  
Some fraunce their curled haire in courtly guise,  
Some prancke their ruffes, and others trimly dight  
Their gay attire: each the others pride does spight.

This is of course the palace of the damned, but the competition of the courtiers, taken with the malice, slander and 'fained forgerie' of the suitors whom Colin Clout observed, introduces what for Spenser seems to have been the major solvent of the social bond and the power and grace of the poet's art, the two being, in the ideal harmony of human society, reciprocally valuable to each other. And that is Envy, which goes under more than one name.

At the beginning, in the prefatory poem 'To His Booke' in *The Shepheardes Calender*, we find: 'And if that Envie barke at thee,/ As sure it will, for succoure flee/ Vnder the shadow of his [Sidney's] wing', an appeal echoed by E.K. at the end of the epistle to Gabriel Harvey. This is conventional enough, but a somewhat stronger note is struck in the letter to Raleigh prefixed to *CCCHA*: '... and with your good countenance protect against the malice of evill mouthes, which

are alwaies wide open to carpe and misconstrue my simple meaning.' Envy, the pageant of the Deadly Sins, has a poisonous mouth, and 'chawed his owne maw' at others' wealth and pride — Avarice on his goldladen camel precedes him — but he hates all 'good workes and vertuous deeds',

And eke the verse of famous Poets witt  
He does backbite, and spightfull poison spues  
From leproous mouth on all, that ever writt. (I, iv, 32)

The translation from Envy to Slander, from backbiting to defamation, is inevitable; they combine in the attack on the hearing sense at the House of Alma:

Slaunderous reproches, and fowle infamies,  
Leasings, backbyttings,

and their final cause is Archimago, 'that Architect of cancred guile' (I, i, 1-2). The image here, as elsewhere, is pursuit, pursuit of those vulnerable to some loss of courtly reputation. So when Arthur, Amoret and Emilia come upon the terrible old hag — 'her name men Sclaunder call' (IV, viii, 23-36). She is a nail-biter, sucking her own venom, 'pouring out streams of poyson and of gall/Gainst all, that truth or vertue doe professe'. When she pursues the ladies with her vile reproaches, they much ashamed did wexe'.

The most savage pursuit of all follows Artegal at the end of Book V, reflecting, as we know, 'Envy's cloud' over Lord Grey on his recall from Ireland. Here Envy is figured as a hideous hag gnawing on a snake, an image out of Ovid (*Metamorphoses*, II, 768) and Alciati's *Emblemata*, no. 71, accompanied by Detraction, the purveyor of lying gossip, whose words are like 'Aspis sting'. They have acquired as a servant the fearful Blatant Beast, who makes his debut at this point, and is the object of Calidore's quest in the Book of Courtesy.

He seems to be Spenser's invention, though he owes something to 'malice privy' in Stephen Hawes' *Pastime of Pleasure*, to which Spenser was indebted in other ways, but in him are assembled in a more dreadful form those qualities of Envy and Slander already given such emphasis in the poem. Most of his thousand tongues are 'tongues of mortal men,/ Which spake reprochfully, not caring what nor when' (VI, xii, 27), and he wounds with 'his teeth impure'. Timias and Serena, heedless as they are, get from the hermit as a cure some high-sounding but limited advice: use self-discipline, restraint, subjection of desire — in short, be careful, thus avoiding 'the poisonous sting, which infamy/ Infixeth in the name of noble wight' (VI, vi, 1). Professor Nelson's

assertion of the identity of the Beast is apposite: 'He stands for shame, deserved or not, public or private.'<sup>4</sup>

Pursued by Calidore through all the estates of the realm — Spenser has forgotten his fairyland here—with special attention to the clergy,<sup>5</sup> he is finally bound and muzzled, but escapes: 'So now he raungeth through the world againe', and of late is grown great and strong:

Ne spareth he most learned wits to rate,  
 Ne spareth he the gentle Poets rime...  
 Ne may this homely verse, of many meanest,  
 Hope to escape his venomous despite,  
 More than my former writs, all were they clearest  
 From blameful blot, and free from all that wite,  
 With which some wicked tongues did it backbite,  
 And bring into a mighty Peres displeasure,  
 That never so deserved to endite.  
 Therefore do you my rimes keep better measure,  
 And seek to please, that now is counted wisemens threasure.  
 (VI, xii, 50-1)

A bitter conclusion, though with a wry apostrophe in the final couplet. The mighty peer is of course Burghley.

I have dwelt at what may seem unwarranted length upon this unsavory set of images, not primarily because Spenser seems to have felt himself pursued by Envy, but for more important reasons. In the rather limited circles through which he moved, the court (though that he knew for most of his life mainly by repute, after the gossip of Envy), the powerful gentry around the Queen in their constant competition for place and favour, the Irish service in which men sought to build estates, and, early but not least, the coteries and rivalries in Cambridge, the pursuit of fame, *a name*, reputation was obsessive, and it was the poet's mission to achieve a place in the literary house of fame by his 'long labours'. Hence the appropriateness of the quest, the hunt—including the hunt for a suitable marriage. No richer ground for Envy to breed upon can be imagined. Even more central for Spenser's humanist preoccupations is the fact that these 'vile tongues' abuse language, abuse the truth which the divine gift of tongues was given us to convey. Here we may cite Mulcaster's preface again, remembering that there is an element of special Tudor pleading in it:

Perfitnesse in learning which consisteth in right education of chosen wits, in right method of best matters, in full time both to learn & digest, when it comes to deale abrode, is the instrument of quietnesse, considerate in publishing hir own opinion, with warrant for truth, with warinesse for peace: the contrarie corrupts, where it cannot gide: it worketh dissension ... uttereth the first conceived heat ... The quik silver, which at the first push it hath poord in peoples heads, an enemy to concorde, which learning pretendeth, as the Art of peace.<sup>6</sup>

Of course Mulcaster is talking of ill-learned impulsiveness, not evil contriving with a 'filed tongue', but that 'quik silver' is very like the 'seedes of evill wordes, and factious deedes' which Spenser's Ate, the mother of discord, sows (IV, i, 25), and are 'bred in assemblies of the vulgar sort'. We remember also how the chamber of Phantastes, in the turret of the House of Alma, is filled with flies and bees:

All those were idle thoughts and fantasies,  
Deuices, dreames, opinions vnsound,  
Shewes, visions, sooth-sayes, and prophesies;  
And all that feigned is, as leasings, tales and lies. (II, ix, 51)

The true learning, supported as it is by the ancient records preserved in Memory's library (the rather musty chamber of the true antiquary), belongs to good and grave reason, who meditates on 'all that in the world was aye thought wittily', and has achieved wisdom. He is one fit to give counsel to a king, and Spenser describes his chamber as painted all over with images ("picturals") of "memorable gestes/Of famous Wizards", of public affairs, arts and all philosophy. His aids to mediation, whereby he 'could of things present best advize', are not unlike those provided by the epic poet.

Spenser's recurring symbol of marriage, as not only a private fulfilment of love creating, but the publication of a religious, social, political and even cosmic concord, is so conspicuous and has been so often discussed, that I plead necessity in my design for this commentary.

As Waldo McNeir has observed, the *Amoretti* sequence is notable for its celebration of marriage, as well as for its "historicity" in what he calls "situational sonnets" (a distressful phrase),<sup>7</sup> and the same may be said for *Prothalamion*. As for *Epithalamion*, grace, in all senses of that word, and nature, both mythologized and realistic, are combined in an elaborate ritual movement in the cycle of the hours. The Graces and the local bellringers, the officiating clergyman and the "glad Genius" of the Gardens of Adonis all are invited to this remarkable wedding, in which the bridegroom has also the role 'of a director of a masque or pageant ... a master of the revels'.<sup>8</sup>

The prayer for "a large posterity" concludes the hymn, and it leads us forward to certain marriage motifs in *The Faerie Queene*. In the original grand design, the poem was presumably to end with the union of Arthur and Gloriana, a union allegorizing, at one level, the marriage of Elizabeth with her realm, a sacrament to which she frequently and with some effect referred. For the union of Artegall and Britomart there is promised a whole British history (III, iii). But the betrothal of St. George and Una underlies all the others, for it figures not only the union of the realm with the true religion of the East after the flirtation

with Rome, but also the marriage of the Lamb from the Book of Revelation, for the Red Cross knight has done the apocalyptic Christ-work. Human society, below the level of Eden restored, must go on, and Gloriana be served. Also there are pleasing translations of heavenly matters into domestic touches: the bride is crowned by the local maidens with a green garland, and she is 'so faire and fresh, as freshest flowre in May'; Duessa sends a messenger at the last moment to offer an impediment to the ceremony, which upsets Una's father considerably, until he finds out that the messenger is Archimago; some Roman marriage ceremonies are used; there is music 'to drown dull Melancholy, and a solo of 'love and jollity', followed of course by an angelic choir. Nowhere in the poem is Spenser more medieval, as we say, than here.

The loves of Britomart and Artegall, as woven into the intricate tapestry of Books III & IV, exhibit, as the occasions of the romance serve, a double perspective: first of the high magic of the tyrannous Cupid, and then of the weight of destiny. Here it is possible to note only the most significant images. Britomart sees Artegall first in Merlin's magic globe, a personage of heroic grace, and her love-melancholy, complete with the usual symptoms, is described intimately and at great length (III, ii, 27-52). But the interpretation given by Merlin (III, iii, 21-49) is a genealogical tree of the renowned kings and sacred emperors who will descend from this union, ending with a "royall virgin". Britomart sets out on her quest armed with chaste love, knowledge, and power; Artegall appears first as the conventional wild man, decorated with moss and oak, his motto *salvagesse sans finesse*, his sword the "instrument of wrath" (IV, iv, 39). The recognition and hasty betrothal (IV, vi, 40-1) is renewed when Britomart rescues her future husband from the tyrant Radigund (V, vii). The whole affair might be called the education of raw power by love and wisdom gained from visionary experience, as in Britomart's dream in the Temple of Isis, where, as the priests explain, she sees herself and Artegall metamorphosed into mythic figures of equity and justice.

This is one of Spenser's most moving images, because it suggests a discovery of identity, not only as in the story, in terms of general social principles, or historical prophecy, but in personal terms, of the fear which lurks in the heart of love. No wonder that when just after this Britomart comes upon Artegall in Radigund's prison "in womanish attire" she accosts him with 'What May-game hath misfortune made of you?'

The spousals of Florimell and Marinell (IV, xi) belong to a different order. Here we are free both of apocalyptic associations, and political ones too. In their story there is much to be considered about how

Spenser works out a romantic pattern, where fancy overcomes both reason and memory. But with a deliberate epic intention he puts aside the byways of his narrative to make an orchestral accompaniment to his myth of Concord in one of his great set pieces, the celebration of the marriage of the Thames and the Medway, catalogue and pageant for a bridal feast. In that pageant the rivers of the realm, their *names*, are at once a circulatory system and a translation of Mediterranean myth into a contemporary setting, 'for Albion the sonne of Neptune was'. Spenser knew the Thames, the Medway and the Granta very well, but he was also a geographer out of Leland and Camden before him. Like those masters he loved and gave a human and civil dimension to the face of England. (If Spenser were to be re-born into our time one book he would wish to read would be Jaquetta Hawkes' *The Land*, a humanist document if ever there was one—it begins with meditation in a Hampstead garden—and he would have enjoyed memorizing the names of the geological periods.)

After all this superb prelude, with the love-complaints of Marinell and Florimell, so obviously contrived out of little pieces among his loose papers, the marriage of flower and sea is disposed of rather perfunctorily, in the first stanzas of V, iii. I think it of little significance that the ceremony should be 'perfected' in the Book of Justice, although the disgrace of Braggadochio and the false Florimell in the tournament which is part of the festivities is a meting out of justice.

The harmony which sustains the whole universe is allegorized in Concord, who sits in the porch of the Temple of Venus (IV, x, 31ff.), between Hate and his stronger halfbrother Love. Before her stretches a park, an Eden of lovers and true friends; within the temple is the idol of Venus, who is both male and female, and also a representation of the caduceus, a token of healing and appeasement. Attendant upon her mysteries is 'a bevie of fayre damzels' who, taken together, might be considered as Spenser's ideal of the perfect wife. The eldest of them is Womanhood, of 'sad semblant and demeanure wyse', with Shamefastness, Cheerfulness, Modestie, Courtesy, 'soft Silence' and Obedience.

The figure of the benign goddess, so appropriate to the total design of *The Faerie Queene*, and imaged in Belpheobe, who is the perfection of grace and modesty at strife in the heroic mind (III, v, 55), is continually set against such feminine sowers of discord as Hellenore, that false and vulgar Helen (III, x), the false Florimell, who is a robot contrived out of the conventional epithets of the sonneteers (snow, 'vermily', lamps for eyes, golden wire for hair), and the proud Mirabella (VI, vii). These are wanderers upon the face of the earth; the centre of civility is the ordered and stable great house. And here one

one may turn once more to Book I, to the allegory of the seven 'Bead-men' in the hospital of the House of Holiness, which will lead us to some consideration of Justice. In Spenser's picture of this monastic establishment there is an implied instruction to the noble houses founded upon the spoils of the Dissolution. The steward, the almoner and the master of the wardrobe dispense *hospitality*; preacher after preacher in the sixteenth century lamented the decay of hospitality. The fourth redeems poor prisoners from Turks and Saracens; a weekly collection for this purpose was taken at the Paul's Cross sermons. The fifth has charge of the sick, the sixth of the dead:

The wondrous workmanship of Gods owne mould  
Whose face he made, all beasts to feare, and gave  
All in his hand, euen dead we honour should.  
Ah dearest God me graunt, I dead be not defould. (I, x, 42)

Spenser had seen that happen to others in Ireland. The seventh has charge of orphans and widows, not fearing the power of mighty men; here Spenser glances at the abuses of wardship, of which there are many contemporary complaints.

In a valuable essay, James Philips has pointed out that 'the tripartite exposition of Justice, Equity and Mercy governs the logical development of the Book of Justice.'<sup>9</sup> The argument is cogent, and helps us to see the unity of the intention in what is, in other terms, an anthology rather than a connected narrative. For my purposes, I propose to begin with some of Spenser's more vivid apprehensions of the Irish problem, in *A View of the Present State of Ireland*, which undoubtedly did much to form his allegory.

The pessimistic and apocalyptic views of Ireland—'the fatall Curse of this Countrie' (Sir Henry Sidney); 'the secret Judgement of God hangeth ouer this soyle' (Lodowick Bryskett)—are echoed by Spenser at the beginning of the *View*. His own solution, which was also Cromwell's, was to rule the country from strategically placed garrisons and judicious 'plantations', but first the natives must be altogether subdued. This is 'justice absolute' of the kind his Artagall practises. He sees the country like 'shippe in a storme amiddest all the raging surges vnruled and vndirected to anye', and for him Lord Grey was 'a most wise Pilott'. Though in *CCCHA* he can imagine a small island of English pastoral on his Irish estate, he looks with no myth-making eye at the 'boolies' or herdsmen's huts, nor does he find their mantles picturesque, rather cloaks for villainy, the very image of the 'uncivil' life. How different the gowned justiciar: 'the person that is gowned is by his gowne putt in minde of gravetye and allsoe Restrained from lightnes by the very vnaptnes of his wede'. These creatures are Cathol-



ics, which is bad enough, but there are survivals too of 'the Schthyan Barbarisme as their Lamentacions at their burials with despairefull outcries and ymoderate waylings'; if keening is a sign of incivility, so are the songs of the bards, who do not set forth the praises of the vertuous, but bold and lawless men. There is no glamour to war in Ireland, 'as with other countries where the warres flame most in Sommer and the helmettes glitter brightest in the fair Sunshine'; this is a year-round, mist-shrouded guerilla affair of ambush and weird battle-cries. Besides, the old Anglo-Irish families are pollers and plunderers too. This is indeed the fallen world to which we are introduced at the beginning of Book V of *The Faerie Queene*, the world from which the goddess of justice has departed, and for the ordering of it has trained Artegall upon wild beasts, assigning the iron creature Talus as his assistant. In this book Spenser is least influenced by humanist values, and the savage and sometimes bizarre images can be shown to enforce that contention. Artegall is likened to Hercules and Samson, both for his great labours and his subjection to female power. There is a strong resemblance here to the Book of Judges, that barbarous and offensive document.

When the pacification program begins, we have first Sanglier the murderer, and beheader, to whom the famous doom of Solomon is curiously applied; next the Pollente-Munera (a Lady Meed) business, which is oppression and banditry (and perhaps, because the encounter is in water, piracy); another beheading follows; with the head exposed on 'a pole on high ordained .../ To be a mirrour to all mighty men/ In whose right hands great power is contain'd', and the body of Munera cast into the cleansing river. The egalitarian giant, 'much admired of foles, women, and boys', and the 'vulgar' generally, who abuses the concord of sea and land and the hierarchy of society, against the rules of Concord, by which 'all the world in state vnmoved stands' (IV, x, 35), is not only out-argued but also drowned. Notice the emphasis on beheading and drowning; when the parody of knighthood, Braggadochio, is revealed for what he is, Talus shaves his beard, so that all his face was 'deform'd with infamie' (V, iii, 38). The head is the crown not only of masculinity but the seat of reason and order. Radigund, who represents those of womankind who withstand 'all rule and reason', has her head cut off too, by Britomart.

Britomart is the child of providence, Radigund of fortune, and this deprives her of the heavenly sanction which Gloriana and Britomart have. She tries her fortune against Artegall, he accepts it, and the 'rout' watches their combat to see how Fortune will resolve it (V, v, 5). Artegall himself, in his absurd conversations with Clorinda the go-between, invokes 'Fortunes frown' and other useless sentiments.

Spenser's indulgence in *transparent* images is nowhere better exhibited than in the political matter which fills out this tragi-comedy of Justice. There is, I sense, in these later cantos, a certain fatigue, a repetition of situations and motifs already exhausted in other places. The destruction of the Souldan (V, viii), which is supposed to represent the defeat of the Armada, is full of failures of imagination, evidenced by the descent into another idiom (e.g., 'overthrown to ground', 'she ranne, like an enraged cow'), and Maleggin (Guile), with his 'vncouth vestment/ Made of straune stuffe, but all to worne and ragged', recalls in part least the appearance and untrustworthiness of the native Irish (V, ix). Even the court of Mercilla (Elizabeth) and the trial of Duessa (Mary of Scots) is so close to the surface of obvious allusion that it loses its imaginative force except in a purely explanatory way. In Arthur's enterprise in the Low Countries we are very close to reportage and propaganda, as when we are told that the foreign power has 'mard her marchants trade' (V, x, 25), 'made her beare the yoke of inquisition', and that the 'cursed Idols altar stone' covers 'an hideous monster' who strikes at the British prince's head and beard (V, xi, 30), and, disembowelled, pours forth such poison as the monster Error at the beginning of the adventures of the knight of the Red Cross. And so with the summit of the quest, Artegall's 'forslackt' freeing of Irena from the tyranny of Grantorto, whose armour is rusty—he's been around a long time—and who represents the papal power. For Irena is not only Peace but the Ireland that Spenser created in reaction to the appalling realities of his daily experience as colonial administrator and planter, an Ireland converted from the Catholic faith and Spanish influence, freed of the manipulations and civil dissensions of the grantees of Plantagenet estates, freed of whatever opposed its metamorphosis into an extended English Pale. This is part of the dream of *The Faerie Queene*, the unrealized perfection of a human society, where even Spenser recognized the indefinite postponement of utopia in a colonial setting, or, perhaps, anywhere.

What strikes us in all this matter is not so much the brutality of sixteenth-century justice, or the Protestant propaganda, but the failure of a 'continued allegory' to carry the complexities of Elizabethan politics and war. The images are nakedly representative, utterly lacking in the subtlety which illuminates the other virtues; the violence of Talus is no more simplistic than the tears of Mercilla.

It may be that such a comment does some injustice to the heroic poet, who expects his formulas to be recognized and applauded in the traditional way, whatever their application. But Spenser was twice a prisoner: of his own inventiveness and of the design, that encyclopedic pattern which should be exemplary for the Elizabethan gentry. In the

descent into the topical, invention becomes a cliché and the design, adapted to 'suspicion of present time', falls into the abyss between the possible and the impossible. On my reading, Philips's neat arrangement makes Spenser too much a philosopher of Justice, and takes too little account of what happens when a vision is made the matter of occasion.

The Legend of Courtesy should, if the cyclical and proportioned pattern to which Spenser was addicted actually worked, make an analogue to the Legend of Holiness, but what was written hardly manages that. The human comedy in the secular world should be an imitation, a mirror if you will, of the divine comedy. Balance is now in the sky, as the poet says in the proem to Book V, and the greatest enemy to balance is Fortune (invoked, by the way, 41 times in the last book that Spenser completed). Order and beauty seem now possible only in retreat, or what has been called 'the truancy' of the knight of Courtesy.<sup>10</sup> Of all parts of this great poem, this book is the most self-indulgent—all that muddle—and in the end most persuasive, for the poet is more explicit than usual, and, at a critical moment, he unmasks. But before that he uses his own kind of anthropology as a surrogate for a vision of Eden. The savages of the new world, the satyrs of the old, are throughout the poem assimilated to the images of bestiality and native virtue, indiscriminately. We cannot expect a theory from Spenser, of breed for example, or its opposite, as in the prefatory sonnet to Nennio's *Treatise of Nobility*. He never made up his mind on this point—and that is a good condition for a poet. Never decided between the fruit of the 'lowly stalk' which 'spreads itself through all civilitie' (Proem, VI), and that which emerges from 'blood': 'All flesh is frayle, and full of ficklenesse.'

We are prepared, in a notable essay by J.C. Maxwell, for certain images of disquiet beyond those already suggested in this argument. 'Of Court it seems, men Courtesie doe call,' Spenser begins: that takes us back to the second perspective of *CCCHA*, and to a helpful observation by G.K. Hunter:

The court of Elizabeth was neither natural nor free. Its ritual was artificial to the last degree, despotic and repetitive. The sovereign was a painted idol rather than a person; the codes of manners it encouraged were exotic, Petrarchan and Italianate. Yet this artificial and insincere world had the power to harness the diverse energies of high and low alike ... a manifestation of Divine Order on earth.<sup>11</sup>

The patron of Courtesy, Calidore, is the least of the heroes (he has been called an anti-hero), but perhaps the one nearest to our limited private qualities, the one who achieves only an approximation of what he stands for. The real hero of the whole design is the poet himself, and he