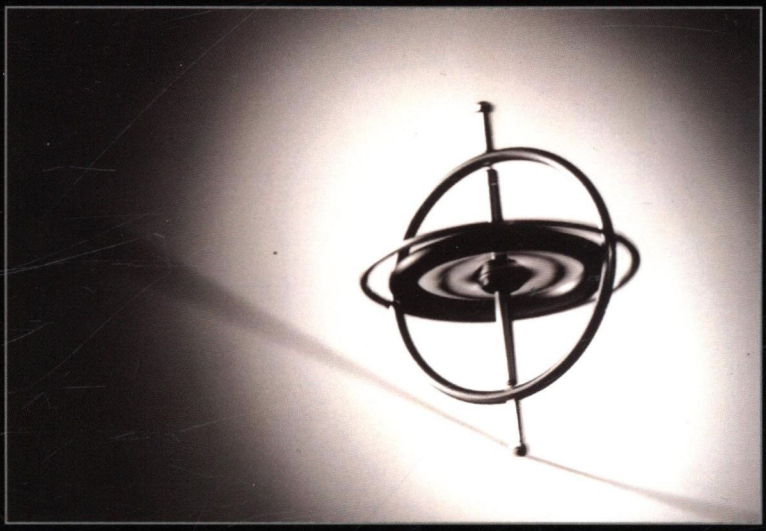
SPENSER IN THE MOMENT



EDITED BY

PAUL J. HECHT AND
J. B. LETHBRIDGE

LITERARY STUDIES • POETRY

Spenser in the Moment collects specially commissioned critical essays of established readings, each of which in surveying the state of the art attempts radically to unsettle our conception of the poetry of Edmund Spenser (1552–1599).

The editors were drawn together by a shared restlessness with the canonical Spenser, and a sense that attention especially to Spenser's musical qualities and the distinctiveness of his poetic style compared with that of his contemporaries could display exciting new paths forward. Scholars from three continents contribute bracing reviews of Spenser's relationship with his classical sources, religious history, and the history of the book. Two essays consider Spenser and music, both music in Spenser's works and Spenser's works in the music of his time. Two working poets inaugurate the final group of essays on Spenser's poetry, with original, irreverent poetry reflecting and riffing on Spenser. The essays argue for various versions of revolution: one mixing aesthetics and sex, another diagnosing widespread fallacies ("expressivist" and "dramatistic") made in reading Spenser, and the last arguing for a Spenser not of enormous interlocking networks, but of the moment: that the primary Spenserian structure is that of a moment of stillness-in-motion. With so much change behind us already in this young century, another series of changes emerges from recent work, and a sense of expectation, as of held breath, seems to pervade the discipline—that is the moment that this volume attempts to capture and nourish.

CONTRIBUTORS

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Spenser in the Moment

For Anne Lake Prescott

Preface

This collection describes and assesses some of what the editors propose are the most active areas of Spenser studies, and each chapter proposes a version of what has been done and what and how it should be done in the future. It is a state of the art collection with a twist, an opinionated state of the art or *Forschungsbericht* (report on research) with its own thesis. It had its generation in a conversation between J. B. Lethbridge and Fairleigh Dickinson University Press over an earlier collection published there, edited by Lethbridge, *Edmund Spenser: New and Renewed Directions* (2006). It was decided that now would be a good time to take stock of certain changes in criticism on Spenser, and to fill at least one lacuna in a pair of papers on Spenser and music. Further designs for musical exploration, in collaboration with living composers, as well as explorations of the potential for narratology (promisingly represented by two panel sessions at a recent Renaissance Society of America meeting), will have to await future venues. The planned focus on music and prosody led Lethbridge to enlist Paul J. Hecht as coeditor. The result was an exciting and fruitful collaboration that brought in scholars from around the world, a collation of recent change in the air, which seeks to offer some indication of the way forward, even as many of the papers indeed take a deliberately diagnostic and corrective approach. This volume attempts a contribution to the study of Spenser at a time when, with so much change behind us already in this young century, another series of changes gradually emerges from recent work, and a sense of expectation, as of held breath, seems to pervade the discipline.

The editors wish to thank Harry Keyishian of Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, Brooke Bures, Ashli MacKenzie, and Zachary Nycum of Rowman and Littlefield. In addition to our contributors, others that have made important contributions behind the scenes include Natalia Christoforou, Bradin Cormack, Kimberly Anne Coles, Jeff Dolven, Andrew Escobedo, Heather Fielding, Roger Kuin, Stefanie Lethbridge, Philipp Multhaupt, Anne Prescott, Melissa Sanchez, and Alexis Ulrich.

Abbreviations of Spenser's Works

Bellay	*Visions of Bellay*
Colin Clout	*Colin Clouts Come Home Againe*
Epith	*Epithalamion*
FQ	*The Faerie Queene*
Gnat	*Virgils Gnat*
Pet	*Visions of Petrarch*
Proth	*Prothalamion*
SC	*The Shepheardes Calender*
Theatre	*A Theatre for Worldlings*
Time	*Ruines of Time*

Introduction

Notes toward a New Spenser

Paul J. Hecht

What set this volume in motion is a deep restlessness with aspects of the current consensus on Spenser, and a desire to press in new directions. At its heart, our restlessness is with how the experience of reading Spenser is typically described, or what reading experience is implied by dominant interpretations and arguments about his work. For Lethbridge as well as Gordon Teskey, whose contribution to this volume is most explicitly a theory of how to read Spenser, the abiding influence of the New Criticism looms large. In this view, a number of Spenser critics, but chief among them Paul Alpers, responded to the changing fashions of reading in the 1950s and 1960s by reinventing Spenser for close reading, by in effect installing a reading filter on *The Faerie Queene* that would allow the book and the author to hold onto—dare I say it?—market share in the endless competition for space at conferences, in journals, and in university presses. The succession of theoretical revolutions that followed the New Criticism generally shared, of course, its commitment to close reading. As did the New Historicism: even if its paradigmatic approach was that of innovative contextualization, the last move was often one of intensive close reading, hinging on a phrase, or a word. So despite the apparent variety of methodological approaches to Spenser in the last fifty years, our sense of the text itself, our approach to reading, and our account of the reading experience, has changed relatively little.

So how, then, might it be changed, and what sort of new Spenser might emerge as a consequence? The contributors to this collection do not offer exactly a rebuke to close reading, as in advocating for a big data, or surface-only

approach to Spenser (although Lethbridge's work in particular, coming off of the large-scale patterns revealed in his recent *Concordance* does this to an extent); but there is an insistence that methods of close reading that work for some early modern writers, for Donne, or Shakespeare, or Milton, emphatically do *not* work for Spenser. Teskey argues in his chapter here that reading Spenser as a poet of "moments" might offer a way forward, and he develops this through an extended analysis of the arrival of Florimell in book 3 of *The Faerie Queene*. He brings to bear, in particular, Augustine and Hegel in what he means by "moment," including the Newtonian senses of the word that appealed to Hegel. In his reading, Florimell appears in what he calls *kinestasis*, both still and in motion, and that combination he argues is one of Spenser's signal poetic effects, if not the defining effect. Teskey's chapter, the last in the volume, can serve to demonstrate the combination of conservation and progression that characterizes the revolution we have on offer here. That is to say, there is as much going back, taking up established and even reverend scholarly tasks and work, as there is searching for new methods, things done with Spenser yet undreamed of in anyone's philosophy. Indeed, the first part of this book is composed entirely of "old" methodologies: a study of Spenser's relationship with Virgil, of Spenser's conception of the past, and of Spenser and book history. And yet each of these contributors demonstrates the revolutionary potential, the stored-up energy as it were, that can be released as they distinguish between what is old and settled opinion because it is right, and what is old and settled because it has been allowed to remain unexamined, unchallenged, where such examination yields new work, new understandings, new insight.

The first chapter in the first section is new work from Syrithe Pugh, who has already established herself as a scholar intent on revising what we thought we knew about early modern British literature's relationship with the classical past (in *Spenser and Ovid*). Her chapter shows off work to be included in the follow-up to that volume, now focused on Spenser's relationship with Virgil. It wasn't long ago that major pronouncements were being made on this subject with respect to the Virgilian "career," by such scholars as Richard Helgerson, Patrick Cheney, and Louis Montrose, and so it is startling to feel the reach, the cascading consequences, produced by Pugh's steady pressure on a few received notions. Her work begins with a comparison of the political investments of Virgil's *Eclogues* and Spenser's *Shepheardes Calender*, and argues that the ambivalence toward the Virgilian "career" expressed by the shepherds Cuddie and Colin, and which has seemed "anti-Virgilian" to previous scholars, actually aligns well with similar ambivalences in Virgil's work. Then, making use of a flowering of

recent Virgil scholarship that brings out Virgil's complex relationship with the *imperium* of his time, she embarks on a virtuosic reading of Spenser's Errour and Virgil's *Fama*. For Spenser, Pugh argues that Virgil offered not a narrow set of choices or an intimidating set of expectations for poetic achievement, but complex and various vocabulary; she urges that we "listen to the continuous and complex music of Spenser's variations on Virgil, where too often we have only noted its loudest chords" (30).

Kathryn Walls's book on Spenser's religious allegory, *God's Only Daughter: Spenser's Una as the Invisible Church* (2013), has recently gained significant attention in Spenser studies, and she brings the same startling and deeply learned sensibility to the topic of Spenser's relationship to the medieval past. For Walls, such a tidy organizational structure as "Spenser and the medieval" cannot survive an encounter with Spenser's actual representations of the past in his own works. What she presents is a compact survey of nothing less than the most prominent of Spenser's conceptions of history in his works, a history in which two central moments, Christ's Incarnation, and the Henrician Reformation, order everything around them. The past, conceived around those moments, can be freighted with moral significance, and, with due respect to Faulkner, it doesn't necessarily stay past either. While Walls gives considerable attention to *The Faerie Queene*, important examples also include works such as *Mother Hubberds Tale* and the *Maye* eclogue of *The Shepheardes Calender*, places where "embodiments of the past appear as ever-present entities, entities that lie in wait to draw humanity back into the darkness of the past" (49).

In the last chapter in the section, Elisabeth Chaghafi begins with a rapid overview of the recent surge of interest in book history in early modern literary studies and within Spenser studies, noting that while *The Shepheardes Calender* and *The Faerie Queene* have received significant attention, "minor" poems have received much less. She focuses on the 1595 quarto edition that includes *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe*, among other poems, but also presents many ambiguities, confusions, and questions, most of which editors have in the past felt obligated to resolve and thus shield from readers. In particular, the 1595 quarto presents some of Spenser's works in intriguing relationship to one another, as well as with works by other authors. Chaghafi argues that influential accounts of Spenser's conception of authorship (by, again, Helgerson and Montrose) have depended to an extent on removing Spenser's poems from their original print context. With the 1595 quarto, she argues that a broader conception of authorship and poetic community—an extension of what is visible on its own in *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe*—can be seen in the way this volume arranges and presents its various contributions.

And she demonstrates that more work is to be done not only in interpreting the clusters or constellations of poems in something like the 1595 quarto, but also with individual interpretations and evaluations of poems that have usually been read on their own. *Astrophel*, in particular, she argues looks different and might be more highly valued in its original multi-author context. She concludes by pointing out several other works that seem ripe for similar treatment, including the *Complaints* and *Letters*.

If the first section offers new potential from old methodologies, the second and third sections of the book offer something more like a collective shift or push, the outlines of a new paradigm for reading Spenser, and to some extent a new paradigm for reading Elizabethan poetry. The second section contains two chapters on nothing but Spenser and music, the best and most comprehensive accounts yet seen on this topic. One chapter, by David Scott Wilson-Okamura, is on music in Spenser—the variety of ways that music, musicians, musical instruments, and musical thinking manifest in Spenser's works—and the other, by Gavin Alexander, addresses Spenser among the music of his time, Spenser as contemporary composers heard him, heard the way his words might be set to music, or how their inherent or implied musicality might be given voice in the abstraction of wordless sounds and rhythms. Both chapters deepen our sense of the important ways in which Spenser is less musical than contemporaries such as Sidney or Shakespeare. Wilson-Okamura does this through a comprehensive, meticulous study of how music appears throughout Spenser's works, and as well as illuminating comparisons with other writers. The result is, yes, a Spenser with relatively little technical insight into music (or desire, at least, to display it in his poetry), but a Spenser nonetheless fascinated, not to say obsessed, with music as aesthetic theory. Among the most fruitful stops along the way are a consideration of "bad" music in Spenser, as it connects to concepts of evil or corrupting arts including poetry, as well as an extension of previous Platonic readings of the musical scene atop Mount Acidale. In the former, our sense is broadened of the moral flexibility or fluidity of artistic pleasure, as we are at the same time given specific lessons—on the surprising European historical background of bagpipes, for example, or the lack of pejorative implication in early modern uses of the adjective "shrill." We arrive at Acidale, appropriately, at the end, exploring both the nature of the "ensemble" of Colin and dancers, and the "resonance" that, as Plato's *Ion* argues, envelops audiences as well as listeners and readers.

Gavin Alexander works toward a complementary understanding of Spenser but from an entirely different angle, spending much of the chapter with examples where Spenser's words appeared in musical compositions or