A. C. Hamilton, General Editor; Donald Cheney, Senior Co-Editor; W. F. Blissett, Co-Editor; David A. Richardson, Managing Editor; William M. Barker, Research Editor. *The Spenser Encyclopedia*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990. Pp. xxi, 858.

Publication of *The Spenser Encyclopedia* deconstructs the witty truth that a camel is a horse designed by a committee. This major contribution to Spenser studies was designed and created by an international collection of scholars working together for more than a decade. The volume will surely serve Spenser students at many levels for a much longer period. Of a very high quality, its potential to sharpen interest in Spenser studies, in particular, and English Renaissance studies, in general, should not be underestimated.

Several factors determine the success of such a volume. These include its general conception, the editorial team's judgement and strength, the level of the intended reader, the rationale for the individual topics and categories, the selection of learned authors, the value of their entries, the plan for editorial oversight, and the quality of the publishing. In all these regards, *The Spenser Encyclopedia* was served well. Especially laudable is the decision to fix on the "intelligent senior undergraduate" as the "implied reader" (p. xi), thereby encouraging readability while making the volume accessible to Spenser students at many levels. (It is a pity that this implied reader is not honored more often in scholarly writing).

The pre-publication history covered by General Editor, A. C. Hamilton, in his "Introduction" contributes much to our understanding of the volume's successful completion. The fashioning of a Canadian and American editorial team in 1971 was followed by international conferences and meetings to assure "the full cooperation by the community of Spenser scholars" (p. xi). A central exercise at these gatherings was the discussion of necessary topics, under the assumption that, in the initial stages, the more heads involved the better. In principle, these gatherings encouraged a broadly cooperative public spirit that contributed to the final editorial decisions. Selecting authors for the different entries required a different kind of exercise. The intention to bring together "the best that the present generation of critics had to say about Spenser" (p. xi) was satisfied by the editorial decision to find the "most suitable contributor . . . whether a senior scholar or recent Ph.D." (p. xii). At that point the editors had to do their homework. They read the "publications or doctoral dissertation of a potential contributor" (p. xii). And I think we can assume that more labour was involved than meets the eye in Editor Hamilton's modest account of this exercise. Once the contributors were invited, an elaborate editorial procedure included many levels of review, proofreading, and consultation between editors and authors. But the bottom line is unequivocal: "the contributor alone is finally responsible for what is said" (p. xii).

Although an encyclopedia cannot be all things to all its potential readers, it must be useful. One measure of usefulness is the success of its formal scheme. In the case of *The Spenser Encyclopedia*, the alphabetical ordering is supplemented by a "Classification of Articles" (pp. vii-x), which groups articles under general categories ("Arts: dramatic, visual;" "Biography;" "Characters;" "Chivalric and courtly matter," etc.). The index both alphabetizes topics and includes, as their subcategories, those entries where the topics are treated. In turn, an alphabetized list of contributors (pp. xv-xxi), by indicating their article(s), provides ready access to the contents in terms of the scholarly participants. In short, the full system readily and usefully displays the contents of the volume.

The "Classification of Articles" does bear close scrutiny. The obvious question whether or not the categories preceded the selection of topics or vice versa is a chicken-or-egg-first question and not the real issue. The categories do reveal the direction of the necessarily subjective editorial decisions concerning which general subject areas were essential. And Monday morning quarterbacking is irresistible here. For my part, two related omissions were surprising. The first is the absence of a section on the history of Spenser criticism, an omission particularly conspicuous, since there is a category entitled "scholarship, reference materials" and an entry entitled "scholarship 1579-1932." Changing critical attitudes often drive scholarship, and a desire to free the encyclopedia from polemical distortions would neither require nor justify omitting a section on criticism. The second omission is a general section on politics and government to be consistent with the categories, "history," "religion," and "law." The index does little to fill this vacuum. There is no entry for government; and the entry, "politics," has only marginal subcategories such as "alchemy," "chivalry," "courtesy as social code," while ignoring more obvious subcategories such as "monarchy," or "patronage." Moreover, the index entry, "power, political," by directing the reader to "politics," where power is not mentioned, proves to be a dead end. My claim – that the absent categories respectively on "criticism" and on "politics and government" are related – is a simple one. A recent productive turn in criticism and scholarship on English Renaissance literature, including the so-called "New Historicism," is a sharpened attention to the interpenetration of literature and politics. For example, the representation of "power relations" was a compelling subject for Spenser and other poets. It is useful to keep in mind that what we call "Spenser" necessarily includes the history of our changing grasp of such matters.

When all is said and done, any encyclopedia can only be as good as its individual articles, for which "the contributor alone is finally responsible." The reviewer faces the unsettling task of assessing a volume with hundreds of entries. A rough equivalent would be reviewing a comprehensive book for all trails in the Rocky Mountains (both sides of the Canadian/American border). The high standards set for selecting contributors and the generally high level of their performance

make the impossibility of comprehensiveness somewhat less unsettling. But individual entries can be judged according to their usefulness. The volume's own implied reader suggests one criterion of usefulness that can be applied to all entries. Other criteria include workable definitions, obvious and succinct displays of essential factors, ready signposts pointing to important scholarship. Above all, the contributor must be aware of fashioning a nutshell version of the subject. A few examples of entries dealing with especially problematical topics reveal varying degrees of success in meeting these requirements.

The entry, "humanism," by O. B. Hardison, Jr., could be taken as a model for this kind of dictionary. It presents clearly and succinctly a complex subject with a rich historical development. First, we are given the historical context, 1300 to 1650, its "most typical features," and the basis of its name; then, "points which recur most in humanist writing." And we are told that it is *not* the so-called "secular humanism" of contemporary North America. Two short paragraphs and our implied reader already has something solid in hand before being introduced, next, to the inevitable complications arising from various scholarly assessments. Then follows the necessary movement through Western Europe, the obvious players and their roles (e.g., Petrarch, Pico, Erasmus), then Spenser's English context, his own involvement, and questions about how he can be considered a humanist. The bibliography is modest, but suggestive and weighty. This is an impressively useful nutshell.

By contrast, Marilyn French's "gender" succeeds much less fully in dealing with another problematical subject. Here, uncertainties about the proper boundaries of a contested subject in modern criticism create very different kinds of problems. Androgyny, crossdressing, power relations, marriage and courtship, poetic roles, and female monarchs are among the potentially complicating subjects. Inexplicably, French ignores almost all other scholarly studies and gives no bibliography, allowing the misleading inference that there is no debate on these matters. In spite of this puzzling omission, she offers a creditable discussion of Spenser's "traditional Western conceptions of gender whereby men are associated with power and the public realm, and women with love and the private realm" (p. 325). But the puzzling failure to say anything about either Elizabeth or Gloriana, who dramatically overturn this pattern, compromises the usefulness of the entry. Likewise, except for a brief paragraph on *The Sheperdes Calender*, there is no discussion of other Spenser works beyond *The Faerie Queene*. At least, *Amoretti*, *Epithalamion*, and *Fowre Hymnes* would seem relevant. The missing bibliography would surely lead the implied reader to ask where we are expected to go for more on this important subject.

The voluminous entry on "romance" by Patricia Parker, one of the longest in the volume, suffers from the opposite shortcoming. Excessive examples cloud ready accessibility; the sphere of reference is deep and wide; and the bibliography is hefty. Like humanism, the subject of romance has a complicated history. Flexible working definitions and judicious selectivity of detail would be welcome in such an ency-

cllopedia entry. We begin only with an inadequate introductory statement that clearly sidesteps definition: "Any discussion of romance broad enough to suggest the many strains incorporated in *The Faerie Queene* must include not only works traditionally designated as 'romances' but also romance elements within other texts." Then follows a protracted examination of "kinds" (subdivided as biblical, early Christian, medieval, Italian, pastoral), and afterwards a much shorter section on "images and motifs." Though learned, the entry suffers from a lack of bold generalization supported by rigorous selectivity. Perhaps not only implied readers will think that the discussion meanders, like romance itself, into more than one wandering wood.

The entry, "heroic poem since Spenser," by Mary Ann Radzinowicz, successfully confronts the difficulties of defining a problematic genre with a lengthy and complicated history. "The term *heroic poem* refers to an extended verse narrative displaying valued human qualities." Unfortunately, these qualities change "from age to age" and "the poetic structures chosen for heroic narrative do not remain constant." Even the term "heroic poem," used synonymously with "epic" or "historical" in Spenser's time, "scarcely survived the eighteenth century." A "loosely conceived mode" still lives even in such recent poets as Lowell and Berryman. The crucial question is how many traditional elements are necessary to admit a given poem to the tradition. "The history of the heroic poem after Spenser, then, can be seen as the history of the transformation and the recombination of the formal, thematic, mimetic, affective, and generative elements – both those recognized by him and those subsequently found valuable, often drawn from parts of the tradition Spenser ignored." The horizon is dangerously expandable in this matter. Radzinowicz wisely narrows it by discussing only one topic each in the areas of form, content and affect. This technique is deft, and the remainder of the discussion controlled, informative, and suggestive. The bibliography follows up usefully on the suggestions.

Predictably, the success of individual entries will vary in an encyclopedia, even in such a valuable one. But not all encyclopedias will reward browsing with so much pleasure as well as substance. Few who browse amongst the entries will resist the witty come-on entry, "Marx and Spenser" (i.e., Karl's interest in Edmund's works), or entries on such subjects as bowers, dwarfs, fauns, hermits, miniatures, mirrors, muses, rivers, satyrs, tapestries, thresholds, veils, and puns, just to name a few. The volume contains an impressively broad and varied field of entries offering both instruction and delight, for the implied reader as well as the rest of us. We can all enter this field repeatedly without fear of exhaustion.

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