

EDMUND SPENSER AS PROPHEPIC POET:
AUTHORITY AND CRITICISM
IN THE FAERIE QUEENE

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PREFACE

There is a quality in the poetry of Edmund Spenser, John Milton, and William Blake that makes readers and critics want to connect these works, despite their vast differences. In 1975 Joseph Anthony Wittreich labeled that quality vision, establishing the critical term "line of vision." Unfortunately, the quality is easier to sense and label than to identify and define. This vagueness is seen in the inconsistencies and variety of terms in critical works. "Line of vision" is often used to introduce ideas on both visionary poetics and prophetic poetics. I chose the term prophetic poetics throughout this thesis because, as I develop in Chapter I, it is the more accurate term for identifying the authority and didacticism that is inherent in prophetic poetry but not always found in or essential to visionary poetry. Also, I use prophetic poetry and prophetic poet rather than prophecy and prophet to emphasize the difference between the person who uses a literary form and mode to express an idea and the person who uses the same form and mode for presentation of a message without concerns for literary value. While biblical prophecy has influenced literary prophecy, claims to divinity of inspiration or content are a concern only in the biblical and not the literary practice.

One of the difficulties in studying prophetic poetry is that what makes a poem prophetic cannot easily be separated from other elements in the poem. The major prophetic poems in the English tradition are epics, use allegory in varying degrees, and respond to the Christian tradition. So to study prophetic poetry is to study epic, allegory, and religion. Prophetic poetry is a very political expression, so both history and politics as well as social concerns must be considered. In addition to these larger ideas outside the poetry, there is a variety of language uses that are found within the poetry. The frequency of allegory in prophetic poetry suggests a significant link between the mode of expression and the message. The framework that allows the poet to assert a hierarchy of values through allegory allows the additional authority of the prophetic message. Once a poem is labeled prophetic, the various uses of language take on added significance, which is the key to discussing prophetic poetics; particular parts of a poem when isolated may not be significantly different from nonprophetic uses but the prophetic element gives these particulars added significance.

One quality that is drastically increased in prophetic poetry is the poet's authority. When a poet claims to write prophetic poetry, readers are forced to consider the message of the poem to discover not only if the poet has been true to the experience presented but also if the poet is "right." The skill of presentation must be set aside for a bit so we

can evaluate the message. For example, the problem of Milton's Eve for modern readers is a problem of message not aesthetics. We do not want a poet as great as Milton to be chauvinistic. We, in the same way, do not want Spenser to be in favor of genocide under the guise of justice. For modern readers, the authority that these poets claim and earn emphasizes their failure to be far-sighted and universal in their views. We expect prophetic poetry to be timeless, as so often we assume truth to be.

When many of us began reading, the written word was exciting because of what it could be, not necessarily how well it was written. We wanted to take part in lives and stories other than our own. Some of us turned to stories to see how things should be, a desire expressed in Sidney, and how we, in turn, should be. The instructive or didactic aims of literature are part of why we read. The prophetic poet exploits our desire to be told how things should be and would be if we behaved or thought in a particular way. Perhaps the history of failure of prophetic poetry to affect significant social change comes from the nature of the reader who wants to be instructed, but can only really change when instruction ceases and self-instruction begins. This change takes place in the narrator of The Faerie Queene and is part of the goal in fashioning a gentleman. Once fashioned, the gentleman will be self-instructive and instructing others like the courtiers in Castiglione's The Courtier. The use of

prophetic poetry, and it is a poetry designed to be used, is most significant when it is not instruction but information. As W. H. Auden wrote, you cannot tell people what to do, you can only tell them stories and let them draw their own conclusions (341). For literary prophecy, such story telling is imperative. As critics, we must move into the grey shadows of messages to correctly evaluate a prophetic poem.

If we read a poem by a poet who makes no claims as prophetic and we find that the poem is well written and true to the experience presented, we cannot justly denounce the poem because we do not like what it says. Art has moved away from the realm of liking for enough years that pleasing is no longer a valid criterion. We may dislike, disagree, and disapprove all we want, but we cannot use those as a basis for critical conclusions. But when a poet claims to be prophetic, claiming the rights and responsibilities of a tradition that requires an evaluation of message, we do have the justification to see if the poet is correct. If a poet, based on his authority, tells the reader that a particular action will lead to salvation or damnation, such an assertion must be evaluated not only for the aesthetic quality but also to see if it is correct. Book V of The Faerie Queene fails because we do not judge it correct; it is too limited by time and particulars to be universal. The solution to the Irish problems suggested by Spenser cannot be brought into our time without violating other more essential truths that our cul-

ture now accepts. To be true to the prophetic purpose of The Faerie Queene critics cannot simply ignore the parts that they do not like; we must consider the parts in the same way as we do the whole. After all, even Homer nodded.

In my thesis I focus on the political motivation for Spenser's prophetic poem The Faerie Queene; this is not to suggest that there are not other and equally important motivations for Spenser. One of the joys of poetry as complex as Spenser's is the variety of ideas and concerns. As an allegory, The Faerie Queene demands the multiplicity of meaning and motives. Likewise, in emphasizing Spenser's humanism, I do not want to slight his Protestantism and Puritanism. But to consider all the subtopics adequately would be to write a thesis as long or longer than the poem itself. The bulk of criticism focuses on various subtopics, but rarely develops criteria for judging The Faerie Queene as prophetic. In Chapter I, I establish two major criteria, authority and criticism, for prophetic poetics as distinguished from visionary poetics.

One of the problems facing both prophetic poets and their readers is authority. The implied authority of so many poets is not adequate for the prophetic poet. To avoid making the problem of prophetic inspiration a problem of religion, I develop in Chapter II the point that Spenser's humanism provided him with a means of establishing authority. It is also humanism that provided a tradition of criticizing the

monarch and society, as I develop in Chapter III. The tradition of Christian prophets provides similar models, but again, the problem of divinity arises. Recognition of Spenser as a prophetic poet and the critical quality it brings to his poem should lay to rest the facile assumption that Spenser was simply a court flatterer, an assumption that turns The Fairie Queene into a beautiful but trite poem.

By the time a thesis is completed, there is a multitude of people who have assisted, encouraged, or influenced its writer. Acknowledgement of such must, of course, go to the members of my committee, Dr. Janemarie Luecke, Dr. John Milstead, and Dr. Paul Klemp. To each of them I am grateful for their patience and their responses. To Dr. Michael Carson, a kind friend and teacher, I owe my greatest appreciation. But it was Libby Stott Young who tolerated my rantings while this thesis was in both the thinking and writing stages. The unpayable debt of a friend and a peer is hers. Thanks and appreciation are due Dr. Cline Young for his support and timely encouragement during my moments of mass inertia. My typist, Ms. Beth Sanborn, has typed and traveled beyond the call of duty. To her and her contingency force, my gratitude is endless. And finally, to Galanthia, for all she is.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

When a reader first approaches a work as long as The Faerie Queene, certain characteristics immediately become evident. It is very long; it is very formal; it is allegory; it is epic. These characteristics affect how one reads The Faerie Queene. Prophecy is one quality that also affects how one reads which has not been treated as clearly or completely as those listed above. One of the most important changes a reader must make when reading prophetic poetry is the change from reading objectively to reading subjectively. We expect more from the poet than an opinion; we must test the special insight that the poet claims authorizes the demands for our change in behavior or belief. Because Spenser chose the mode of prophecy, the problem of authority in The Faerie Queene must be addressed and the reader must constantly challenge the poetry to discover the prophetic poet's quality of knowledge. Such a reading requires the time and mental concentration demanded by The Faerie Queene's length, stanzaic complexity, allegory, and epic nature.

As the reader demands certain qualities from the prophetic poets and the poem, so the prophetic poet makes demands on the reader. Prophetic poets claim the right to place readers in a student's role. Edmund Spenser makes this

claim upon readers of The Faerie Queene; he states in his letter to Sir Walter Raleigh that his "general end therefore of all the booke is to fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline" (737). With the specific rhetorical goal of teaching, prophetic poetry demands a reader prepared to be taught. Spenser has provided all the necessary flags to let the reader know that what follows will require concentrated effort if the reader desires to "profite of the ensample" rather than be of the "most part of men" who "delight to read, rather for the variety of matter" (737). Critics should never lose their delight in Spenser's variety of matter, but they should also attempt to be ideal readers and to "profite of the ensample" to correctly understand and critique the work as a prophetic poem.

Although the number of critical works about prophetic poetry is increasing, the number which address Spenser as a prophetic poet is still in the minority; more works focus on Milton and Blake as major prophetic poets. Even as such critics as Wittreich and McGarr turn to Milton and Blake, they remark that Spenser is the beginning of the prophetic line but fail to develop or adequately justify the claim. In some of the more recent works, including Ulreich's and Hyde's, there is even a movement away from considering Spenser as a prophetic poet as critics develop the concept of the poet-priest. John Ulreich's "Prophets, Priests, and Poets: Toward a Definition of Religious Fiction" presents this

theory. Ulreich claims Spenser to be "perhaps, the archetypal English maker of myth, [and] Milton almost certainly our greatest iconoclast" (6). This classification takes on considerable import since it follows his statement that "the prophetic voice is radically iconoclastic" (6). While agreeing with some of the distinctions Ulreich makes, I must differ with his conclusion that Spenser has only "prophetic moments" (20). His distinction between the "prophetic iconoclast [who] sees poetry as a means" to "redirect the energies of the soul" and the "priestly maker [who] sees poetry as possessing its own intrinsic virtue" to "enlarge the imagination" (18) makes a separation between teaching and delighting that a humanist poet like Spenser would not have made.

Joseph Anthony Wittreich, who coined the term "visionary poetics," does not go as far as Ulreich in insisting that the prophetic poet must be iconoclastic, "a legislator of reform and a transformer of the world" is enough (Visionary 5). Critics generally allow Spenser the role of transformer because of his desire "to fashion a gentleman or noble person." But the larger consequences of reforming his world--Elizabethan society with its influence on Western Europe and Ireland--have largely been ignored because it would require serious criticism not of only Elizabeth's court but also of the queen herself. For many critics, Spenser is too much of a panegyrist to be so bold. But David Norbrook, in Poetry

and Politics in the English Renaissance, allows Spenser just such boldness: "Spenser considered it his responsibility as a Protestant humanist to put his literary skills in the service of the cause of political reformation" (141). This cause makes Spenser support increasingly controversial figures, such as Essex, and become increasingly bold in his criticisms of Elizabeth's policies (143). Daniel Javitch similarly asserts Renaissance humanism's influence on Spenser's poetry in Poetry and Courtliness in Renaissance England though recognizing its reformatory power was limited under a monarchy as strong as Elizabeth's:

The ideal aim of the rhetorical education advocated by humanists remained utilitarian and civic: to make men capable of communicating political and ethical truths so persuasively that they would thereby reform and civilize society. (23)

Ulreich's expectation that a prophetic poet must be iconoclastic comes from his use of biblical prophets as the standard: Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Isaiah were iconoclasts who broke the images of the Hebrews and the surrounding peoples. But Spenser turns to humanism for his prophetic impulse and the tradition of reason and republican transformation and reform. The problem facing Spenser is how to aesthetically and politically accomplish the civic goals of a humanist under a monarchy.

The solution Spenser selects is that of allegory, and with it, the allegorical mode. One of the lost goals of classical rhetoric for the Elizabethans was the influence

over the many. Now prophetic poets who desired to reform and civilize needed to make their works exclusive. Ulreich notes this exclusivity in Milton as a prophetic trait (7), but it is precedent in Spenser. Michael Murrin's The Veil of Allegory establishes allegory as the predominant rhetorical mode for the prophetic poet because it is exclusive, or in his term, divisive:

The allegorical poet affects his audience more in the manner of a Hebrew prophet than in that of a classical orator. Instead of appealing to all the people and attempting to win them over to a particular point of view, the poet causes a division in his audience, separating the few from the many, those who understand from those who cannot. (13)

Spenser's Faerie Queene is nothing if not divisive. Spenser responds to the consequence of this divisiveness in the Proem to Book IV. William Cecil, Lord Burleigh could only understand the poem as a "false allurement" (1.7) and vain poem, but Spenser's true readers will learn of true love and be crowned with "immortal blis" (2.8). In addition to separating those who cannot or will not read seriously from those who will, Spenser's prophetic mode separates those who read the surface objectively from those who read subjectively and for deeper meaning. I would like to modify Murrin's point quoted above and assert that one reason why Spenser writes allegory, and divides his audience is his humanist desire to effect political change. I make no claim that Spenser wanted any radical reorganization of the political system but rather an improvement in the practice of the existing one. Allegory

accomplishes two specific functions of the prophetic mode for Spenser: it alerts his reader that there is a claim to special insight and hidden truth (and tempts the good reader to seek it), and it allows him to present the instruction that should bring about civic change in a delightful manner likely to be approved by the court.

My contention is that the special insight which Spenser hides with his allegory is part of what modern critics have come to consider prophetic. The prophetic tradition includes particular uses of language, such as allegorical and pictorial, as well as particular goals, such as reformation and civilization. I intend to show that Spenser's Faerie Queene is indeed the work of a prophetic poet. To do so I will establish criteria for prophetic poetry concerning the poet's authority and the poet's role. Then I shall show how Spenser meets these criteria, emphasizing the role of his humanism in doing so. Before the body of the argument can begin, though, it is necessary to clarify some terminology.

A problem which must be clarified, before beginning a study of prophetic poetry is one of semantics. In many articles, critics use the terms visionary and prophetic interchangeably. Generally visionary gets the worse of it because it is used to mean both visionary in the metaphysical sense, as seeing actual visions, mental projections or having a utopian program for society (often determined by an aesthetic principle or worldview), and also a work that describes

visions or is strongly pictorial or visual. Angus Fletcher does not maintain clear distinctions between the visionary and the prophetic even in his significant The Prophetic Moment: An Essay on Spenser. While discussing the "historicism" of "prophetic utterance," he tells us that "visionary as he may be, the prophet lives with the actual deeds of men. . ." (5), unlike, he suggests, the mystic seer. Jerome McMann muddies the distinctions even more as he explains the "depersonalizing inertia" in Blake's poetry: "the prophetic and visionary aspect of the poem ["The Lamb"] is similarly depersonalized. The poem fulfills its prophecy and vision only in man the reader" (5). Thomas Hyde helps us to appreciate "the complexities of Spenser's use of the visionary mode" (129) then tells us that Spenser's "earliest works are indubitably in the prophetic mode" (131). Avoiding the problem, Stuart Curran and J. A. Wittreich, Jr. simply coin new phrases: "sublime allegory" and "divine vision" (xiii). Maureen Quilligan, who gives the reader the options "prophecy, vision, [or] insight" (36), is hesitant to stay with any term:

Spenser and Milton both keep as fine a balance between inner and outer--what I have elsewhere called vision and rhetoric and what one might also call, in another aspect, revelation and its practical application--as a visionary poet may. (emphasis added 39-40)

Some critics seem to prefer visionary to prophetic as a safer term to avoid the problems of authority while keeping the mythopoeic and metaphysical qualities. Hyatt Waggoner in

discussing visionary clearly understands the problem of terminology:

So Blake, Wordsworth, Yeats, Emerson, Whitman, Stevens, and a host of lesser figures are all praised as visionaries, without its becoming clear what they have in common. A good many of the best-known contemporary poets produce verse that is quasi-religious in tone and reminiscent of myth in vocabulary, and we like to honor their work too by calling it visionary, though it may express only nostalgia or despair and have little or no reference to any reality outside the poet's mind. (228-9)

If visionary and prophetic are to tell us anything useful about a work or a poet, some clarification must take place.

Most critical terms allow for the general understanding of the broad outlines of an idea along with room for specific applications and fine distinctions, allowing individual critics to particularize a term to develop a line of argument and reveal more about particular works. Allegory, epic, Romanticism, and realism are such terms. When defined, these words reveal trends in thought as well as specifics in techniques. William Kerrigan recognizes the failure of critics to establish clear terminology for discussing the prophetic qualities of certain works and their authors:

What are the appropriate names for the creator of Paradise Lost? Often critics vary the tedious repetition of "Milton," "poet," "narrator," and "author" with the designation of "poet-prophet." The term is an English amalgam uniting two of the three meanings of the Latin vates--"priest," "poet," and "prophet." Writing "poet-prophet" for "Milton," the critic assumes that he and his audience hold a communal definition to which he can appeal without explanation. But this definition does not exist, and "poet-prophet" is critical jargon. In Milton studies, as in most literary

criticism, the bastard word blurs all the prerequisite distinctions. (8)

Kerrigan not only points out the problem but also locates its genesis: the use of vates. S. K. Heninger, Jr., who uses the term poet-prophet, reveals in "Sidney and Milton: The Poet as Maker" some of the confusion caused by using Sidney's A Defense of Poetry to develop a critical theory of visionary or prophetic poetry. The problem lies not with using Sidney's aesthetics, which Spenser would have shared in the lost The English Poet mentioned by E. K. in the October gloss to The Shepheard's Calender, but with the incompleteness of Sidney's argument. Sidney was not defining poetry but defending it, and using his vates and maker as terms of distinction as Heninger does leads to critical confusion of the terms:

Sidney soon indicates that these "makers" are the "right Poets", in contradistinction to the poet-prophets, who do no more than repeat the eternal truths of religion, also to the didactic poets, who use only the data of sense experience as the subject matter of their knowledge. ("Sidney and Milton" 58)

As the problem of terminology arises when we turn to A Defense, as so many critics of visionary and prophetic poetry do, we must take a closer look at just what Sidney says is needed.

When Sidney first mentions vates, he is giving a brief history of the respect given to poetry in the past and its precedence in recording knowledge. This vates refers to the poetry which readers treat as divine; it is the readers

who believe that whatever passage they turn to in The Aeneid would predict their future:

Among the Romans a poet was called vates, which is as much as a diviner, foreseer, or prophet, as by his conjoined words vaticinium and vaticinari is manifest: so heavenly a title did that excellent people bestow upon this heart-ravishing knowledge, And so far were they carried into the admiration thereof, that they thought in the chanceable hitting upon any such verses great foretokens of their following fortunes were placed. (11)

Sidney goes on to refer to King David's poems as divine to justify the use of the term vates and, this time, the content of the poem earns it the title of prophecy because the poems, through poetic presentation, bring God and beauty to the reader.

Once he asserts the excellence of poetry, Sidney divides poets into three groups: divine, philosophical, and the right poets. The first group writes religious poetry such as the Psalms, Ecclesiasties, Proverbs from the Bible and similar works from other religions (25). Sidney summarily dismisses philosophical poets to the grammarians because their poetry does not delight (26). Sidney again refers to vates when writing of the right poets (though he allows the first group, a "most notable sort," to be included). The right poets, while not restricted to moral or religious subjects, have the ability to see what should be; they go beyond the physical imitation:

For these third be they which most properly do imitate to teach and delight, and to imitate borrow nothing of what is, hath been, or shall be; but range, only reined with learned discretion, into

the divine consideration of what may be and should be. (26)

The reader's concerns in the first type of vatic poetry and the content of the second now combine in the right poet's purpose to teach and delight:

For these indeed do merely make to imitate, and imitate both to delight and teach; and delight, to move men to take that goodness in hand, which without delight they would fly as from a stranger; and teach, to make them know that goodness whereunto they are moved. (27)

Sidney's defense of poets and poetry builds upon the argument of imitation, and the Neo-platonic maker plays a central role. For Sidney's purpose maker is clearly a more appropriate term than vates. But while stating his preference for maker, Sidney does present them as synonyms; one term is Roman, the other Greek: "both Roman and Greek gave such divine names unto it, the one of prophesying, the other of making" (48). Sidney does not assert any "contradistinction" between them based on content. The content problem which Heninger sees is indeed in A Defense, but it is in reference to the philosophical poet who adds nothing to the "proposed subject, and takes not the course of his own convention" (26).

Heninger's, and other critics', distinction between the vates and maker is not to be found in Sidney. Few critics today would expect the foretelling of fortune from any poem, vatic or not; even Sidney considered it a "vain and godless superstition" (21) despite Albinus. David is a vates because

his Psalms bring the sight of God to man, and the right poets are vates because they teach and delight humans in goodness they make. The leap from God to goodness is not that difficult and is important because it takes vates out of the role of a recognized religious figure and opens it up to any poet who seeks it. Sidney's Defense is concerned with what poetry is rather than distinctions between visionary and prophetic, and it does not solve problems it does not address. But A Defense of Poetry does give us two things: a tradition for poetry being linked to prophecy and a place to begin.

Sidney requires that right poets "range, only reined with learned discretion, into the divine consideration of what may be and what should be" (26). The consequences of a work or poet being visionary, ranging into that divine consideration, are not as great as being prophetic. It is a responsibility to label works or poets prophetic because then something extra, in a sense suprapoetic, is to be required of them. The distinction I would like to make between visionary and prophetic poetry is one of degree rather than kind, but of such degree that it places special requirements upon both the poet and the reader.

The idea of vision is familiar to poets and readers alike; we expect poets to express special insight on human affairs in their poetry, for them to see "better or farther, deeper or more truly, than we" (Waggoner 228). The clas-

sical image of the blind poet with the inner sight greater than the physical sight of other human beings is a tradition in English poetry: there is something special in the quality of a poet's way of seeing or vision. This sight frees the poet's imagination from what is. The poet's sight, the ability to see and imagine that which "should and could be" has traditionally separated the poet from the populus. Part of what Sidney is defending is the right to an audience that recognizes this ability. But, for Sidney, the responsibility to instruct comes with this sight. The poet writes not only to express a particular vision but also to persuade the reader to experience the way the poet does. As readers we are to come to see more clearly, and we are to see how we can and should see if we so choose: we are allowed to see with the poet what may or should be, but we are also to learn from what we see. The goal of visionary poets then is to present their visions in such a way as to persuade readers to acknowledge the truths within the visions. Sidney's own sonnet "Leave me O Love which reachest but to dust" is an example of just such visionary poetry:

Leave me, O Love, which reachest but to dust,
And thou, my mind, aspire to higher things!
Grow rich in that which never taketh rust:
What ever fades, but fading pleasure brings.

Draw in thy beams, and humble all thy might
 To that sweet yoke where lasting freedom be;
 Which breaks the clouds and opens forth the light
 That doth both shine and give us sight to see.

O take fast hold! let that light be thy guide
 In this small course which birth draws out to death,
 And think how evil becometh him to slide
 Who seeketh Heaven, and comes to heavenly breath.

Then farewell, world! the uttermost I see:
 Eternall Love, maintain thy life in me!

Splendidis longum valedico nugis.

(161-2)

The sonnet, a meditation on Matthew 6:19-23, expresses Sidney's vision of treasures of the mind--with delightful presentation--and instructs the reader directly beginning with line nine. In the sonnet the visionary poet seeks a change in how the reader sees, "the light / That doth both shine and give us sight to see / . . . let that light be thy guide" (7-9), and a change in what the reader thinks, "and think how evil. . ." (11). The instructing is of the reader's mind and is not a direct call to change in behavior, which I shall show to be a trait of prophetic poetry, though the assumption that a change of thinking will produce a change of behavior is always there.

As the number of critics writing about prophetic poetry increases, so do the specific qualities of prophecy. For Wittreich the "purpose of all . . . prophecies" is "the restoration of the Word, [and] the restoration of the forms that would contain it" ("Poet Amongst Poets" 139), while for Mark Schorer "the historical function of prophets is not to write a certain kind of poetry so much as to order social wisdom toward a desired conduct of life" (21). The prophet is to have a "millennial pre-occupation" (LeSage 22) with "strangely automated ritualism of the verse" (Fletcher 18); Ulreich's iconoclast (6) is Erdman's "tiny alarmist" (xiii). These specifics are only distinctions to a communal definition of prophetic poetics which Kerrigan accurately points out does not exist (8). We can find this missing definition by considering the two primary concerns of prophetic poets: the problem of inspiration and authority, and the problematic role of prophetic poets in their society.

Sir Philip Sidney may need only to call upon his own imagination for his visionary poetics, but the prophetic poet must have a greater authority if he is to fulfill his role. Thomas Hyde raises a significant question against the prophetic poet's authority:

God casts the prophet in his role, and if a poet is genuinely a prophet, then his works ought to be Scripture in more than a metaphysical sense. If poets follow or appropriate the forms and rhetoric of biblical prophecy, then they and their works occupy a limbo, justifiable and even laudable by any number of arguments, but subject also to the Bible's condemnation of false prophets--those who

have cast themselves in their roles, who "speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord" (Jer. 23.16) (128)

Hyde properly reveals the need for special authority for the prophetic poet, but a common and incorrect assumption is the basis for his charge of false prophets. Critics often make this assumption because of Sidney's Neo-platonic aesthetics as they relate to the poet as a maker and imitator of God's act of creation. But to imitate an act, or "appropriate the forms and rhetoric," of the sacred is not to make claims of divine authority, though it does call to attention the problem of authority, which a prophetic poet needs to do.

Maureen Quilligan carefully separates the sacred from the prophetic: "poetry, by offering analogous vision and language parallel to God's, is heavenly--like to God's Word, but not that ineffable language itself" (134). Poetic inspiration is even a problem for Sidney in his Defense. Inspiration is not easily understood, and perhaps the Renaissance "divine gift" was their terminology for a psychological state they did not fully understand, while furor poeticus provided them with a classical term. Though readers may not have the terminology for solving the problem of inspiration, the prophetic poet still has the problem of establishing authority, sacred or otherwise. To fulfill the requirement of the prophet--to correct society--the poet must make some claim to authority.

Prophetic poetry and visionary poetry share the goal of instigating change: the visionary seeks to change the in-

dividual's understanding, but the prophetic seeks to change the individual's social behavior. Wittreich explains this additional action in Visionary Poetics: "prophecy also reminds us that vision, unless it inspires action, is nothing" (34) and asserts that prophetic poetry "concretiz[es] vision into word" so the "audience may further concretize it into act" (36). This activeness distinguishes prophecy from vision. The prophetic poets' claim to authority and inspiration presumes that they have critical knowledge, critical in both the sense of evaluative and dire, for and about society. The prophetic poet is "the detector-general of the shortcomings of his age, as both the exposé of corrupt institutions and their executioner" (Visionary 52). Wittreich is not the only critic to connect prophecy to criticism of social, and therefore political, institutions and practices. Tommaso Campanella considered Tasso prophetic:

the true prophet is the one who not only says future things, but who scolds princes for their wickedness and cowardice and peoples for their ignorance, for sedition, and for bad behavior. (Weinberg 1068)

This critical nature of prophecy is, in part, Ulreich's justification for excluding Spenser from the ranks of prophetic poets and Wittreich's claim that Milton "restored the art of prophecy to its original perfection and thus should be regarded as the father of a poetic tradition" ("Poet" 101), again to the exclusion of Spenser. In the remainder of this essay, I propose that Spenser is, with his Faerie Queene, the

beginning of the prophetic line in English literature, and as such he meets the criteria of a prophetic poet: he establishes his authority for such a role and he is critical of not just his society but of the major institution of his time--the court and its queen.

CHAPTER II

SPENSER AND PROPHEPIC AUTHORITY

The assumption that any poet writing to improve society's moral and ethical behavior has a religious motivation comes easily, especially when, in the case of Spenser, he begins The Faerie Queene with the virtue of holiness. Religion undoubtedly plays a large part in both the private and social spheres in The Faerie Queene, but Spenser is very careful not to make claims of direct divine inspiration. To establish his authority as a prophetic poet, he does not need to because he has another authority and one which allows him to avoid charges of heresy or presumption: Spenser's authority is humanism, particularly the militant Protestant humanism of his age. In defending poetry by its ability to teach moral and ethical virtue, Sidney does not compare the poet to religious authorities, only to moral philosophers, historians, astronomers, and mathematicians. Perfection of the soul, as much as possible, is credited to learning:

This purifying of wit--this enriching of memory, enabling of judgement, and enlarging of conceit--which commonly we call learning, under what name soever it come forth, or to what immediate end soever it be directed, the final end is to lead and draw us to as high a perfection as our degenerate souls, made worse by their clayey lodgings, can be capable of. (Defense 28)

The humanist belief that "men could be moulded most ef-

fectively, and perhaps only, through the art of eloquence, . . . which stimulated a man's will as well as informing his reason" (Gray 500-1) authorized Spenser to do what he wanted to do: write an elaborate moral and ethical poem and assert his political views with relative safety. In this chapter, I shall relate Spenser's use of humanist authority to his political aims; the three areas considered are Spenser's use of the humanist theory of Neo-platonic imitation, his use of the humanist concern for form, and his use of the humanist practice of eloquence for persuasion.

Critical works that discuss the theory of Neo-platonic imitation as explained by Sidney in The Defense of Poetry and as used by Spenser include Sears Jayne's "Ficino and the Platonism of the English Renaissance," Ellrodt's Neoplatonism in the Poetry of Spenser, and Heninger's Touches of Sweet Harmony: Pythagorean Cosmology and Renaissance Poetics and "Sidney and Milton: The Poet as Maker." The element of Neo-platonic imitation essential for this argument is the poet's imitating God, not only in the act of writing, but also by imitating God's method of creation or, as Heninger puts it, God's metaphor:

The poet, though, is enjoined to reproduce not only the matter of God's metaphor, but also its technique. Just as God extended his metaphor from one level of creation to another until it reached through all the orders of being, so the poet should devise an assemblage of analogies with the hope of providing a continuum of meaning from the highest to the lowest. His poem should be a network of active correspondences, so that much of its meaning is conveyed in the arrangement of its parts, in its

structure. Metaphor in such a poetics becomes the major mode of discourse, and structure is itself a metaphor, revealing the divine plan in action. (Touches 340)

Spenser's choice of allegory as his mode of discourse and form of imitation emphasizes this imitation of correspondence and structure because allegory itself is a system of correspondences which require the observer or reader to discover its own metaphysical "plan in action." As an allegorical poem, The Faerie Queene establishes Spenser's prophetic authority in two different though related ways. It encourages the idea that, even without direct claims, poetry is inherently divine, and as Spenser's early metaphors or correspondences connected to the divine are judged accurate, it establishes his ability to read God's universe correctly and, therefore, human society. Spenser's authority now lies in an observable and measureable artifact: the poem itself. Spenser's use of holiness as his first virtue helps the reader evaluate his correspondences because of his audience's religious education. Spenser's using the red cross on the unknown knight's breast and a dragon as the foe easily suggest Saint George and the dragon, the patron saint of England and his appropriate monster. From the very beginning of Book I, the reader establishes Spenser's authority for him. The simple identification of the knight with the red cross and a fair maiden on a white ass with goodness, if not yet holiness, and truth and unity works in the way that the white hats and horses does in the movie westerns. If Spenser were

to violate standard correspondences early on in his poem, his reader would question his authority.

Both Sidney and Spenser are careful to make distinctions between the maker who may surpass nature, making her golden instead of brazen (Defense 25, 24), and those "that build castles in the air" (Defense 24) or write the "abundance of an idle braine" (FQ Proem II.i.3). By making a point of this difference, the poets are asking their readers to make such a distinction, to evaluate, as in the case of The Faerie Queene, the correctness of the poet's interpretation of the cosmos, his skill in the "discovering of something already prescribed in God's book of nature" (Touches 338). Spenser's obsession with correct reading and false appearances applies not only to Faeryland and the universe but also to his own poem. The pervasiveness of forms of seem and verbs of reading in Book I is an attempt to get the reader in a habit of reading and judging closely. The first challenge to Redcrosse Knight and Una is the wandering wood which has led them with delight (I.i.x.) leaving them to wander and doubt because "their wits be not their owne" (x.7). For a courtier with humanistic training the loss of wit or reason due to delight, especially following immediately after a reference to the Maple which is "seeldom inward sound" (xi.9), would be a flagpost signaling the humanists' concern for content that instructed as well as form that delighted. The use of early warnings and hints to the reader, especially in

Book I, emphasizes Spenser's dilemma: to establish his authority as a critic of society, he must get his readers to read his poem correctly so they will know that he has read the universe correctly. Would Spenser be able to destroy the Bower of Bliss in Book II (still a crux judging from the numerous articles) if he had not already given us the Archimago in Book I? Spenser tells the reader of Archimago's deceptive dreams for Redcrosse and Una before they actually begin: we see his conjuring. Knowing who the false characters are, we can learn from Redcross' and Una's misreadings.

Conservative and familiar metaphors in Book I of The Faerie Queene provide Spenser with credibility and authority. A comparison of the proems to Book I and to Book V shows what a poet can do once the reader believes in his or her ability. The first stanza of the proem to Book I (which serves as a prologue to the complete poem) is as follows:

Lo I the man, who Muse whilome did maske,
 As time her taught, in lowly Shepherds weeds,
 Am now enforst a far vnfitter taske,
 For trumpets sterne to chaunge 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.

[t/o]

The first stanza to the proem to Book V is such:

So oft as I with state of present time,
 The image of the antique world compare,
 When as mans age was in his freshest prime,
 And the first blossome of faire vertue bare,
 Such oddes I find twixt those, and these
 which are, [t/o]
 As that, through long continuance of his course,
 Me seems the world is runne quite out of square,
 From the first point his appointed source,

And being once amisse grows daily wourse and wourse.

The very first thing Spenser does in the first stanza to his entire poem is associate himself with Virgil with a variation on the opening to the Aeneid: "Lo I the man . . . / . . . sing . . ." (1-5). Spenser combines both the verb from the actual first phrase ". . . cano" and part of what in Spenser's time was the assumed opening, "Ille ego" His subject matter is similar to Virgil's, "Fierce warres and faithfull loves," though love in The Aeneid is not faithful when a woman is its object. And both Virgil and Spenser depend upon the Muse. In this stanza Spenser is establishing his authority via tradition, and he is already affecting the audience's reading:

The convention of vision or dream can clearly be, as can the appeal to the Muses (also often and skilfully used by Spenser), more than a convenient cliché to start things going, or to point to the importance of what you have to say. It can also point to the nature of what you have to say; it is

one way of defining the nature of poetic significance and poetic communication, and thus of sharpening the reader's response. (Williams 132).

But more importantly for this comparison, the narrator is the passive agent in the stanza: the Muse "did maske" (1) him as a pastoral poet and is now the one who "enforst" (3) him to write verse and "areeds" (7) him (explained by Hamilton in his edition of The Faerie Queene as "counsels; both `com-mands´ as `enforst´ (3) suggests and `instructs´ (from `read´ OED 12)" (27 fn 7). Nowhere in this stanza is the narrator active: he is the object of the Muse's verbs, and he is unfit (3) and "all too meane" (7). The subject of his poem is more active than he is: "Fierce warres and faithfull loues shall moralize . . ." (9). The only assertiveness we find is in the first four and last two words of the stanza: "Lo I the man" and "my song." Without the man and his song, the praise of the knights and ladies would remain unsung. This "if it weren't for me" is the extent of the narrator's own authority; the poem's real authority comes from its tradition, so carefully established, and the Muse. This is in stark contrast to the Proem of Book V.

Again in the first line of the stanza, we have the first person pronoun, but it is no longer the object. Now the narrator is the subject, and it is not the Muse forcing and counseling; the narrator is comparing (2) and finding (4). The Muse is gone and is replaced by the narrator's own ability to read and reason. He is able to read the "image of

the antique world" (2) and discover that the present world is "quite out of square" (7). The Muse teaches the narrator well enough to establish his authority to teach us; the Muse teaches him to sing of ancient heroes so he can learn to compare the ancient and modern worlds and discover that the modern world is "amisse" (9), and, in the same way, the narrator teaches us to read Faeryland so we can learn to compare the Faery world with the modern and discover that things are indeed "amisse." By beginning his poem with a traditional invocation, Spenser establishes his authority through tradition which allows him to later use his own humanistic abilities to reason and read the world rightly as his authority.

The remainder of the first proem continues in the same manner; there is little surprising in the remaining stanzas, which elaborate further on the the poet's inabilities, "thy weaker Nouice" (2.2), "my weake wit" and "dull tong" (2.9), "my feeble eyne" (4.5), "my thoughts too humble and too vile" (4.6), "mine afflicted style" (4.8), and on his invocations for assistance from the Muse, "O holy Virgin" (2.1); Cupid, "Faire Venus sonne" (3.2); Venus, "thy mother milde" (3.6); "triumphant Mart" (3.7), but especially from Queen Elizabeth:

And with them eke, O goddesse heauenly bright,
 Mirrour of grace and Maiestie diuine,
 Great lady of the greatest Isle, whose light

Like Phoebus lampe throughout the world doth
 shine [t/o]

Shed thy faire beemes into my feeble eyne,
 And raise my thoughts too humble and too vile,
 To think of that true glorious type of thine,
 The argument of mine afflicted stile:

The which to heare, vouchsafe, O dearest dred a-
 while. [t/o]

(Proem I.4)

The queen must raise his thoughts just so he can think of her type, Gloriana. The elevation of Elizabeth to the status of a goddess is not unconventional nor is his use of types, another clue to the reader as to how to read the poem. Nothing is startling or new: Elizabeth is the mirror of grace and majesty (2) and comparable to the sun (4) as befits her position as monarch. Proem V ends with a similar stanza addressing the queen, but this time it follows not three stanzas of supplication and invocation but ten stanzas of criticism of justice in the modern world. It is now a "stonie" (2.2) age in which things are "amisse":

For that which all men then did vertue call,
 Is now cald vice, and that which vice was hight,
 Is now hight vertue, and so us'd of all:
 Right now is wrong, and wrong that was is right.

(4.1-4)

The heavens have been moving "toward dissolution" (iv.9)

since Saturn's reign: "For during Saturnes ancient raigne
it's said, / That all the world with goodnesse did abound: /
All loued vertue. . ." (ix.1-3). After a lengthy explication
of how the heavens have decayed, the topsy-turvy state of
virtue, and, in the stanza immediately preceding, the duty of
a prince to rule with justice, the last stanza with its
praise of Gloriana's, and therefore Elizabeth's, "righteous
doome" is troublesome:

Dread Souerayne Goddess, that doest highest sit
In seat of iudgement, in th' Almightyes stead,
And with magnificke might and wondrous wit
Doest to thy people righteous doome aread,
That furthest Nations filles with awful dread,
Pardon the boldness of thy basest thrall,
That dare discourse of so diuine a read,
As thy great iustice prayed ouer all:

The instrument whereof loe here thy Artegall.

(Proem V.11)

No longer is this "basest thrall" seeking Elizabeth's aid to
even think about her type; he dares to do his own discoursing
on a subject of royal prerogative and traditional concern to
humanists--justice. While some of the traditional correspon-
dences of the universe and the world images are here,
the narrator is no longer using his knowledge of them as a
basis for authority; he has led the reader to a place where
the narrator's own judgments and abilities "to compare" (l.2),

"to finde" (1.5), to "forme" (3.3), and to "discourse" (11.7) become the authority. He can defend his choice, no longer the Muse's, of ancient over modern justice for his matter, "Let none then blame me" (3.1), because he has shown his knowledge of correspondences between the universe and this world, as the zodiacal metaphors in this proem emphasize.

While I have concentrated on Proem V as compared to Proem I, the other proems show this same movement away from the inspired poet who is taught to the humanist poet who teaches based on his own rational abilities. In the second and third proems four times the narrator is presented in the first person active voice: "Right well I wrote" (II.1.1); "Which I so much do vaunt" (II.1.8); "How then shall I, . . . / Presume" (III.3.1-3); "That I in coloured showes may shadow it" (III.3.8). In contrast, in Proems IV and VI there are five such occasions in each: "(I wote)" (IV.1.3); "I haue done" (IV.1.4); "I do not sing" (IV.4.1); "I sing" (IV.4.6); "I weene" (IV.4.7); "I guyde" (VI.1.1); "I nigh rauist" (VI.1.6); "I gin to feele" (VI.1.8); "where shall I . . . / . . .finde" (IV.4.1-2); "I doe this vertue bring, / And to your self doe it return againe" (VI.7.2-3). The change is, of course, not to deny Spenser's invocations for inspiration but only to show the developing emphasis on humanism. Spenser's movement away from passive inspiration to active formation follows Ficino's view on human's authority:

. . . the power of man is almost similar to that of the divine nature, for man acts in this way through

himself. Through his own wit and art he governs himself, without being bound by any limits of corporeal nature. (233)

The first two stanzas of Proem VI make this point well. In the first, the narrator is his own guide through Faeryland, which strengthens and cheers him (IV.1.9), but in the second stanza he calls upon the Muses to "guyde ye my footing, and conduct me well / In these strange waises, where neuer foote did vse, / Ne none can find, but who was taught them by the Muse" (VI.2.7-9). By placing himself first, the narrator is fulfilling the humanists' goal for their readers: he learns well enough to become his own guide with an informed reason and a stimulated will.

To prepare readers to look for truth, to be informed as well as delighted, Spenser uses a mode that stresses the hiddenness of truth. Michael Murrin, who links the allegorical mode with the prophetic in his The Veil of Allegory claims that

if the poet does not receive divine truth, he no longer possesses a special kind of truth beyond ordinary human comprehension and has no justification for concealing it. Consequently, his whole rhetorical mode collapses. With divine truth the veils of allegory seem quite necessary, without it, they appear superfluous and give the impression that the poet has deliberately adopted an inflated form of speech. (169)

Murrin makes the error of requiring prophetic and allegorical poets to write only of divine truths. Most of Spenser's truths are social and political, he presents even Christian truths with social and political consequences. Spenser's use

of allegory is not superfluous without his establishing the reception of "divine truth" "beyond ordinary human comprehension." The problem Spenser faces is just the opposite; his audience does not see that with "ordinary human comprehension" they can know "divine truth." Truth is not hidden because it is beyond comprehension but because the people do not see it. Allegory is the rhetorical expression of "he that hath ears to hear, let him hear." Spenser must show them that they can indeed comprehend the universe and, therefore, human society. Once they are looking closely, he can show them what he wants them to know. Javitch explains the benefits of cloaking humanistic didacticism in order to please the courtly audience:

There is no reason to doubt that this audience would derive equal pleasure from inferring the moral lessons embodied in the poet's pregnant examples. For in the poet's hands moral truth can be as challenging and therefore as pleasurable to apprehend as the truth derived from his metaphors.
(100)

Teaching this process of discovery, intensified by the use of allegory with its multiple levels, is part of Spenser's method to "fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline" (737). One of Spenser's political goals is to improve the courtiers' moral behavior and, in turn, their civic behavior. As Murrin points out, allegory is especially well suited for the task as "no one can juxtapose a man and a toad or a man and an angel without making a moral judgement of some kind" (65).

Allegory is a mode of discourse that emphasizes the complexity of the universe while giving the writer a form that can contain and explain that complexity. Spenser uses allegory as a rhetorical tool which permits him to train his readers to understand the complexity of society. Part of what a prophetic poet must do is present that complexity and provide choices. Allegory provides the poet with a means of expressing multiple perspectives and choices and complements the episodic nature of romance in The Faerie Queene. Wittreich explains how this multiple perspective, epitomized by St. John's Revelation, is characteristic of prophecy:

Prophecy is dramatically structured, progressing from shadowy types to truth and substituting for the conflict among characters in a play a conflict among its various perspectives--perspectives deriving from the different forms it incorporates and held in dynamic tension by their various styles. Like the ordinary dramatist, the prophet employs choric devices both to lead an audience toward, and to jostle it into adopting new perspectives. ("Poet" 106)

Wittreich recognizes the religious and dramatic influences on prophecy's presentation of multiple perspectives but does not present the attempts by humanists to use the dialogue form in the same way. Hanna Gray explains that the humanists' choice of the dialogue as a preferred form is not due only to its being used by classical authorities such as Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian. The dialogue allows writers to use various persona to present and explore alternative perspectives on issues that were not subject to scientific validation. The humanists could present arguments in a

pleasing manner, often with an established fictional external form (505-12). Sir Thomas More's Utopia and Erasmus's Praise of Folly are two examples of such dialogues. Spenser uses the humanists' emphasis on choice, using the allegorical mode rather than the dialogue form. But as Gray explains, the dialogue could be used as a subversive form: "the conventions of oratory might also give an author the opportunity to state arguments which he could then claim not to have meant literally" (511). The humanists presented arguments under the protection of the dialogue form and provided Spenser with a tradition to call upon for the subversive use of language through allegory and form through panegyrics. Gray gives the example of Valla's De falso credita et ementita Constantini donatione declamatio:

Thus Valla, attacking the authenticity of the Donation of Constantine, called his work a "declamation," the term for an oratorical exercise. In the practice of declamation, ancient orators were supposed to be able to construct equally convincing cases for opposing sides of the same question. (511)

Those who label Spenser a panegyrist or a mere flatterer generally have not considered the subversive use of language. Wittreich fails to see this when he states that "de-radicalizing the genre of prophecy, Spenser uses a form ordinarily deployed against monarchs to celebrate them" and suggests that Spenser's works be judged by the prophetic obligation to scold princes (Visionary 58). The practice of dissemblance by humanists, whether through rhetorical figures or with

courtly sprezzatura, and the poet's concern about the charge of lying as evidenced by Sidney in his Defense of Poetry, raises questions as to why the subversive use of form has not been explored. Wells recognizes that epideictic poetry is moral (3) but does not make the connection between Erasmus's explanation of panegyrics and the humanists' use of form to present contrary ideas. She quotes Erasmus's letter to Jean Desmarez:

Those who believe panegyrics are nothing but flattery seem to be unaware of the purpose and aim of the extremely far-sighted men who invented this kind of composition, which consists in presenting princes with a pattern of goodness, in such a way as to reform bad rulers, improve the good, educate the boorish, reprove the erring, arouse the indolent, and cause even the hopelessly vicious to feel some inward stirrings of shame. (qtd. in Wells 3)

As presented by Erasmus, the goal of the panegyrist is that of the prophetic poet, and as his Praise of Folly clearly subverts the expectations of the form, I suggest that The Faerie Queene also subverts the expected form, though in a less consistent and noticeable manner.

In addition to subverting the larger form of panegyric, Spenser also subverts minor forms within the larger structure of The Faerie Queene. Michael Murrin points out the importance of the form of proverb for the prophetic poet: "since the proverb was the most potent weapon in his tropological armory, the poet had to use it sparingly and where the occasion justified it" (62) and gives the example of "God helpe the man so wrapt in Errours endlesse traine" (I.i.18). If we

move back a few stanzas in the same episode, we can see Spenser's using the proverb form in a more subversive way. In the passage, Redcrosse Knight and Una have been wandering in the woods when they come upon a cave, which Una has not yet recognized as Error's den. Redcrosse dismounts and Una warns him:

Be well aware, quoth then that Ladie milde,
 Least suddaine mischief ye too rash prouoke:
 The danger hid, the place unknowne wilde,
 Breedes dreadfull doubts: Oft fire is
 without smoke, [t/o]
 And perill without show: therefore your stroke
 Sir knight with-hold, till further triall made.

(I.i.12)

Such a warning seems quite appropriate, especially coming from Una, whom we read as truth, to Redcrosse, who has yet to prove himself. But once we remember the hesitance of Queen Elizabeth to become involved in military ventures, and Spenser and his group's (Sidney, Essex, Raleigh, etc.) disagreement with that hesitation, we must reconsider our simple reading of Una's warning. As we reconsider, we re-read the passage more closely, we discover how Spenser subverts the form of proverb in the fourth and fifth lines: "Oft fire is without smoke / And perill without show." Tilley traces the written record of the proverb "There is no smoke without some fire" from 1576 through 1732, which becomes the version

familiar to us as "where there's smoke, there's fire" in 1599 (613). If we take either version we can see how Spenser restructured the proverb. But if we, in turn, restructure the second element to match the more familiar one, we find that "where there is show, there's perill." Spenser's distrust of courtly show, a theme developed throughout The Faerie Queene, is discovered. Spenser has set up this stanza in such a way that three distinct points can be made: 1) the straightforward warning, 2) a critique of Elizabeth's military hesitance, 3) a critique of courtly show. Subverting the proverb's form, Spenser expresses two of his concerns that are developed more fully throughout the poem. But at the same time he is merely having Truth warn against Error. The subversive use of form here allows Spenser to fulfill his prophetic obligation of social and regal criticism.

As Spenser follows the humanist tradition of subverting form on both the small and large scale, he also follows the humanist tradition of eloquence. Spenser knew his audience was the court and knew that if he were to persuade it, he must first please it. In Poetry and Courtliness in Renaissance England, an excellent study of the court's expectations of eloquence based on humanism, Daniel Javitch asserts that Spenser's authority to instruct the court on courtly behavior in Book VI of The Faerie Queene comes from his own skill:

To be acknowledged by his courtly readers as a maker of manners, the poet must prove his stylistic proficiency, even more perhaps than his moral authority. The subtlety with which he presents his

argument in Book VI becomes such a demonstration of the poet's refinement. I would maintain that the discretion, the indirection, even the dissimulation he so impressively exercises are themselves proof of the poet's proclaimed authority as an arbiter of manners. (157)

As a prophetic poet, Spenser must use language in a way so as to be not only an arbiter of manners but also to be one who inspires action:

and by pointing beyond itself, literally both in the direction of other prophecy and toward those who are its recipients, and metaphorically out into the world where it is to be accomplished, prophecy also reminds us that vision, unless it inspires action, is nothing, the mental activity involved in its interpretation being a correlative of the later activity that will effect its implementation.
(Visionary 34)

Eloquence as practiced by the Renaissance humanists provided Spenser with a language that could accomplish both goals. Sophistication and metaphorical richness could please the audience and also inspire the audience through the process of discovery. This use of language in almost a game-like method allows Spenser to accomplish his aims. Spenser's desire to fashion a gentleman or noble person directs his poem to the aristocratic courtiers of his day, whom one would assume would not need such fashioning. But Spenser's consistent complaints about the quality of the courtiers in The Faerie Queene suggests otherwise. Spenser wants to empower the courtiers with the humanist tradition, returning to the civic and ethical qualities emphasized by the humanist orators such as Cicero and Pico della Mirandola and away from the theatrical and less substantial qualities of the courtly lover. To

make this change, Spenser presents humanism with the qualities he sought with such persuasion that it would move the courtiers away from the art of dissemblance humanism had become. And that could only be accomplished by showing his own quality.

The practice in the Renaissance of mixing rules of poetical practice with rules of courtly behavior is evident in both Castiglione's The Courtier and Puttenham's The Arte of English Poesie in which "one of the controlling assumptions in the work is that to be a good poet entails being a good courtier" (Javitch 50). Critics have long treated Book VI of The Faerie Queene as the book which states Spenser's ideas on courtly behavior. Javitch goes into great detail about Spenser's skill as a courtier through his analysis of Book VI. But the one book alone is not all that places Spenser in the courtier tradition; we find Spenser's manipulation of language in a way to please his courtier audience throughout The Faerie Queene. In "The Secret Wit of Spenser's Language" Martha Craig analyzes Spenser's use of archaic language and unusual spellings to emphasize the etymological meanings or suggestions:

The poet's alterations are an effort to correct language according to his vision or insight so that it reveals reality more adequately. Forms and spellings are improved in order to disclose the etymological rationale of the word. Slight alterations in sound and spelling are admitted so that connections in meaning may be clearer. (452)

Spenser makes obvious use of manipulation of language, even

within a simple word, throughout The Faerie Queene to emphasize his ability to use language in a manner that would please the courtiers' sense of play. Just one example of this would be the name of the character Marinell. In addition to the Latin word mari, the ablative singular of mare or sea, which is its etymological base, the name also suggests marry-nell or marry-not by its sound. Both the sea and the marry references are appropriate for a character whose parents, Dumarin and Cymoent are linked to the sea, and whose fate is linked to marriage. In Book III, canto iv, Spenser develops the word play further:

And for his more assurance, she inquir'd
 One day of Proteus by his mightie spell,
 (For Proteus was with prophecie inspir'd)
 Her deare sonnes destinie to her to tell,
 And the sad end of her sweet Marinell.
 Who through foresight of his eternall skill,
 Bad her from womankind to keepe him well:
 For of a woman he should haue much ill,
 A virgin strange and stout him should dismay, or kill.

 But ah, who can deceiue his destiny,
 Or weene by warning to auoyed his fate?
 That when he sleeps in most security,
 And safest seemes, him soonest doth amate,

(25, 27)

Here the verb amate, cast down, suggests a very different meaning by its appearance. As the plural imperative of the Latin verb amare, to love, amate suggests that Marinell is to love soon, to not be without marriage as his name suggests. It also stresses what Spenser sees as the appropriate ends of love, marriage, by suggesting that Marinell is soon to have a mate. Stanza 27 as a whole recalls Oedipus' trying to avoid his fate, and by implication, suggests that the queen not attempt to avoid her natural fate of marriage. This layering of language is part of the elitism of eloquence; it distinguishes between readers who can discover the hidden meaning from those who cannot. Part of the thrill of discovery was its establishing the courtly reader as a member of the elite. The prophetic poet who takes humanism as his or her authority hides meaning not because it is divinely inspired truth to be hidden from the profane but hides meaning to establish authority by skill:

As a courtier's grace derives from his various modes of deception, so the grace of poetry depends on the poet's ability to conceal aspects of his subject and delay, by indirection, the recognition of his meanings. (Javitch 58)

Puttenham also stresses the poet as entertainer rather than judge:

because our maker or Poet is appointed not for a judge, but rather for a pleader, and that of pleasant & lovely causes and nothing perillous, such as be those for the triall of life, limme, or livelyhood; and before judges neither sower nor severe, but . . . young ladies, gentlewomen and courtiers . . . and that all his abuses tende but to dispose the hearers to mirth and sollace by

pleasant conveyance and efficacy of speech. (154-55)

Castiglione's whole book is an elaborate parlor game of self-fashioning. Javitch points out the "courtier's reluctance to dissociate profit from pleasure, entertainment from seriousness. The company [of courtiers] accepts the serious enterprise of shaping a human ideal because it assumes recreative form" (95). This foundation in the political teaching and delighting has a foundation in the political events of the age as well because the previous "upheavals of the mid-century had made Elizabeth, like many of her subjects, deeply suspicious of religious and political ideologies" (Norbrook 58). Using eloquence, Spenser appears less radical and more playful than other political and religious reformers. He appears on the surface to be a playful poet, writing of courtly love and war in a fanciful Faery land, but is all the while encouraging a return to the less playful civic and political aims of humanist rhetoric and poetry.

The humanist characteristics of prophetic poetry are seldom considered by critics because of the religious tone of prophetic poetry. Critics generally focus on the biblical influence on poets and their poems. Sometimes they do not make a distinction between a religious poem and a poem that is about moral or ethical behaviour; it is in response to such criticism that Ulreich and others make their charges of Spenser's being a false prophet. But Spenser was careful to make a clear distinction between his secular authority and the biblical pro-

phet's authority. Spenser could assume a Christian foundation in his society and that left him free to work on the reason, not the faith, of his audience. As Wells states, Spenser's "ultimate concern as Protestant and humanist is not so much the salvation of the individual soul, as the realizing of the true Christian state" (46). As a literary prophet with no claims to biblical authority, Spenser focuses on human reason rather than revelation. Humanism provided a tradition that Spenser can exploit with its concerns for eloquence, form, and Neo-platonic imitation. With his authority as a reader and writer established, Spenser can address his prophetic goals of reforming his society.

CHAPTER III

SPENSER AS A PROPHEMIC POET

In defining prophetic poetry as opposed to visionary poetry, I suggested that the greatest difference is that of degree. A visionary poet does not need to establish an authority because the reader's very act of reading the poem gives the visionary poet the authority for a temporary imposition of his or her particular sight or way of seeing. Keats' "Ode to a Grecian Urn" holds us momentarily, giving us a new way to see and think through the consideration of the urn:

O Attic shape! Fair attitude! with brede
Of marble men and maidens overwrought,
With forest branches and the trodden weed;
Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of
thought [t/o]

As doth eternity: Cold Pastoral!
When old age shall this generation waste,
Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe
Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou
say'st, [t/o]

"Beauty is truth,"--that is all

Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

(373)

For at least a few moments, the poet has our thoughts, and that is enough. But for the prophetic poet, that is not enough. The prophetic poet must not enlighten our thoughts for just a few moments, but must change them, put them right, so our actions will change accordingly. The poets' true audience is society, though they will reach only a few within that society. The goal of social change requires more from the poet and the reader than the momentary change sought by the visionary poet. For prophetic poets to earn the audience's attention, they must first establish the right to that attention. The Faerie Queene is clearly a poem that requires close attention, if only because of its length. But Spenser is careful to establish his own authority. He shows his reader that he is part of the tradition of poets who have won that attention before by establishing his debt to Virgil, he shows us his ability to read the universe correctly and not be deceived by forms and appearances, and he shows us that he is a practitioner of his own message. With his attention to authority throughout The Faerie Queene, Spenser can maintain his claim as a prophetic poet and fulfill his responsibility to instruct his society.

The major institution in Spenser's society was, of course, the court which meant that to instruct his society, Spenser had to instruct the court. Spenser acknowledges the place of the court at the center of society and Elizabeth as the center of the court in the proem to Book VI, the book in

which he instructs the court on matters on which they should most clearly be the authority/expert:

Then pardon me, most dreaded Soueraine,
 That from your selfe I doe this vertue bring,
 And to yourself doe it return again:
 So from the Ocean all rivers spring,
 And tribute backe repay as to their King.
 Right so from you all goodly vertues well
 Into the rest, which round you ring,
 Faire Lords and Ladies, which about you dwell,
 And doe adorne your Court, where courtesies excell.

(7)

While the Elizabethan court society was extremely closed and class conscious, its obsession with living a life based on rhetorical forms gave the poet an excellent opportunity for power:

Puttenham shows us that the poet, by virtue of the devices characterizing his art, could satisfy more effectively than other articulate men the stylistic norms desirable at the center of power. And he makes it clear that, if one is not born to the court but possesses poetic skills, these can serve as a ready way of gaining acceptance there. Just as the beautiful strategies cultivated by the courtier serve him to win grace and favor, so the same artifices in poetry help its practitioner secure recognition and place at court. (Javitch 68)

The practice of living rhetorical form, evidenced by the genre of courtesy literature and the rhetoric and poetry handbooks, may have been from a genuine belief in the stated values of some, but for all, such practice was the foundation

of power. Matthew Black failed to see the power element of poetry when he explained his inclusion of Edward De Vere's epigram "Were I a King" in his Elizabethan and Seventeenth Century Lyrics:

Oxford's epigram Were I a King, which was pointed enough to draw several "answers," one of them from Sidney, reminds us how genuine must have been the taste for letters at court when even a dissolute fop could share it. (55)

In as finely crafted a society as the Elizabethan court, I find it hard to imagine a "dissolute fop" having a "genuine . . . taste for letters" without accounting for the political power of rhetorical show. For example, Puttenham introduces the figure of Allegoria not with an example from "letters" but with the judgment that a man can not succeed without it:

never or very seldome to thrive and prosper in the world, that cannot skillfully put in ure, in somuch as not onely every common Courtier, but also the gravest Counsellour, yea and the most noble and wisest Prince of them all are many time enforced to use it (196)

As Javitch points out, Puttenham "rarely comments on the connection between figures he itemizes and the norms of becoming conduct they obey" (59), but Puttenham makes the connection implicitly by using examples of political and courtly behavior for examples of rhetorical terms and addresses some of the problems such a connection causes.

In the last chapter of his third book of The Arte of English Poesie, Puttenham tries to put limitations on the use of dissemblance, so necessary to "thrive and prosper in the

world." He warns that there may be some who will seem "rough and churlish in speach and appearance, but inwardly affectionate and favouring" (307) while others abuse the forms of courtly dissemblance. After giving examples of courtiers from foreign courts who "go ordinarily to Church and never pray to winne an opinion of holinesse," who "speake faire to a mans face and foule behinde his backe," and who are "fayned friend[s]" (307), he limits the courtly poet "to be a dissembler only in the subtilties of his arte":

that is when he is most artificiall, so to disguise and cloake it as it may not appeare, nor seeme to proceede from him by any studie or trade of rules, but to be his naturall: nor so evidently to be descried, as every ladde that reades him shall say he is a good scholler, but will rather have him to know his arte well, and little to vie it. (308)

This distinction between dissemblances and sprezzatura may be an attempt to avoid the charge of fraud, but after such a long treatise on the pleasures of rhetorical standards as the models for court behavior, Puttenham's last minute restriction seems of little value. The evidence of the period suggests that the courtiers also thought it of little value; they excelled in the art of dissemblance or living allegory. The "play acting" became a major element in the behavior at court and the functioning of power. The blending of the rules for poetic practice with the rules of courtly, and therefore political, behavior provides the prophetic poet with an established terminology that can be used against

that society while at the same time pleasing it. Critics could levy all the arguments used against humanist eloquence as empty show and pedantic scholasticism against the court. This is just what Spenser does. And just as Pico della Mirandola wrote an eloquent argument against eloquence as superficial ornament and deceptive, Spenser writes a poem against the practiced courtly behavior using courtly language and structures. As shown in the previous chapter, Spenser's use of humanist rhetoric gave him both the authority and the manner in which to critique the court. Spenser's Faerie Queene makes the connection between the rhetoricians' concern for eloquence, the court's concern for theatricality, and the prophetic poets' concern for political action. In this chapter I shall present the Elizabethan court's practice of using show for power and how Spenser uses his poetic skills to seek reform of that practice. While historians and biographers have admitted the abuses of power and show in Elizabeth's court, most critics of The Faerie Queene concentrate on Spenser's criticism of the courtiers rather than of Elizabeth herself. I hope to show that the reforms Spenser seeks are for not only the court but also for the queen and would, in fact, deny her her method of power and control. This political and radical critique of Elizabeth moves The Faerie Queene out of the genre of panegyric into the mode of prophetic poetry.

Scholars such as John Nicols and Roy Strong have well

documented and presented the theatricality of Elizabethan life and court, emphasizing the queen's use of pageant and procession. Among such grand pomp, it is easy to forget that the Elizabethan court was a constant theatrical performance and not just on special occasions. Roy Strong makes the point that the "Renaissance court festival, unlike its medieval forbears, stemmed from a philosophy which believed that truth could be apprehended in images" (22). Perhaps it would be more accurate to use presentation rather than images. The presentation of a man at court, as Puttenham said, is what will bring him success. We can find the use of what Steven Greenblatt refers to as "histrionic self-presentation" in formal occasions such as a court masque where the participants in the masque play the parts of participants--"[m]asquers are not actors; a lady or gentleman participating in a masque remains a lady or gentleman" (Orgel 39)--or in a less formal occasion such as Sir Robert Carey asking to be paid:

In 1597, smarting at not having been paid for his services as Warden of the East Marches, he [Carey] rode to Theobalds uninvited and requested an audience with the queen. Both Cecil and Carey's brother (who was then Lord Chamberlain) advised him to leave at once without letting the queen know of his rash visit, for they assured him she would be furious. But a courtier friend, William Killigrew, devised a better plan: he told the queen that she was beholden to Carey, "who not having seen her for a twelvemonth and more, could no longer endure to be deprived of so great a happiness; but took post with all speed to come up to see your Majesty, and to kiss your hand, and so to return instantly again." Carey was then granted an audience and was given the money due to him. (Greenblatt 165)

The courtier's impromptu performance gained Carey his money. Often the players on the stage were indistinguishable from those in the court. In referring to the practice of actors wearing real court garments of deceased noble people, Orgel notes this mixing of court life with stage life:

when the ordinary Elizabethan went to the theater to see a play about royalty, he might have thought of the drama as a mere fiction, but its trappings were paradoxically the real thing. (5)

While the ordinary Elizabethan might have made a distinction between the show of court and the show of theatre, there is evidence that the courtiers did not always make such a fine distinction.

The theatricality of Sir Walter Raleigh's life is documented in Greenblatt's Sir Walter Raleigh: The Renaissance Man and His Roles. Linking Raleigh's sense of performance directly to the queen's, Greenblatt presents the depth of Raleigh's "histrionic self-fashioning":

The self-dramatizing that was the essence of the court deeply influenced his life, coloring not only his relations with the queen but his entire personality. His theatricalism in the crucial scenes of his life, his sense of himself as an actor in a living theater, his capacity truly to believe in the role he played though it was in many of its elements an evident fabrication, his self-manifestation in poetry and prose are all profoundly related to the example and the effect of the remarkable woman on the throne of England.
(55)

Javitch does note that Raleigh was one of the few courtiers who "cultivated so pronounced and sustained a dramatic identity," but also notes that the Earl of Sussex, Leicester,

Hatton, Oxford, and Sidney practiced similar self-fashioning (74). Spenser championed the causes of Raleigh, Essex, Leicester, and Sidney in his Faerie Queene; Spenser's criticism of courtiers and the theatricality was the same as Sidney's defense of poetry: without moving men to good deeds, poetry/courtliness is false and open to charges of being mere lies. Spenser's humanism sought political action from eloquence, and these men had tried to exercise that power in some form. But the power of any courtier, regardless of his grace and presentation, intrudes upon the authority of the monarchy.

As monarch, Queen Elizabeth had a particular power structure established by tradition, despite the numerous royal intrigues. But as the queen and a single female monarch, Elizabeth had to establish, if not her right to rule, a method that would allow her subjects to be ruled by a female. The cult of Elizabeth that grew up around her, with its emphasis on the queen's two bodies--one political and one natural--and the theatrical romance of her court were self-fashioned forms that gave her a power base. Robin Wells and Thomas Cain have done excellent studies of Elizabeth as a cultic figure and the resulting use of praise, and several works such as Ernst Kantorowicz's The King's Two Bodies cover the use of the dual body, therefore, I would like to concentrate on her use of the romantic courtier to maintain her power.

Elizabeth's astuteness concerning her power as a single female is evident in her earliest speeches, where she made it clear that she was appointed by God to rule and would do just that:

and yet considering I am Gods Creature, ordeyned to obey his appointment I will thereto Yelde, desiringe . . . that I may have assistance of his Grace to bee the minister of his Heavenly Will in this office now commytted to me, . . . so I shall desyre . . . that I with my Rulinge and you with yo^r Service may make a good accompt to Almighty God and leave some comferte to our posterity in Earth. (qtd. in Heisch 33)

In this accession speech, Elizabeth stresses that the role of the nobility is to serve her, who would be not just a royal female but their ruler. Elizabeth's desire to reign, and remain unmarried to do so, is seen in a devotion she wrote in the first year of her reign:

And albeit, it might please almightie god to contynue me still in this mynde, to lyve out of the state of mariage, yet it is not to be feared, but he will worke in my harte, in yo^r wisdomes as good provision by his healde may be made in convenient tyme . . . And in the end this shalbe for me sufficient that a marble stone shall de[clare, that a] Qu[ene h]aving ra[i]gn[ed such] a time [l]y[ved and] dyed a vargin. (qtd. in Heisch 55)

The desire of the nobility for her "to marry quickly and acceptably and to turn over the real business of government to her husband" (Heisch 33) was not only rejected but strongly reacted against. Whatever her personal thoughts on matrimony, clearly Elizabeth knew that a large part of her political power was determined by her marital status; once she married, her elaborate justifications for a female rule

would dissolve. Elizabeth responded in 1566 to a petition for her to marry with a speech emphasizing not only her right and ability to rule, "thoughe I be a woman, yet I haue as good as a corage awnsuerable to my place as euere my father hade," but also that she will not be forced by her subjects to marry: "I wyll neuer be by vyolence constreyned to doo any thyng" (Heisch 36). Comparing drafts of Elizabeth's speeches to the final copies, Heisch shows her conscious effort to "remove all but the most irresistible insults from her public language" (36-37) despite the numerous petitions that she marry. Elizabeth's singleness became an essential part of what Quilligan refers to as amor cortois, a format that provided ritual guidelines for male courtiers functioning under a female monarch:

The issue of Elizabeth's sex was not simple historically, and all the paradoxical tension it introduced into court culture not easily resolved by the sophisticated self-consciousness of Renaissance courtly *complement. We need to remember, therefore, that an essentially medieval mode of amor cortois formed part of the political style of Renaissance government administration, becoming a method by which men made or did not make brilliant careers for themselves. (40)

Married, Elizabeth would be like any other woman with a husband as her head; single, she was the only head and as queen the center of her court both politically and rhetorically.

In The Courtier, Lady Elizabeth Gonzaga, "my Lady Dutchess," and Lady Emilia Pia control the amusement: "Then were they governed as the dutchesse thought best, which many

times gave this charge unto the Lady Emilia" (I.22). The dutchess determines the topics of presentation, she assigns the topic of fashioning ladies to Lord Julian de Medicis at the end of book two. The purpose of the courtier's skill, according to Lord Julian, is to gain women's love:

the end also of this love must needs be vertuous,
and if noblenesse of birth, skilfulnesse in
martiall feates, in letters, in musick, gentleness,
being both in speech and behavior indowed with so
many graces, be y^e means wherewithall the Courtier
compasseth y^e womans love (242)

The female is the motive for courtly behavior, and she dictates the expression of that behavior--and the resulting rewards. Elizabeth exploited this female centered courtliness to her advantage as a method of justifying her power over her male court. Norbrook notes this use of romance imagery as a political force when describing Spenser's idea of having knights going out each year from Gloriana's feast:

Spenser probably derived this idea from the annual festivities of the Order of the Garter, which involved rituals of devotion to the monarch, and the annual Accession Day tilts. Courtiers like Sidney and Essex would make spectacular entries at these tilts, dressed in romantic costumes and making speeches in which the deeds they had performed in the queen's service that year were cast in the imagery of romance. The romantic idiom of these occasions helped to overcome male courtiers' dislike of subjecting themselves to a woman; they could see themselves as ideal knights gaining honour from the service of a distant and virtuous lady. (110)

In this role of delicate control, Elizabeth was able to maintain iron control: a breach of decorum could become treasonous. Her imprisonment of Raleigh upon the discovery of

his secret marriage resulted from this breach: Raleigh denied Elizabeth the control as the romantic center and showed that he was fully aware of the pretense. Greenblatt explains how Raleigh used the conventions that caused his imprisonment to extricate himself:

In his relationship with the middle-aged queen, Raleigh had cast himself in the part of a passionate lover pursuing a remote and beautiful lady. That fantasy was all but shattered by the queen's discovery of the secret marriage. Imprisoned in the Tower, Raleigh attempted to recreate the poetic illusion, now as the faithful lover cruelly mistreated by his mistress. In his sonnet ["What is our life?"], role and reality, the literary type and the actual situation, spill over into each other. The woman in whose "auntient memory" the poet is imprisoned has actually put him in prison. The poem enables Raleigh to reenter the realm from which his disgrace had driven him, that zone at the boundary of fiction and truth in which he chose to exist. (25)

Just as Raleigh's marriage spoiled the presentation, Elizabeth's marriage would have put an end to the presentation and an end to her full power. Spenser's insistant marriage motif throughout The Faerie Queene must have displeased Elizabeth, despite Spenser's struggle to make exceptions for the queen, considering her responses to Parliament's similar suggestions and Raleigh's marriage. In the proem to Book III, Spenser tries to get around the problem of using Elizabeth as his example for the virtue of chastity and still emphasize marriage. But Britomart's adventures are not ones directed by the Faerie Queene, but are ones she comes upon in her search for her future husband, Artegall:

How then shall I, Apprentice of the skill,
 That whylome in diuineſt wits did raine,
 Presume ſo high to ſtretch mine humble quill?
 Yet now my luckleſſe lot doth me conſtraine
 Hereto perforce. But o dreed Soueraine
 Thus faire forth pardon, ſith that choiceſt
 wit [t/o]
 Cannot your glorious pourtract figure plaine
 That I in colourd ſhowes may ſhadow it,
 And Antique praiſes vnto preſent perſons fit.

(Proem III.iii)

While it is amazing to think that the reign of an adamantly
 virgin queen would produce one of the greatest British
 epithalamic poets, it is not remarkable that the same poet
 would have images of stasis, near-paralytic knights, when
 men are trapped by the artifice of a single woman. In the
 Bower of Bliss, one of Spenser's most elegant and eloquent
 artifices, Acrasia sucks the life from the young knight
 Verdant. Spenser's narrator states "That certes it great
 pittie was to ſee/Him his nobilitie ſo foule deface"
 (II.xii.79). Verdant ceases to be praiseworthy because he
 has chosen the enchanting show of the female's "lewd loues"--
 lewd in part because the love will not lead to marriage--
 over the show of arms:

His warlike armes, the idle instruments
 Of ſleeping praiſe, were hong vpon a tree,

And his braue shield, full of old monuments,
Was fowly ra'st, that none the signes might

see; [t/o]

Ne for them, ne for honour cared hee,
Ne ought, that did to his aduancement tend,
But in lewd loues, his body did he spend:

O horrible enchantment, that him so did blend.

(II.xii.80)

Line eight makes him very much like a courtier of Elizabeth with her famous parsimony. Another passage containing the single female's negative influence on the knights is Artegall with Radigund, emphasizing the unnatural rule of women over men. Artegall becomes helpless because he responds to beauty in the manner of a romantic courtier: "No hand so cruell, nor no hart so hard,/But ruth of beautie will it mollifie" (V.v.13). Radigund's power over Artegall is her ability to be the courtly lady in appearance and yet still act outside the courtly framework. She is a lady with power to rule more than a parlor game. A multitude of knights are waylaid and become ineffective under countless single females--especially those females such as Lucifera and Snowy Florimell who are involved in some form of pageant or procession.

Elizabeth's failure to marry presented particular aesthetic problems for Spenser. As a prophetic poet he was especially aware of the importance of both pageant and marriage, but the queen used pageants for her own method of

control and refused to marry for the same reason. Fletcher's description of the prophet's actions reveals the difficulties Spenser faced:

The prophet begins in critical withdrawl, but his withdrawl, unlike that of the mystic, ends in a return, affirming a festive hope. His kairos or season promises truth in the measure that any betrothal is a union of opposites and can hope for offspring. The festivity is rich with hope because infused by faith. Prophecy, representing its vision in ceremonial pageant, can enforce a feeling of local topocosmic unity among a varied people, creating a court, a family, a city, a culture.
(52)

The reality of the queen's own use of marriage and pageant required that Spenser put the significant marriages in The Faery Queene on hold and constrained the very metaphors of his prophetic poetry. Spenser was limited to the betrothal and its promises. The power of the single Elizabeth to order her courtiers' behavior through chivalric and romantic rules denied the courtiers the active power the humanists sought. The combining of rhetoric and courtly behavior in books such The Arte of English Poesie fostered the power of women by not placing greater stress on the civic function of rhetoric and eloquence as the classical humanists had. For Spenser, Elizabeth's difficulty with several of her courtiers--namely his circle of friends including Essex, Raleigh, and Sidney--was that she would only let them be vacuous flatterers and performers rather than actual political counselors. Spenser found his authority for this view of the courtier not only in the Protestant and Puritan movements as shown by Norbrook and

Hume, but also in the very works that were causing the problems.

In Book IV of The Courtier, Lord Octavian criticizes the very activities which make up the bulk of Castiglione's book:

For doubtlesse if the Courtier with his noblenes of birth, comely behaviour, pleasantnesse and practise in so manye exercises, shoulde bring foorth no other fruite, but to be such a one for himselfe, I would not thinke to come by this perfect trade of Courtiershippe, that a man should of reason bestow so much studie and paines about it, as who so will compasse it must do. But I would say rather that many of the qualities appointed him, as dauncing, singing, and sporting, were lightness and vanitie, and in a man of estimation rather to be dispraised than commended. (IV.260)

For Octavian, all the tools of the "trade of Courtiershippe" are mere vanity if they are used only for the benefit of the individual. Such behavior has brought the name of Italy to slander (261) and "doe many times nothing els but womanish the mindes, corrupt youth, and bring them [courtiers and youths] to a most wanton trade of living" (260-61). All the activities which are the "floure of Courtliness" (261) are not for the purpose of self-aggrandizement, which is mere vanity and lightness, but for the purpose of "training and helping forward of the Prince of goodnesse, and the fearing him from evil, the fruite of it" (261):

The ende therefore of a perfect Courtier . . . I believe is to purchase him, by the meane of the qualities which these Lordes have given him, in such wise the good will and favour of the Prince he is in service withall, that he may breake his minde to him, and alwaies enforme him franckly of the truth of every matter meete for him to understand, without fear or perill to displease him . . . And

so shall the courtier, if he have the goodnesse in him that these Lords have given him accompanied with readinesse of wit, pleasantnesse, wisdom, knowledge in letters, and so many other thinges, understand how to behave himselfe readily in all occurrents to drive into his Princes heade what honour and profit shall ensue to him and to his justice, liberallitie, valiantnesse of courage, meekenesse, and by the other vertues that belong to a good prince, and contrariwise what slander, and damage commeth of the vices contrarie to them.
(261)

The studied graces give the courtier the authority to instruct the prince, who seems very susceptible to show, as the poet does according to Sidney; the courtier is to teach by delighting. Octavian continues warning against flattery, ignorance, and "selfe liking" (262). His courtier should be part of a council for the prince with authority and freedom to advise: "hee [the prince] shoulde picke out a certaine number of gentlemen . . . with whom he shoulde debate all matters, and give them authoritie and free leave to utter their minds franckly unto him without respect" (284). Such a courtier is a far cry from the one described in the second book of The Courtier who

shall never be among the last that come forth into listes to shew themselves, considering the people, and especially women take much more heede to the first than to the last because the eyes and mindes that at the beginning are greedy of that noveltie, note every lite matter, and printe it: afterwarde by continuance they are not onely full, but wearie of it. (96)

This concern for self-presentation easily overcomes the more productive counseling position of courtiers because it is an easier obligation to meet, with more material rewards, with

fewer ramifications of power. As Javitch notes, even Elizabeth wearied of show: "Now the wit of the fox is everywhere on foot, so as hardly a faithful or virtuous man may be found" (128).

If Elizabeth tired of show without substance, there is little evidence that she encouraged or allowed her courtiers to be any different. Even Sidney, the paragon of courtiers, was not awarded his knighthood based on merit or royal favor but for a point of protocol:

Count Casimir was about to be installed as a Knight of the Garter, which honour had been conferred on him during his visit to England with Languet, and as he had named Sidney his proxy, and as no one could act in that capacity below the rank of knight, Sidney's deficiency was made good. (Wallace 288)

We easily assume that this favorite of courtiers was a favorite of the queen, but Sidney did not receive his due advancement from the queen because of his Protestantism and militarism, two points on which he had more in common with Spenser than with Elizabeth. Indeed, most of the courtiers Spenser supported were the active military men and militant Protestants with whom Elizabeth had so much difficulty.

In the remainder of this chapter I shall concentrate on the militant quality Spenser approved of and the queen disapproved of. Norbrook has done excellent work showing the connection between politics, puritan Protestantism, and military aggressiveness in the English Renaissance as have Hume and other critics, so I shall focus on how Spenser's

military program, regardless of its religious foundation, put him at odds with his queen. The criticism of Elizabeth's policies is more evidence that Spenser is not merely a flatterer but is, in fact, a poet who does belong in the prophetic line.

Javitch argues in Poetry and Courtliness in Renaissance England that Sidney's death marks the beginning of the decline in the belief of the courtier (125). With Sidney and many of Elizabeth's leading courtiers dead by 1591--the Earl of Leicester, 1588; Sir Walter Mildmay, 1589; Blanche Parry, the Earl of Warwick, Sir Francis Walsingham, 1590; Sir Christopher Hatton, 1591 (Javitch 126)--the age and tone of the court was changing. The queen was getting older and her leading courtiers--Raleigh, Essex, Robert Cecil--were now of a younger generation. Because of this decline, Javitch argues, the number and degree of criticisms concerning the court increased. This is in part evidenced by the change in The Faerie Queene which becomes increasingly political and critical in the last three books. If the myth of Sidney as a living perfection of Castiglione's courtier moderated Spenser's critique of Elizabeth and her court, it did so by a softening of the rhetoric, not a silencing of the criticisms. If we recognize Sidney as having his own criticisms of the queen's policies rather than expect his total approval, references to him in the earlier books of The Faerie Queene become not only praise of him but also criticism of the queen.

Sidney, like Spenser, sought a more independent position for courtiers and a more active military program than Elizabeth favored. Norbrook's assessment of the queen's military skills contrasts sharply with Lawrence Stone's description of the frequent resorting to physical action by courtiers for even minor disagreements. Norbrook writes that

the queen was not pursuing warfare for its own sake but shrewdly judging the best way at a particular moment of advancing her cause, whether by diplomacy or by carefully planned and limited military intervention. (128)

In contrast, Sidney warned his father's secretary "that if he read his letters to his father again `I will thruste my dagger into you. And truste to it, for I speake it in earnest'" (qtd. in Stone 224) and of the common "readiness to resort to direct action that in an age of armed retainers could easily lead to rioting and even minor warfare between rival gangs":

When personal conflict between principals took place, no holds were barred. When Henry Earl of Southampton fell out with Ambrose Willoughby at cards, the latter pulled out some of the Earl's hair. After Edward Rogers had got into a scuffle with John Harington outside Westminster Hall, he boasted that he had come away with a handful of his opponent's beard. Even teeth were not excluded, and when Thomas Hutchinson was attacked by Sir Germaine Poole, "getting him downe he bit a goode part of his nose and caried yt away in his pocket." When armed retainers were employed, there were equally no conventions about fair play. Surprise ambushes, attacks from the rear, onslaughts by overwhelming numbers were all legitimate tactics in the sixteenth century. (225)

Whether the men Spenser supported in his poetry were suffering from the "changes in the techniques of warfare that

reduced the military role of the court aristocracy" (Javitch 130-31) or from "chronic dyspepsia from over-indulgence in an ill-balanced diet" which made them "exceedingly irritable" (Stone 224), they sought and defended a more aggressive foreign policy than Elizabeth preferred. Spenser rewrote much of the current history in his Book V, turning what were often unpopular and unsuccessful military ventures into the deeds of his Knight of Justice. As Norbrook points out, Spenser's Book V "amounted to a sustained defense of the Leicester-Essex foreign policy, looking back over the past ten or fifteen years and looking forward to possible future victories" (132). Spenser also supported and was friends with Sir Walter Raleigh, even though Essex "and his Puritan friends regarded [him] as a wicked atheist" (Norbrook 132), who "did support a militant foreign policy" (Norbrook 132). Spenser's thinly disguised justification of Lord Grey's Irish policies, policies not wholly supported by Elizabeth, acknowledges Spenser's willingness to use brutal force for political solutions.

Elizabeth's hesitancy to use military force, as evidenced by her recall of Grey from Ireland and her sending Leicester to the Netherlands making him too late to save Antwerp, contrasts with Spenser's most dominant female character, Britomart. Britomart, with her name that emphasizes the military quality Spenser sought for in Britain, effectively takes over the middle three books of The Faerie

Queene in her search for Artegall and the inclusive battles. Britomart may be closer to Spenser's ideal for Queen Elizabeth than any of the other characters, including Gloriana and Belpheobe regardless of his letter to Raleigh. For Britomart is closer in type to Arthur, "magnificence in particular" (Hamilton 738): both Britomart and Arthur were educated by Merlin, both had visions of their mates (though Arthur seeks Gloriana for courtly service, not betrothal), and both come to the rescue of other knights with enchanted weapons. We are told Britomart's full genealogy, her future line leading to Elizabeth through Merlin's prophecy in Book V.iii, and her own ancestral line through Paridell in canto ix. Violent men and actions fill both genealogies, and the reference to Elizabeth is a prophecy that she will defeat Spain:

Then shall a royall virgin raine, which shall
Stretch her white rod ouer the Belgicke shore,
And the great Castle smite so sore with all

That it shall make him shake. and shortly learne to
fall. [t/o]

Britomart is more closely tied to Britain than any other character, including Arthur, who is overshadowed by Artegall in the last books, with her more developed genealogy and her name. Britomart is the only character in The Faerie Queene to have a name which includes the nation's name. The combination of Britain and Mars also stresses the military propensity of Britomart even though in Book V she is the mod-

erating element of mercy to balance the harsh justice of Artegall. Norbrook explains how Spenser uses Britomart to represent his view of military power:

But the long-term aim was not just a static balance of power but a decisive forward movement, a diminution of the forces of Antichrist. It is just such a complex synthesis of peace and war that Spenser represents in the figure of Britomart, who has attributes of the peaceful deity Pallas but also of the aggressive Mars; her name indicates that the arts of war are as important as the arts of peace. Artegall's long-term aim is Irene, peace; but it is a peace that can only result from a complete reformation of religion and politics and must therefore be prepared for by vigorous action. Britomart must marry the militant Artegall. (128)

Britomart contains in her personality Spenser's major themes: aggressive foreign policy and marriage. Spenser's changing treatment of Elizabeth in The Faerie Queene has been noted by such critics as Javitch and Quilligan, but the presence of Britomart as early as Book III indicates that Spenser's differences with the queen did not result from lack of preferment and from being sent to Ireland, but from his own political views held even in the first books of The Faerie Queene. The last books of The Faerie Queene, of course, are more aggressive than the first three but the images of violence are all found in all the books.

While political and historical allegory is more prominent in the last books than in the first books, Spenser's themes of war and marriage, the "fierce warres and faithfull loues" of Proem I, make the entire poem political and, in varying degrees, critical of Queen Elizabeth. The easy as-

sumption of most modern critics is that Spenser was so taken by Queen Elizabeth that he wrote a poem as long and complex as The Faerie Queene to praise her. Many recognize the critical element in the poem but focus that criticism only on the courtiers and not on the queen herself. But no one can criticize a court as tightly controlled as Elizabeth's without the criticism applying to the queen. Spenser does more than criticize the queen through her courtiers; Spenser attacks two of the major aspects of her power, her rejection of marriage and her reticence to support military activities. Even if the modern critic does not recognize Spenser's politically controversial position, Spenser's contemporaries did:

Spenser's public image in the 1590's was that of a poet sympathetic to the case of the Earl of Essex, an increasingly controversial figure who eventually rebelled against the queen. Already by the early 17th century, admirers of Essex were propagating the myth of Spenser not as a court panegyrist but as an exile from court, championed in his poverty by Essex alone. (Norbrook 126)

The complexity of loyalty to a queen whose policies are disapproved is denied Spenser by the Essex propagandists and by modern critics reacting against that propaganda. But that complexity allows Spenser to be a prophetic poet, criticizing, warning, and presenting alternatives, rather than a propagandist or panegyrist for any particular side.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

Whatever Spenser's personal view of Elizabeth, in The Faerie Queene he expects his queen to marry and to pursue a more aggressive military policy. In The Faerie Queene these themes become matters of salvation and damnation for society as well as for the individuals. Particular people may be defended for their military actions, but it is the military action itself and the political consequences that Spenser presents as a method for social salvation. His Irish policy includes destroying the Irish culture so the Irish could be redeemed by British culture. Spenser presents marriage in a similar social and political manner. Individual characters marry, but it is marriage itself that is celebrated, saving society with its ability to save and make whole. For Elizabeth marriage was an even greater political question, one that included the problem of an heir and the problem of a queen's power. Spenser's "fierce warres and faithful loues" were not only romantic themes; they were the major themes of the political reality in Elizabethan England. To write a poem addressing these themes was to write a political poem.

Spenser's political views were inextricably wound together with the Elizabethan love of theatricality. Elizabeth

and her courtiers used the show of rhetorical eloquence in both language and behavior as a political tool; throughout The Faerie Queene Spenser attacks the court's love of seeming and especially its practice by courtiers. While Spenser can make some direct attacks on the courtiers, he must be less direct in his criticism of the queen. But Spenser argues against her court and her practice of power through the romantic pretense. Such a pretense, focusing on the unmarried queen, encourages the use of show over substance and counters the social values Spenser holds for the married woman. The queen's method of control does not accommodate Spenser's views on marriage, the role of courtiers, or the goal of humanism. And as humanism is one of Spenser's influences, it provides him with the means as well as the reason to criticize the queen's reign.

The court took the form of rhetoric without its corresponding duties for civic and political reform. Under a monarchy any reform will be dangerous because of the intrusion on the monarch's power. But humanists suggests that the courtiers can gain power and influence by advising the ruler in a pleasing and delightful manner. Elizabeth was able to use delightful presentation by the courtiers in her own way to keep the appearance of action without any loss of her own power. For Spenser to present a complex poem addressing the basis of power and its misuse of rhetoric, he has to use similar rhetoric himself to win his audience. The audience

he addressed originally was very sophisticated with language. The many schemes and tropes used in the courtiers' own poetry and self-presentation suggest the depth of their ability. For Spenser to gain an ear for his message he has to follow the dictates of Sidney and other humanists and delight with his skill as he teaches. The word plays throughout The Faerie Queene allows his audience to discover subtleties of meaning and gain appreciation for his skill. With his audience paying close attention to the poem, Spenser can present his message of political action and reform without being heavy-handed. His use of allegory as a dominant mode reinforces the humanists' use of delightful presentation for teaching and recalls the civic responsibility of knowing. Spenser's form, language use, political ideology, social views, themes combine to make The Faerie Queene the complex and yet unified poem that it is even without the planned last six books.

At the beginning of this thesis I suggested that the difference between visionary and prophetic poetry was the degree of persuasion the poet sought. It is enough for the visionary poet to change, even temporarily, the way the reader sees or experiences an event; the prophetic poet, though seeks a more complete change. A change in mind must lead to a change in behavior. The poet's imitation of God's creative act must be recreated by the actions of the reader. When a poet assumes the position of teacher he or

she must establish an authority. For many critics such an authority lies in the implied divine inspiration of poems that are at least quasi-religious. If we allow religion as Spenser's only authority, we deny the complexity of both his ideas and the Elizabethan age. Many critics try to simply use the Christian tradition as an influence rather than read the poem as a Christian poem only, but they do not make the distinction between biblical prophecy and literary prophecy; consequently, they tend to address the problem of inspiration in religious terms. If Spenser claims divine authority through the Christian faith for the writing, and we assume accuracy, of The Faerie Queene , then it is correct to level charges of false prophet against him.

Spenser does not explicitly claim the Christian tradition for his authority. Instead, using humanism and its concerns, Spenser is able to develop his own authority, from his own skill, without claims to divine inspiration other than that accorded any "right poet." Rather than argue about Spenser's divine inspiration, we should evaluate Spenser's authority established within the poem to see if he fulfills his obligations as a prophetic poet. After recognizing Spenser as a prophetic poet based on a humanist tradition, critics can move away from the simplistic presentation of Spenser as a court panegyrist. The role of prophetic poet includes judging as well as celebrating society. The focus of Spenser's society was Elizabeth; therefore, it is not

enough to assume that Spenser would only criticize the courtiers and not Elizabeth. Once we recognize that he does indeed have major differences with Elizabeth, we can move away from the assumptions so often implied in essays that the "good" women in The Faerie Queene are types of Elizabeth and the "bad" women are just personifications or characters to show what could happen if Spenser's warnings are ignored.

Seeing The Faerie Queene as a prophetic poem gives meaning to the critics' claim that Spenser is the beginning of the prophetic line in English literature, a claim that is often meaningless because it is neither developed nor substantiated. My emphasis on the political aspects of prophetic poetics is not to encourage more historical pairing of characters and people or episodes with events from Spenser's life and time. While such decoding may be appropriate, for most of The Faerie Queene such historicism is not necessary. Michael O'Connell makes the point that "[n]one of the various historical allegories fastened upon book 1, for instance, can actually be kept in mind while one is reading the poem attentively" (12). What is important is that we return to The Faerie Queene with the willingness to read it as it was meant to be read: closely and instructively.

If Spenser claims to know what is necessary for society to function, and we assume that though specifics might change, general principles would have some bearing outside of Elizabethan England, as a reader I want and need to know if

Spenser is right. The poet who claims special authority on any basis must be challenged because the poetry is challenging the reader at the same time. So as I read, I must evaluate the poem as a prophetic poem including the quality of the content. The problem of Book V and its rejection by most readers is a result of this evaluation. The critics who try to cajole readers into appreciating the poetic quality of Book V, whether its imagery, internal complexity, use of various traditions may be correct as literary critics but they are missing the point as readers of prophetic poetry. Spenser does not want his vision of justice explained away; he is explaining and defending it to persuade his readers to agree with him. It was not agreeable to some in his own time, thus the necessity of its defense, and for most of us today, it is still disagreeable. It is especially bothersome after so many books in which Spenser has established his credibility and quality of insight. Book V fails because Spenser is not able to persuade us that his authority and knowledge as a prophetic poet are greater than our common repulsion for genocide. As prophetic poetry, Book V does not persuade me to follow Spenser and his political ideas; he has not moved us to action; he has not taught as he delighted; he has not delighted as he taught.

The critical study of prophetic poetry has developed greatly beyond the influences in Revelation and Old Testament prophets. Many critics have done excellent work on prophetic

poetry, though there is a great deal of clarification needed. In the study of Spenser as a prophetic poet more needs to be done on Chaucer's influence and how his use of language, and its imitation of Chaucer's, fits into the prophetic mode. A more thorough study of prophetic language in general needs to be done. Are there particular forms and modes that are predominant in prophetic poetry? What is the role of imagery or pictorialism? Kouwenhoven raises several interesting points about Spenser's use of tableaux and pageants to interrupt narrative flow. Can that breakdown of time be a prophetic device? If prophecy is as closely linked to allegory as Murrin argues, does irony become a valid verbal tool for the prophet? How closely can we tie the literary prophet to the biblical prophet? What can deconstructionism or structuralism tell us about a prophetic poem? Are Spenser's prophetic qualities less developed because he still believed in the salvation of both individuals and society? Critics are more comfortable with Milton's rejections of society and prophetic address to individuals through reason or Blake's rejection of human rationality for the subconscious. So far Spenser's belief in society has shoved him out of the line because it makes him less iconoclastic.

The critics of prophetic poetry need to move away from repeating themselves and begin to address some of these basic issues. The avenues to explore seem endless, but the focus must always be on how the prophetic claim changes the way the

poet writes and the reader reads. Havelock Ellis defined the term fiction as what "is impossible, but it enables us to reach what for us is relatively truth, and, above all, while hypothesis simply contributes to knowledge, fiction thus used becomes a guide to practical action and is indispensable to what we feel to be progress" (qtd. in Curtis 24). Ellis's fiction is very similar to Spenser's prophecy. Both seek to move, to "guide to practical action," even through the medium of stories. Spenser has written stories he believes will improve society by fashioning gentlemen; his didactic claims are clear, and as readers and critics, we must concede to them and evaluate The Faerie Queene based upon them.

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