Complicating the Allegory: Spenser and Religion in Recent Scholarship

ANNE LAKE
PRESCOTT

Résumé : *Presque tous les travaux récents sur la poésie d'Edmund Spenser et les convictions qui la soutiennent ont insisté sur la complexité, l'ambivalence ou l'ambiguïté de l'auteur. Certains critiques maintiennent que la situation de la religion dans l'Europe pré-moderne était floue en elle-même et qu'elle offrait plus de choix qu'une simple division entre Protestant et Catholique. D'autres mettent en valeur les nuances qui existaient même au sein d'une seule communauté confessionnelle. Et pour à peu près tous les spensériens actuels, *The Faerie Queene*, *Amoretti* et *Epithalamion* possèdent trop de subtilité linguistique et un esprit trop interrogatif pour être facilement classés. Cet article conclut que le traitement par Spenser de la réforme grégorienne du calendrier et les traces de textes liturgiques plus anciens Catholiques ou inspirés par le Catholicisme indiquent aussi que son imaginaire religieux était à la fois large et en quelque sorte indéfini.*

Identifying Edmund Spenser's beliefs so as to illuminate his poetry further has proved no easy task. At first glance his religious convictions seem clear enough. After all, in the Legend of Holiness, Book 1 of *The Faerie Queene*, the witch Duessa is the Whore of Babylon who succeeds for a time in luring the Red Cross Knight, Saint George of England, from the shiny if as yet veiled Una. To flirt (or worse) with Duessa is to flirt (or worse) with Rome, to be seduced by the fantasies of Mistress Missa — the Catholic mass — rather than loving the one Gospel truth.¹ Spenser's heroes, moreover, stumble when relying on their own capacities. Saint George rushes into Error's den because he is "full of fire and greedy hardiment," only to be "wrapped in Errours endlesse traine" (1.1.18). In Book 2, when Guyon, the knight of Temperance, "evermore himselfe with comfort feedes, / Of his

owne vertues, and prayse-worthy deedes” (2.7.2), he meets the god of worldly riches, Mammon, and comes close to saying, “Lead me into temptation.” Saint George defeats Error when, in Una’s words, he adds (or does he *choose* to add?) “faith” to his “force”; he needs hauling up from the dungeon of Pride by Prince Arthur; and he escapes Despair only when Una reminds him that he is “chosen.” In his historical allegory, moreover, Spenser treats Rome and Madrid as an axis of evil and in Book 5 accepts as necessary the execution of Mary Stuart.

And yet, for a firm Protestant Spenser seems strangely friendly toward some Catholic practices and texts. What, for instance, is a nice girl like Una doing in a betrothal ceremony that recalls the Easter Saturday baptism ceremony in the old Sarum (Salisbury) rite?² Why does the House of Holiness lodge respectable beadsmen who perform a version of the Catholic corporal works of mercy? St. George sees a vision of the New Jerusalem thanks to a hermit named Contemplation, not to his hardworking local pastor. Why Saint George at all? That saint survived the purge of saints in the Elizabethan prayerbooks, continued on as England’s patron, and figured in the Garter ceremonies, but many in England doubted his credentials. Even to call a book “the *Legend of Holinesse*” might raise eyebrows. No wonder that only a few years after Spenser’s death one anonymous poet, in a politely dismissive gesture, wrote that Saint George “in Spensers Red-crosse Knight doth live,” but Saint Michael “is a truth divine”: “The spirit, and the sense of things our care is,” he says grandly, for “Wisdom is Queene, who fareth not with Faëries.”³

Early modern theology, however, was often subtle and unsettled, and as John Donne puts it in his Satire 3, there were many brides available for those who wanted to marry the True Church. The ones he locates in Geneva, Germany, Rome, and England, moreover, had sisters. Robin Headlam Wells is not alone in locating Spenser’s favorite in Rotterdam with the shifty Erasmus. The disparity between a Protestant sense of human depravity and a humanist belief in human freedom and dignity, he argues, has a parallel in Erasmus’ popular *Enchiridion*, a text that anticipates moments in Spenser’s *Legend of Holiness*.⁴ And, of course, there was a large Catholic minority — perhaps, at the start of Elizabeth’s reign, a Catholic majority — that renders allusions to “Protestant England” misleading. Nor were religious affiliations immutable, as witness the many conversions and reconversions. Protestant Elizabethans were in any case still connected to Catholic culture through surviving books, conversations with parents and grandparents, friendships, and the physical remains that Shakespeare called “bare ruined choirs” (Sonnet 73). Whatever his beliefs, whatever his Erasmian or Melancthonian flexibility or an occasional exploitation of pre-Reformation relig-

ious texts, Spenser wrote before religion in England became a largely internal and personal matter, and at a time when confessional allegiance had often as much to do with geopolitics as with theology. Hence Spenser's hard line (some would say a murderous one) on English foreign policy or the related effort to force Ireland, where he lived and where he served his queen, to obey England. So too, what might seem secular issues in Spenser's poetry can have religious meaning. For example, it matters that he wrote his *Shepherd's Calendar* (1579) while Pope Gregory XIII was meeting with his astronomers to create the calendar we still call by his name. Calendars are inevitably political, for those who tell us how to track Time's movements have power. Many in England were reluctant to let Rome's Anti-Christ wield it.⁵ For the remainder of this essay I will first describe some current efforts not so much to pin Spenser down as to track his often ambiguous moves and then add a few suggestions of my own.

What distinguishes a number of recent books from many earlier studies is both an increased sense of Spenser's own slipperiness (even those who would not call themselves deconstructionists can see his signifiers slithering off into ambiguity or the void, his taste for dissonant puns, a syntax that can make definable agency disappear, and a wily humor inaudible to those who think him a solemn idealist) and a sharper awareness of the Reformation's dynamic instability.

One such is Carol Kaske's ingenious *Spenser and Biblical Poetics*, which looks back to a medieval but still lively tradition of interpreting images or concepts *in bono* or *in malo*.⁶ There can be good fountains (baptism, the Word), for example, and bad ones (sloth, concupiscence). Kaske's point is crucial in the literal sense because for those inhabiting Spenser's fictional world, this doubleness is indeed a *crux*: a hero's moral or spiritual dilemma is less a matter of choice and will than of epistemology and perception. Is that lion a good royal one or a bad attack of wrath? Saint George tries to be a good man, but he can be a bad reader. At least he can profit from a related narrative technique: *correctio*. One episode, that is, can "correct" an earlier one, whether as parody, revision, or commentary, generating what can seem to be ideological contradictions but are better seen as complications. In untangling or simply accepting them, Kaske refuses to read Spenser as a consistent dreamy idealist and agrees with those who think that if Spenser teaches at all, what he teaches is a sinewy worldliness that only deepens his moral commentary. Hence she can say that when a hero changes his own non-symbolic shield and yet condemns another for shedding one that signifies Protestant faith, Spenser means to "jar the reader into some moral flexibility."⁷ If Spenser has "real and substantive" contradictions, so do Erasmus and Melancthon, says Kaske, and in adopting their

complex, even self-contradictory view of free will, a view at odds with that of his own church, he shows some “religio-political courage.”⁸

John N. King’s *Spenser’s Poetry and the Reformation Tradition* also looks back, in his case to earlier Tudor anti-Catholic satirists, arguing that in our fascination with classical and Continental writers and with Chaucer, we have neglected such flashily plain-spoken and self-consciously English writers as Luke Shepherd and John Bale.⁹ In making his case, King reproduces some fascinating pictures. One, from Stephen Bateman’s *Cristall Glasse of Christian Reformation* (1569), shows “Faith” as a knight, a defeated devil under his feet, looking toward both a solar tetragrammaton and a distant promised city; he carries a “shielde of lively faith” with the cross of Saint George and wields the “sworde of the word of God.”¹⁰ Another, from *circa* 1555, shows a Mass conducted by wolves devouring a lamb — the *Agnus Dei* Himself — who cries, “Why do you crucify me again?”¹¹ King does not say so, but in style and arrangement the picture is a parody of the image of the mass found in a number of Sarum missals. The complexity, one not irrelevant to Spenser, is that Protestants in fact maintained that the bread on the altar is just bread; as with other anti-Catholic accusations, the gravamen of the charge is oddly paradoxical: Catholics merely fool themselves into thinking that they eat the Lamb’s body and Catholics are cannibals. The mass cannot be a recrucifixion if the whole procedure is illusion. Spenser effects the same dissonance with Book 1’s Archimago: the arch-image maker is both terrifyingly magical and a temptation to believe foolishly in magic.

King locates several of the eclogues in *The Shepheardes Calender* (1579) and some episodes of *The Faerie Queene* in religious discourses that give them added energy and significance: the common Protestant unease with fantasy and imagery, for example, although Spenser “never equates art with idolatry.”¹² Like others, King points to the Protestant sense of living in the last days, when evils like Catholicism and Philip II will be destroyed. He notes Spenser’s adoption of an iconography that transfers older, often Marian, images to Tudor monarchs. And he examines Protestant talk about marriage and married love; Spenser’s poetry, he says, shows just how wrong it is to think that Protestants separated sacred and profane love.¹³ Spenser exploits the old discourses and genres (georgic, pastoral, biblical allusion, parody, epic, hagiography, comedy — I would add fabliau and chronicle), King says, so as to reform or revise them; Saint George becomes an Englishman. King cites Protestant touches: Spenser’s personified Charity, for example, appears only after her sisters because good works *follow* faith (*FQ* 1.10). Even King, though, explicitly and often refuses to identify Spenser as a “Puritan” — a vexed and debatable term — if only because the

Elizabethan established church was already Calvinist in theology, if episcopalian in structure.

It is tempting, when gesturing excitedly at cleverly noticed anxieties or paradoxes, to establish some home base from which to do so. To see texts *and* contexts in their full complexity is to turn the scholar-critic into not a deconstructionist caught in a swarm of flittering signifiers but a Laocoön at a loss to know which serpent to seize next and where.

Darryl Gless complicates Spenser's religion by complicating its context.¹⁴ Mixing reader-response criticism with theological history, his *Interpretation and Theology in Spenser* declines "to perceive dogmatic simplicity where Spenser has provided novelty and complexity" (p. 23), although he is also careful to say that even when "religious contexts" are shown "to be problematic" they are not therefore rendered useless (p. 2). The complexities he traces include the variability of readers, the impact of generic categories on our reading, the uneven spread of Reformed orthodoxy in Spenser's England, and the complexity and even self-contradictions in Protestant doctrine(s). As for Spenser's waffling on the matter of *sola gratia*, *sola fide*, Gless observes, most of us are instinctive Pelagians, unable to act as though we had no free will. Calvinism is counter-intuitive, he says, which may in part explain why there was such a "widespread, surreptitious perpetuation of traditional practices" (p. 11); Calvin might sigh and agree — he was not, after all, trying to suit our intuitions. As the epic continues, says Gless, "sturdy acts of faith become increasingly necessary if readers are to sustain optimistic providentialist interpretations" (p. 25), and his later chapters observe this developing process.

This is a crucial issue, one that Richard Mallette also examines.¹⁵ "As the poem's later books grow seemingly farther from the substratum of the Reformation," he says, "their problematic relation to Reformation concerns becomes ever more interpretively interesting."¹⁶ Like others, Mallette argues against limiting Spenser to any one discourse, or any consistent and coherent set of theological principles, a position he repeats as he explores such topics as Spenser's understanding of the body and its tendency either to rebel or to fall apart (temperance, he suggests, "literally holds the body together"¹⁷); Protestant understanding of married sexuality; the apocalyptic foreshadowings in Book 5 that become more uncertain as Spenser turns to allegorize Elizabethan military campaigns; and the relation of Providence to Fortuna, grace, and free will in the Legend of Courtesy.¹⁸ Like others nowadays, Mallette readily acknowledges Spenser's contradictions: a hermit who advises victims of slander that "in your selfe your onely helpe doth lie, / To heale your selves, and must proceed alone / From your owne will, to cure your maladie" (6.6.7) is no orthodox Calvinist. Mallette does not

deny the religious substratum in the later books of *The Faerie Queene*, although he thinks that the afterlife is never an issue in the Book of Courtesy and that the various rescues in that book are secular.¹⁹ So they seem, although I would add that if the captive heroine Pastorella thinks herself in Hell with “damned fiends” (6.11.43), and if she is rescued from the dark by a powerful chivalric figure in the guise of a humble shepherd, who bursts through locked doors, and if she is then restored to her true status and home, we may hear Easter echoes.²⁰ Mallette, then, agrees with Gless that as the epic unfolds it becomes if not less religious, at least more secular: “religion is reformulated and collides more violently with other discourses.”²¹

What Mallette and Gless say about the epic’s religious e/devolution touches the heart of a still fairly neglected question in Spenser studies: how to relate the earlier to the later virtues. Some have found patterns in its sequence of books, while others have wondered about this or that shift in tone (did Spenser lose confidence in his vocation?) or method (does allegory go underground in Book 6?). I believe that we also need to think even harder about how Holiness relates not just to Temperance or Chastity (1590) but also to Friendship, Justice, and Courtesy (1596). Perhaps Spenser did not secularize his epic so much as scrutinize, lament, or even satirize what happens to human holiness in a fallen world. Modern scholarly questions parallel, and indeed re-enact, the dilemmas of Spenser’s knights and his designated readers. The “gentleman” that Spenser’s letter to Raleigh (published at the end of the 1590 edition) says the poem “fashions,” if he is to serve in the real world as a prince or prince’s counselor, will have trouble relating holiness to other virtues — or, more dismayingly, to the vices that princes and their servants must on occasion use. Machiavelli was by now a stage demon, but that does not mean that realistic or resigned Elizabethans thought him wrong to separate an ideal morality from what rule in this world entails.

Hence the Book of Courtesy, for example, is also the smooth-tongued Book of Kindly Lying, the Book of Flattery, the Book of Evasion (narrative and rhetorical). We have moved from watching a hero imprudently entangled by hostile Error to a hero willing to entangle a lady (Pastorella) by friendly courtesy. When the same hero, Calidore (whose name may pun on the Greek for the gift of beauty and the Latin for sneaky²²), rescues the lady while using a disguise (shepherd’s weeds over a suit of armor), Spenser may be hinting at an epic struggle underneath the book’s pastoral greenery, as well as at the sad political necessity to use concealment even in the pursuit or protection of what is true or valuable. Pastorella is escorted to the light by a pastoral innocence that reveals itself as militant violence enabled by deception. Is there a religious implication here? If we recall the many images

of Truth lifted by her father Time from the miasma of slander, misprision, and envy; if we notice the flower mark that allows her mother to identify her as her long-lost child; and then if we think of David's claim that "[t]rueth shal bud out of the earth" (Ps. 85:11 [Geneva version, 1560]) we might wonder if Book 6 does not rework the same pattern of a restored church for which one could thank Elizabeth as well as Providence. In the Book of Courtesy, though, the retrieval lacks clarity. By now Elizabeth had not only restored the church temporarily repressed by her sister, Mary; she had also helped Henri IV even after his conversion to Catholicism, had failed to rescue Belgium from the Spanish, had helped the Netherlands retain their independence only at great cost, had so far been unable to make the Irish behave, and had resorted to double agents and police spies to locate and sometimes execute Catholics and the more seditious Puritans. Spenser's view of such policies and events can be debated; his awareness that protecting or serving the Gospel and the Church of England in the 1590s required problematic compromises and entailed some painful defeats or postponements seems beyond dispute. *The Faerie Queene's* fully-fashioned gentleman will have to live with cognitive dissonance and hope God understands.

Much remains to be said about Spenser and religion. I offer here, merely as examples, some further complexities, all calendrical.

Whatever Elizabeth's authorities desired, a large number of pre-Reformation or at least residually Catholic calendars, primers, and missals remained in university, personal, and ecclesiastical libraries. Born around 1552, Spenser could have seen some when he was just learning to read. To see traces of them in his poetry further modifies his image as a militantly Protestant poet.²³ Indeed, the printer's preface to Spenser's *Complaints* (1591) mentions lost works that include the Penitential Psalms and the "howers of the Lord," which, as Kenneth Larsen says, must "refer to the popular devotional manuals, the primers, that were a feature of pre-reformation spirituality."²⁴

Spenser means us to recall the old *Kalendrier & Compost des Bergers* (translated into English in 1506) when reading his *Shepherd's Calendar*, for E. K.'s "generall argument" alludes to it. Nevertheless, the illustrated primers linked to (even if sometimes modifying) the Sarum liturgy, some produced under Mary Tudor, have more compelling pictures of the months, advancing and popularizing a visual tradition that continued, minimized, in calendars attached to the Book of Common Prayer or the English Bible. Some images are in medieval manuscripts, but printed versions, many published abroad for the English market, were far more available. Two points need stressing. First, they are imitative; editions vary, but the basic pattern is often recycled. Second, the pictures do not often show the famous

labors but rather the activities appropriate to each month, as the year circles around and a man passes from childhood to wooing, to marriage, to children, grandchildren, illness, and his deathbed, each month representing six years for a generous total of seventy-two (believers in *sola scriptura* might note that the biblical three score and ten have yielded to a superstitious taste for numbers and symmetry).²⁵

In January, boys play, unless there is an old man drinking in front of the fire, a choice that reflects the bifacial role of January, the gate-keeper looking before and after. In February, boys listen to a schoolmaster who holds a book — and a disciplinary bundle of twigs. In March, youths hunt, often with bows and arrows. And so forth. Adam's curse, after all, is not just to work the earth but also to return to it, so although we do not see our race earning its bread by the sweat of its brow, we do see a fallen, if often enjoyable, world of time, always ending in December with the reminder that it is time to leave.²⁶

Years ago Mary Parmenter identified some parallels between Spenser's eclogues and the traditional months.²⁷ I would add that March's tale of Cupid shooting a puzzled boy recalls the archery in many primer illustrations of that month and the accompanying poem that typically says something like "That season youth careth for nothyng / And without t[h]ought dooth his sporte & pleasure."²⁸ The dog of which we hear in September might remind some readers of the one in the traditional picture warning that it is now too late to provide for winter. This thought, so unlike Jesus' comment on the lilies of the field, can be given a religious meaning (lay up treasure in Heaven *now*), but the picture of a vagrant beggar chased from the door by a dog is curiously heartless.

Most significant for Spenser, though, is the traditional treatment of February. February, we read over and over, is "That tyme chyldren is moost apt & redy. / To receive chastysement\nurture\and learnynge."²⁹ Not in Spenser's *Calender*, though. In this seriocomic eclogue, headstrong young Cuddie will not learn from aged but impotent Thenot. Hoping to persuade Cuddie into greater respect, Thenot tells of an old oak, once hallowed with blessings and sprinkled with holy water ("But sike fancies weren foolerie," l. 211) but now slandered by an upstart bush who talks the tree's owner into felling it, only to find itself thereby exposed to "blustering Boreas." You see, says Thenot, why you should listen to your elders. Cuddie merely scoffs, proving the limits of edifying fiction, pedagogical exhortation, and hope for surcease from battles between youth and age, January and March, Winter and Spring, or even ways of dating New Year's Day. The poems that accompany the primers' pictures usually say that spring begins in late

February, so the month really does belong to both shepherds. Cuddie will win, of course—but then *become* Thenot.

Parmenter must be right to say that the eclogue derives its resonance from this generational and cosmological tension. Yet there is more. It is hard to resist the thought that Spenser has taken the bundle of twigs held by the traditional pictures' schoolteacher (and in a few of them applied to a set of bare buttocks) and then in an ironic glance at youthful recalcitrance recast it as a feisty bush.³⁰ Even the teacher's twig-bundle will not behave. Spenser has taken a primarily Catholic tradition and ironized it, and although there is nothing inherently Protestant about his irony, many in his government would agree wearily that reforming the old in England and Ireland was as uphill work as forming the young. Sometimes, after all, Age is wrong. Thenot's palm does have a little cross. . . .

"Februarie" has also been read as a commentary on supplantation at court, a political version of the ancient conflict between old and new.³¹ There is also a parallel to calendrical arguments, as Pope Gregory sought to find a new computus (the "compost" of the old *Kalender and Compost of Shepherdes*) to supplant the old. Or is the Gregorian calendar older than the Julian in some sense? The Julian certainly needed reforming: it was by now so erroneous that the real equinox, needed in determining the date of Easter, fell ten days before the notional equinox set on March 21 by the Council of Nicea. To reform the calendar, to be "new," was to turn time back to where it should be. Not far enough back, said some, who thought Nicea should have tried harder to ascertain the date of the vernal equinox (March 23? March 25?) at the time of Jesus' birth. For Gregorians, February is young; for Julians it is old. Spenser offers no opinion, and indeed in 1579 it was not clear whether the queen and her government would accept the eventual proposal. His sensible refusal to take sides between youth and age, moreover, has another religious analogue in his treatment of the stately, if hollow, oak. The bush is a self-destructive envious upstart, but the tree is also suspect, what with all that holy water and those superstitious blessings. Spenser's sympathies may be divided, but why? Surely a sturdy Protestant should have nothing but contempt for this particular oak. I have no explanation for Spenser's mild sympathy for a quasi-Catholic tree and mild distaste for the bush that seeks to grab the sunlight. His ambivalence, however, parallels some awkward religious debates concerning generational placement and replacement, for the issue is also ecclesiastical: who is church history's codger and who the boyish upstart? Who should instruct whom, and who should wield that twig-bundle? Granted a greater upward mobility in early modern Europe, social supplantation could become a tricky question, because, as Louis Montrose remarks, there were many who "wanted to enjoy

a position from which to be conservative.”³² So too in religious matters: new men could wish to be thought old men. Is Luther the rebel youth, or is he rather the ex-“brother” who unearthed the long-lost truth that the Fathers had learned from the Son? The dynamics are beyond Oedipal.

By the mid 1590s, much of Europe had accepted Pope Gregory’s new calendar. England, reluctant to adopt anything so foreign, disruptive, and Catholic, was to delay until 1752, but discussion had not died down.³³ The problem remained explicitly religious, for Easter is tied to Passover and thus to the spring equinox, so it was important, for many, to get the dates right. The matter is surprisingly relevant to Spenser’s love poetry, recently a locus for commentary on his religious imagination. In 1595 he published *Amoretti and Epithalamion*, in which, refreshingly, the lover wins the lady — or, rather, she gives herself to him — and then, after some unspecified difficulties, they marry. The sequence’s religious depth is obvious from Sonnet 68, which praises the “Most glorious Lord of lyfe” and tells the lady that “Love is the lesson which the Lord us taught.” Some years ago Alexander Dunlop, hoping to find in *Amoretti* something like the calendrical allusions that Kent Hieatt had noticed in *Epithalamion*, was able to work out Spenser’s clever pattern.³⁴ Briefly, *Amoretti* is a triptych of eighty-nine sonnets: a set of twenty-one, then a set of forty-seven, starting with one imagined as spoken on Ash Wednesday and ending with a jubilant one spoken on Easter, and then twenty-one more. The Ash Wednesday sonnet is just the right number of days before the Easter one (Sundays do not count in Lent’s forty days), and the year is specified by an allusion to Lady Day — taking that as the new year alluded to in *Amoretti* 62. The dates work perfectly for 1594, when Easter fell on March 31. Since Dunlop’s discovery, others have extended his work. William Johnson, who also traces what he sees as the education of the lover (not, one might argue, a very Protestant view of the matter), has found further liturgical connections, as has Kenneth Larsen, although some of these can seem strained.³⁵ Larsen dates the sequence from January 12 to May 17, although an end in Advent might make more sense: the lover is separated from his love, carries an image of her in his heart, suffers slander, and waits in the cold.

Spenser’s amatory poems are movingly harmonious, and these calendrical or liturgical connections make them more so, tying human love to the Love that moves the sun and the other stars, but they acknowledge both the negative (separation, cruelty, cold, fear, pain, illusion) and the imperfect (*Epithalamion* takes account of the sun’s lags and slants). There is, moreover, a further ambiguity and dissonance, leaving aside the poignancy of a sequence that is so warm in tone yet so bloody in its imagery that it is no wonder one recent critic has noted its disturbing connection to English

campaigns in Ireland.³⁶ As is seldom if ever observed, Spenser's amatory calendar is a firmly *Protestant* one, written by somebody working for a colonial power that held to the Julian way of ordering the year in a land that would have adopted the Gregorian reform had it been free to do so. The scheme that Spenser creates works *only* for 1594, when he married, and then only if we count March 25 as the New Year (or at least *a* New Year), if Easter falls on what in the Julian calendar is March 31, and if the day of "Barnaby the bright" — June 11 — falls on the summer solstice when "the sunne is in his chiefest hight" and sees "the Crab behind his back," and when the bridegroom can lament that the night is the shortest of the year. Spenser seems almost to go out of his way to stress that both *Amoretti* and *Epithalamion* are patriotically Julian, even as some of the content, from bell-ringing and church greenery to a few echoes of older liturgies, recalls the Catholicism that rendered the Gregorian calendar suspect to many.

Is the Gregorian reform relevant to *The Faerie Queene*? Probably, if only because the poem is so interested in the heavens. At one point, though, Spenser comments on a celestial flaw that even Pope Gregory could not reform: the precession of the equinox, that slow circular wobble of the earth's axis that pre-Copernicans read as the sun's barely perceptible movement backward through the zodiac. Spenser seems to have thought that signs were now detached from the constellations by the width of one sign. When the sun's path first angled away from the celestial equator (at the Fall?), the equinox had coincided with the sun's entry (or creation) in the *constellation* of Aries, as well as in the *sign* of Aries, but by 1596, whenever Sol was "in Ariete," the actual constellation up there was Pisces. In the Proem to Book 5, Spenser affects to blame the signs, not the sun, and to read their misbehavior as supplantation — the same issue as in "Februarie." Each sign has, he fancies, usurped its neighbor's "house." Thus the "golden fleecy Ram" has "now forgot, where he was plast of yore" and "shouldred hath the Bull"; and the Bull has "hardly butted those two twinnes of Jove," the twins "have crusht the Crab" into "the great Nemaean lions grove" (5, Proem 5–6). The lion must now be in Virgo's house and Virgo herself in Libra, but Spenser is too tactful to say — and only hints — that England's Virgin might be associated in the slightest metaphorical fashion with such disgraceful goings-on. The tone is lightly satirical, the political and religious implications uncomfortable. As Spenser does not quite say, the "House" of Tudor had similarly supplanted earlier royal "houses" of Plantagenet, even as the Normans had supplanted the Saxons, and so on back to equally ambiguous supplantations recorded in the Bible, and perhaps even to Satan's rebellion.

Book 5 both records and criticizes nostalgia for the time before Astraea/Justitia/Virgo fled the earth and perhaps before Jove's supplantation

of golden Saturn (Kronos/Chronos/Father Time). Now Artegall, Knight of Justice, must work on very recalcitrant material, armed with a golden sword and an iron sidekick. Spenser's dream, or perhaps nightmare, of a primal truth — religious, economic, and political — and of the vanity that makes some think it obtainable, is a giant with a pair of scales, who wants to return things to the way they had been at first. Artegall argues for a while and then, less patient than the traditional "February" schoolmaster, lets his iron servant shove him off a cliff and scatter the crowd who had listened to him. Most critics take the giant to represent deluded communists or crazed Anabaptists. The religious issues, not unrelated to those in "Februarie," remain troubling. If some can ask, "When Adam delved and Eve span / Who was then the gentleman?", others can ask, "So, who was Bishop of Eden?" To unreel time's circles so as to return to a primitive truth was precisely what truly radical Protestants were demanding, but what the Church of England no more wanted than did Catholics. As I have said, Protestants liked to argue that they did not come "after" Catholics; hence titles such as *Look before Luther*.³⁷ But the Giant looks to an early truth that risks being not just "before Luther" but before Christ's *new* law, *new* Justice. Time and the signs move on, even if the sun does so backwards. To make a perfect calendar, to unreel Time, would, in Artegall's words, require one to "know / What was the poysse of every part of yore" (5.2.34). And that is beyond even the best astronomers and computists of whatever religion.

Notes

1. See Douglas Waters, *Duessa as Theological Satire* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1970).
2. See Harold Weatherby, "Una's Betrothal and the Easter Vigil: The Probable Influence of the Sarum Manual," in *Spenser at Kalamazoo*, ed. Francis Greco (Clarion: Clarion University of Pennsylvania, 1984), pp. 6–20. Weatherby's *Mirrors of Celestial Grace: Patristic Theology in Spenser's Allegory* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994) argues for the impact of Greek patristic texts and liturgies. Much of what he finds is also, as he allows, in Sarum or other materials, and he underestimates Spenser's ease with sexuality, but it is good to remember another tradition on which Spenser could draw.
3. *Apollo Christian or Helicon Reformed* (London: Thomas Norton, 1617), sig. C2.
4. Robin Headlam Wells, "Spenser's Christian Knight: Erasmian Theology in *The Faerie Queene*, Book 1," *Anglia* 97 (1979): 350–66. In *Edmund Spenser: Protestant Poet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), Anthea Hume, who underestimates Spenser's pluralism, notes that Protestant divines warned against pleasure in one's own virtues (p. 116); Erasmus is subtler.
5. See Robert Poole, *Time's Alteration: Calendar Reform in Early Modern England* (London: UCL Press, 1998).

6. Carol V. Kaske, *Spenser and Biblical Poetics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999).
7. *Ibid.*, p. 76.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 155. Explaining why Duessa escapes death in Book 1 but not in Book 5, Kaske argues that for Una/Truth exposing falsity suffices, whereas Justice cannot abide falsity (p. 137). Yes: Spenser can both use Catholic texts and fear Catholic power; he can wait for Truth's victory over Doubletalk, but Catholic conspirators are intolerable *now*.
9. John N. King, *Spenser's Poetry and the Reformation Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990). Even at his most savage, Spenser avoids scenes like that in William Baldwin's *Wonderfull Newes of the Death of Paule the III* (London: Thomas Gaultier, 1552), in which a transgendered pope drips menstrual blood into an infernal chalice. John N. Wall, *Transformations of the Word: Spenser, Herbert, Vaughan* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988), thinks Spenser's imagination shaped more by corporate worship than by doctrines and polemics.
10. King, p. 196.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 38.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 109.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 157. King is wrong to call Spenser the first to write love sonnets and an epithalamion (p. 160); Salmon Macrin did so in France — with poems on the babies. Catholics could value married sex and poetry.
14. Darryl J. Gless, *Interpretation and Theology in Spenser* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
15. Richard Mallette, *Spenser and the Discourses of Reformation England* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997).
16. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 82.
18. See also Kenneth Borris, *Spenser's Poetics of Prophecy in The Faerie Queene V*, English Literary Studies Monograph Series, 52 (Victoria, BC: English Literary Studies, University of Victoria, 1991).
19. Mallette, pp. 177, 181.
20. This seems to echo the Harrowing scene in the *Gospel of Nicodemus*. Mallette himself (pp. 198–99) associates the scene with Arthur's Christ-like rescue of Saint George.
21. Mallette, p. 211.
22. *Kal-* for beauty, *dor-* for gift and *callidus* for cunning, astute.
23. During the wavering course of the Henrician Reformation, primers continued to be printed, some incorporating Lutheran prayers and others such innovative elements as, in 1538 (STC 15998), a notice of Erasmus' death in the calendar. 1545 saw an authorized one (STC 16034), designed explicitly to replace earlier ones. These, however, retained so much of the older materials, illustrations, and structure that even when not strictly *Roman Catholic*, they were nothing a later "Puritan" would admire. On their evolution, see Charles C. Butterworth, *The English Primers (1529–1545): Their Publication and Connection with the English Bible and the Reformation in England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1953), although Butterworth skimps on the theological issues; for the notice of Erasmus's death, see p. 163. I thank Thomas Herron for writing me that Barnabe Googe reported to Walsingham on 11

March 1583 that he took “portmysses and solemn servysses of our Lady” from some Irish people, who responded with curses. Herron cites William Pinkerton, “Barnarbe Googe,” *Notes and Queries*, 3rd series, 3 (1863). Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400–1580* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), thinks “there were something like 57,000 of these books in circulation in the two generations before the Reformation” (p. 212). In *Lost Property: The Woman Writer and English Literary History, 1380–1589* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), Jennifer Summit shows how some of the Reformed dirtied their primers and cleared their consciences by inking out offensive passages. Still, such books must have seemed to many like the rags of the Scarlet Woman, not least because they had been used as charms (see Duffy, ch. 8).

24. Kenneth J. Larsen, *Edmund Spenser's Amoretti and Epithalamion: A Critical Edition* (Tempe: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1997), p. 13. In this essay I focus on primers, hoping to explore Spenser's use of the Sarum missal later.
25. On how a linear human life cuts across seasonal repetition, see also Bruce R. Smith, “On Reading *The Shepheardes Calender*,” *Spenser Studies* 1 (1980): 69–93.
26. The labors do often figure in little marginal pictures (and in, e.g., an anonymous almanac for 1569: STC 463; London: Hubrigh). Spenser uses them for Book 7's procession of months.
27. Mary Parmenter, “Spenser's *Twelve Aeglogues Proportionable to the Twelve Monethes*,” *ELH* 3 (1936): 190–217, cites similar images from, she says, *The Kalender and Composte of Shepherdes* (1518). They are not in Tudor editions I have seen. These do have lists of months, often with attributes found in the primers, including a pedagogical February (with less stress on punishment). See also Ruth S. Luborsky, “The Illustrations to *The Shepheardes Calender*,” *Spenser Studies* 2 (1981): 3–53, who likewise stresses the labors. She calls the little cross on Thenot's palm more probably a sign of age than of Catholicism. Perhaps it is both.
28. STC 2966.3: *Pystles and gospels, of every Sondag, and holy daye in the yere* (Rouen: [n. pub.], 1538). The sneakiness of Spenser's Cupid recalls the March poem in STC 15943 (Paris: Regnault, 1526): “Sic Venus obrepit / sic lusus gaudia lupus / Sic juvenilis amor subdola furta petit”; the young hunters chase a not unwilling rabbit while a bemused bearded gentleman looks on, perhaps thinking, like Spenser's older shepherd, that he has been there, done that.
29. STC 15986.7 (Paris: Regnault, 1535); Cambridge has a copy.
30. For buttocks, see STC 15973 (Paris: Regnault, 1531) and the calendar in a Bishops' Bible (London: Norton, 1575), a Reformed text with traces of this tradition.
31. Ronald B. Bond, “Supplantation in the Elizabethan Court: The Theme of Spenser's February Eclogue,” *Spenser Studies* 2 (1980): 55–65, sees a struggle for “place.” Louis Adrian Montrose, “Interpreting Spenser's February Eclogue: Some Contexts and Implications,” *Spenser Studies* 2 (1980): 67–74, replies that Spenser too had aspirations.
32. Montrose, p. 68.
33. In an appendix to *The Shepheardes Calender: An Introduction* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1990), Lynne Staley [Johnson] notes Spenser's interest in the calendar debates and in reform as such. Like others, she believes E. K. when he explains that Spenser starts with January because that month celebrates the Circumcision; this, she says, shows his “insistence upon a Christian frame” (p. 37).

Yet Lady Day is as Christian as January 1. Alison A. Chapman's interesting "The Politics of Time in Edmund Spenser's English Calendar," *Studies in English Literature 1500–1900* 42 (2002): 1–24, also reads the *Calender* as critical of Gregory's project.

34. Alexander Dunlop, "The Drama of Amoretti," *Spenser Studies* 1 (1980): 107–20; A. Kent Hieatt, *Short Time's Endless Monument: The Symbolism of the Numbers in Edmund Spenser's Epithalamion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960).
35. See William C. Johnson, *Spenser's Amoretti: Analogies of Love* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1990); Larsen, ed., *Amoretti*; and my "The Thirsty Deer and the Lord of Life," *Spenser Studies* 6 (1986): 33–76.
36. James Fleming, "A View from the Bridge: Ireland and Violence in Spenser's *Amoretti*," *Spenser Studies* 15 (2001): 135–64.
37. Tension between reform and restoration explains George Webbe's backward-rolling "calendar" of right-thinking Christians: *Catalogus protestantium, or, The Protestants kalender containing a surviue of the Protestants religion long before Luthers daies, even to the time of the Apostles, and in the primitive church* (London: Nathaniel Butter, 1624).