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TIME, CHANGE, AND THE USES OF THE IMAGINATION IN EDMUND SPENSER'S LAST MAJOR POEMS

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ABSTRACT: *The aim of this study is to examine Spenser's last major poems—Prothalamion, Fowre Hymnes, and Mutability Cantos-—to show that though they differ greatly from one another, they all, like the second half of the Faerie Queen, share a retrospective quality, looking back on the earlier poetry from the perspective of middle age. They deal in various ways with time, change, and the uses of the imagination, where in each, the speaker works through a sequence of imaginings toward a more comprehensive, if not to a final, vision. Fowre Hymnes was published in 1596 with a reprint of Daphna Ida. In the dedication to the Countesses of Cumberland and Warwick, Spenser asserts that he wrote the first two in honor of earthly love and beauty in the "greener times of [his] youth," but finding "that the same loo much pleased those of like age and disposition, which being too vehemently carried with that kind of affection, do rather suck out poison to their strong passion, than honey to their honest delight, I was moved by the one of you two most excellent Ladies, to call in the same" (YESP 690). Since too many copies of these hymns had got abroad for them to be recalled, he "resolved at least to amend, and by way of retractation to reform them" with two hymns of heavenly love and beauty The dedication thus, as William Oram reflects in "Introduction: Spenser's Para texts," gives the four poems a biographical structure (xxi): the first two are the work of youth, while the second pair embody the second thoughts—the revision—of wiser age. It raises questions of biography (how accurate is this account of their genesis?) and of meaning (how are the first hymns opposed to the later ones?).*
KEYWORDS: change, edmund spenser, imagination, time

INTRODUCTION

Edmund Spenser's life would seem in most respects to be what William Nelson has called it—"a success story" (10). Yet the voices of his work—searching, ambivalent, and at times deeply frustrated— articulate Spenser's pursuit of permanence in a world of mutability, which seems to be the dominant theme of his poetic works. If the Shepherds Calendar is full of references to religious and political issues, most of Spenser's last work tends to turn away from the political to the personal, and in particular to problems of love. Colin Clout, for example, ends by rejecting Elizabeth's court for love's court, and the last major works all turn in different ways to the concerns of love and marriage. ([1])

Where the speakers of Spenser's earlier work are, generally, choric and impersonal voices, the speakers of the later poems are identified in one way or another with Spenser himself. Where the Colin of The Shepheard's Calendar is a character very different from the voice of the poet at the end of that poem, the Colin of Colin Clout is just as clearly identified with the poet: he makes the journey Spenser made and praises the people Spenser met. He is, of course, not all of Spenser, but he develops for the reader a way of seeing and understanding Spenser's journey. All of Spenser's later poems similarly turn inward to follow the thoughts of a highly particularized speaker under circumstances that recall Spenser's own. Narrative genres gradually yield to lyric ones, and in the case of Spenser's epic, the poet's voice becomes increasingly prominent.

The aim of this study is to examine Spenser's last major poems— Prothalamion, Fowre Hymnes, and Mutability Cantos-—to show that though they differ greatly from one another, they all, like the second half of the The Faerie Queen, share a retrospective quality, looking back on the earlier poetry from the perspective of middle age. They deal in various ways with time, change, and the uses of the imagination, where in each, the speaker works through a sequence of imaginings toward a more comprehensive, if not to a final, vision.

Fowre Hymnes was published in 1596 with a reprint of Daphnaida. In the dedication to the Countesses of Cumberland and Warwick, Spenser asserts that he wrote the first two in honor of earthly love and beauty in the "greener times of [his] youth," but finding "that the same loo much pleased those of like age and disposition, which being too vehemently carried with that kind of affection, do rather suck out poyson to their strong passion, than hony to their honest delight, I was moved by the one of you two most excellent Ladies, to call in the same" (YESP 690). ([2]) Since too many copies of these hymns had got abroad for them to be recalled, he "resolved at least to amend, and by way of retractation to reform them" with two hymns of heavenly love and beauty([3]) The dedication thus, as William Oram reflects in "Introduction: Spenser's Paratexts," gives the four poems a biographical structure (xxi): the first two are the work of youth, while the second pair embody the second thoughts—the revision—of wiser age. It raises questions of biography (how accurate is this account of their genesis?) and of meaning (how are the first hymns opposed to the later ones?).

The biographical question does not admit of much certainty. It seems unlikely that Spenser would tell the countesses that one of them had asked him to recall earlier work unless there were some truth in the scenario. Yet, as Oram explains, "Spenser thus invokes the paradigm of the prodigal son that Richard Helgerson has identified in Elizabethan love poetry—the tendency to present love poetry as a youthful straying from the path of virtue, to be atoned for by the later, wiser works" (xxxi). ([4]) Besides, the compliment Spenser pays to the countesses as being "rare ornaments of all true love and beauty, both in the one and the other Kinde" implies that he is willing to allow earthly beauty some value and expects that they will as well. The earlier hymns do not appear in the lists of Spenser's unpublished works unless they are the hell of lovers or the Purgatories mentioned by Ponsonby in the preface to the Complaints. The Fowre Hymnes's versification suggests that both the "earlier" poems and the "later" ones are

late work: if Spenser wrote the first two as a young man, he revised them extensively for inclusion in the final group. ([5])

Whatever its historical accuracy, the dedication emphasizes the work's concern with the speaker's growth. It presents a conversion—a turning from one kind of love to another, or more precisely, from the shadow of divine love to the reality. For all the Neoplatonism argument in the opening hymns, the poem is lyric, not philosophy, and dramatizes the speaker's search for love—love whose definition changes during the poem. The speaker's relation to the historical Spenser is complex, as always when he makes biography into fiction. Like Colin in Colin Clout, he embodies one aspect of the poet's more complex nature. Simply equating him with the poet reduces the poem to untrustworthy biography; it implies that, since the final stanzas of the "Hymne to Heavenly Beautie" declare all worldly goals worthless, Spenser was either hypocritical or confused when, in the simultaneously published Prothalamion, his heart is set on worldly advancement. During this period and after, as Alexander Judson states, he was busy acquiring additional property in Cork (174—75); earthly riches surely had meaning for him. In his treatment of the narrator, Spenser looks back at attitudes struck by an earlier self and submits them to loving parody and criticism. But he shapes the narrator's character with the freedom that fiction confers.

As with The Shepherds Calendar, Fowre Hymnes creates its meaning out of the relations of its parts; criticism has shown how intricate Spenser made those relations. ([6])The four have structural similarities: each opens with an invocation, followed by an account of creation, and closes looking toward grace. The members of each pair contrast with one another: whereas the odd-numbered hymns tend, for instance, to be narrative in method, the even-numbered hymns tend to emphasize argument in its more restricted modern sense. but the central contrast occurs between the largely secular, this -worldly emphasis of the first pair and the explicitly Christian orientation of the second pair. The third hymn begins by repudiating the earlier poems and offers itself as a substitute for their false doctrine. The narrator's repeated words and images-—light, fire, wounds, food, disease, healing—shift in meaning as he understands his initial experience as part of a fuller truth (Bjorvand 15 - 45; DeNeef, Spenser and Motives of Metaphor 78-88).

Renaissance writers inherited the hymn form, like so many others, from classical antiquity. Greek poets, as Phillip Rollinson makes clear, wrote hymns to classical gods, describing their attributes, and the "Homeric" hymns often included narrative sections (292-304). In the Middle Ages Christian poets used the form to celebrate the One God, and with the Reformation vernacular hymns were sung in English churches (Spenser uses the most popular hymn stanza for "July"). The classical hymn praising pagan deities and heroes reappeared in the Renaissance alongside the Christian form. It was popular in neo-Latin poetry, and among vernacular poets Ronsard in particular wrote hymns to gods like Bacchus, abstractions like Death or Justice, and heroes like Hercules or Castor and Pollux. In his hands, the hymn became a half-lyric, halfnarrative form, which enabled the poet freely to develop ideas associated with his subject. George Chapman had anglicized this Continental form in 1594 with two hymns jointly titled The Shadow of Night. An uneasy relation between "pagan" and "Christian" subjects

thus formed part of hymnic tradition. When Ronsard wrote "Hercule Chréstien" (Christian Hercules. 1555), which he included among his hymns, he asserted that Hercules could be seen as Christ, whose exploits were adumbrated by the pagan figure. But his attempt to fit Hercules into the context of revelation suggests how much it was necessary to argue that pagan and Christian were compatible.

In Fowre Hymnes Spenser makes use of this tension, dramatizing a movement from one kind of hymn to another, from earthly love (however exalted) to the divine love that makes other goals seem inadequate shadows. The poem thus traces the speaker's hesitant, uncertain journey toward divine truth. The first two hymns develop a neoplatonizing vision of the Good that is fulfilled only in the final vision of the heavenly hymns. The relation between the two sets resembles the familiar relation between type and fulfillment; to borrow Ralegh's description of pagan mythology, the first hymns present "crooked images" of the "true history" informing the later ones (2: 176). Yet the poem does not present a record of salvation achieved. It charts the narrator's path toward the divine love he describes but never fully attains: like the Mutabilitie Cantos, the poem ends looking toward a final end.

In the proem to the first hymn, "An Hymne in Honour of Love," the speaker announces his condition:

Love, that long since hast to thy mighty powre,
Perforce subdude my poore captived hart,
And raging now therein with restlesse stowre,
Doest tyrannize in everie weaker part;
Faine would I seeke to ease my bitter smart,
By any service I might do to thee,
Or ought that else might to thee pleasing bee. (1-7)

This plaintive lover owes much to Chaucer's mildly comic speakers, overawed by a conquering deity. The clichéd self-pity of "my poore captived hart" and the lover's eagerness to propitiate Cupid recall the Chaucerian persona, an association strengthened by the rhyme royal stanza Chaucer often used for his serious poetry and by the mock-pathetic references to the speaker's wits, which have been "enfeebled late, /Through the sharpe sorrows, which thou hast me bred" (15-16). The dutiful lover swears homage to a mastering Cupid and sings his praises in the hope that the god will relent and aid him in winning his lady.

The Cupid praised in these opening verses is not the neoplatonic figure who appears intermittently in the poem but the powerful, sadistic, conqueror god celebrated in the first of Petrarch's Trionfi, "The Triumph of Love." As a deity of "victorious conquests" (11) he ruthlessly creates "wyde wounds” with his "cruell darts" (13-14). The echoes of Petrarch are explicit: in the sixth stanza the speaker advises the young women he addresses to "Prepare your selves, to march amongst his host" (40). The line recalls "The Triumph of Love," in which Love appears like a Roman general above a procession of enslaved lovers. But in Petrarch the triumph of Love leads to a succession of later triumphs of Death, Fame, Time, and ultimately Eternity—each victor in turn yielding to the next. Here, by contrast, the triumph of Love seems at once random and

absolute: Cupid's "wondrous triumphs" (18) have no larger meaning than the triumphs of the god of Love in the House of Busyrane.

Yet in the fourth stanza, and intermittently thereafter, the speaker views Cupid differently, in neoplatonic terms. This deity sits like the Cupid of Colin Clout in "Venus lap above" (24) begot both by Venus and by "Plentie and... Penurie" (53). The reference to "Plenty and Penuric" is neoplatonic, and Spenser signals the speaker's shift into the alternate tradition by employing similar paradoxes in the rest of the stanza. ([7]) Lius god of Love is a creator responsible for separating the confused elements of the universe and linking them in "Adamantine chaines" (89), He presides over all generation, causing beasts to mate and man to "enlarge his lasting progenie" (105), a phrase suggesting both physical offspring and works of the mind. He enables the lover to glimpse a beauty beyond the beauty of the flesh, making him "mount above the native might /Of heavie earth, up to the heavens hight" (188-89), The lines suggest the familiar neoplatonie view of love as a force born with an apprehension of physical beauty that nonetheless drives the lover beyond the "heavie earth'' of the body as he ascends to a vision of Beauty itself([8])

Although Spenser is sometimes a syncretic poet, blurring the differences between the traditions he joins, this poem insists on those differences. In this hymn, the speaker tries unsuccessfully to reconcile his experience of painful earthly desire with a notion of love as an elevating force. The first he couches in Petrarchan terms, the second in neoplatonic. At times, the contradiction issues in direct questioning, as when, after praising Cupid's achievements, he returns abruptly to his own unhappiness:

How falles it then, that with thy furious fervour,
Thou doest afflict as well the not deserver,
As him that doeth thy lovely heasts despize,
And on thy subjects most doest tyrannize? (158-61)

Through the first two hymns, the speaker tries to adopt a neoplatonizing view of love, but he cannot: he is a Protestant Aristotelian, concerned with this world, and his imagination refuses the serene flight of a true platonist, inevitably returning to his worldly frustration. As he veers from one view of love to the other, his language changes. Having shifted from the Petrarchan Cupid to the creator-god, the speaker returns in stanza 18 to Petrarchan clichés—the "imperious boy" with "sharp empoisoned darts," the wretched lovers, and the lady's frozen breast. This plaintive explosion subsides as the speaker returns to the idea of love as a virtuous discipline, and by stanza 24 he explains his setbacks as a spiritual trial separating true love from easy lust. After a neoplatonizing account of the lover's vision of his lady, he reverts to earthly pains in discussing the lover's jealous torments. When he praises love again, he does so in a most un-neoplatonic fashion by envisioning sexual fulfillment in a "Paradize /Of all delight" (280-81).

The speaker is most obviously neoplatonic in this hymn when he describes how the lover's imagination works to refine his beloved's image:

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Such is the powre of that sweet passion.
That it all sordid basenesse doth expell,
And the refyned mynd doth newly fashion
Unto a fairer forme, which now doth dwell
In his high thought, that would it selfe excell;
Which he beholding still with constant sight,
Admires the mirrour of so heavenly light. (190-96)

Spenser's ambiguous pronouns suggest how the lover's imaginative vision of his beloved enables him to transcend himself. The first two lines describe love's purifying of the lover's mind, so that it is "refined… Unto a fairer forme." But the following lines ("which… thought") suggest that it is the beloved's mind that has been refined. The lines sketch out the neoplatonic commonplace that the lover recreates a purified image of the beloved in his imagination—an image closer to the absolute Beauty that has shaped the beloved in the first place. Yet the following phrase ("that... excell") seems to refer again to the lover's high thought: by refining the beloved's image, he himself rises above his ordinary nature. Both occur at once: by purifying his image of the beloved, the lover purifies himself.

Yet this idealizing may encourage the solipsistic worship of a fantasy: the lines remain unclear on whether the lover admires the beloved or himself. The speaker's doubts about this imagining surfaces in the next stanza:

Whose image printing in his deepest wit.
He thereon feeds his hungrie fantasy,
Still full, yet never satisfyde with it,
Like Tantale, that in store doth sterved ly:
So doth he pine in most satiety,
For nought may quench his infinite desyre.
Once kindled through that first conceived fyre. (197-203)

The image of the beloved becomes the lover's food, whose imagination (his "hungrie fantasy") it nourishes; the nourishment is limited, however. The picture of Tantalus, as Anne Prescott explains, suggests not the satisfaction of love achieved but desperation: desire is infinite, and the food the imagination offers is insufficient (676-77). This image may merely rework the ncoplatonic commonplace that any particular lady is never enough for a desire satisfied only by Beauty itself, but it also recalls Amoretti 88, in which the lover, absent from his beloved, finds her image insufficient: "But with such brightnesse whylest I fill my mind, /I starve my body and mine eyes doe blynd" (13-14). Love's imperfection reappears five stanzas later, where the list of famous lovers—Leander, Aeneas, Achilles, Orpheus—consists of amatory disasters.

The imagination's potential deceptiveness appears in the repeated verb to feign. On the one hand, it denotes (from the Latin fingere) the act of fashioning or imagining. As a faculty for making things up its associations are dominantly negative: one fains (or feigns) what does not exist. ([9]) On the other hand, it denotes (from the Old English faegen) the act of rejoicing. In the earlier hymns the lover's feigning forms part of his

loving. The beloved is "Fairer than fairest, in his fayning eye, / Whose sole aspect he counts felicitye" (216-17): the eye at once imagines the beloved and enjoys her. The lover, too, is a "Thrise happie man... / [who] faines himself, and doth his fortune blesse" (209-10). Here, the lover's faining is rejoicing, but it may suggest as well a reconceiving of the self under love's influence. Yet what the lover feigns may be unreal. When he purchases "lyking" in the lady's eye, "What heavens of joy, then to himselfe he faynes" (240): he has exaggerated his lady's kindness. Soon after, tormented by jealousy, his imagination pictures "to his fayning fansie.... / Sights never seene, and thousand shadowes vaine, / To breake his sleepe, and waste his ydle braine" (254-56). The imagination acts as a double-edged sword, able to idealize the beloved and equally able to picture her infidelity. For a thoroughgoing neoplatonist, what the actual lady does is unimportant, but the speaker is not so serenely free of earthly desire.

The speaker's confusion appears again at the end of the hymn when he describes the sensuous "Paradize / Of all delight" (280-81) the lover finally attains after the "paines of Purgatorie" (278). It is a place of "joyous happie rest,"
Where they doe feede on Nectar heavenly wize,
With Hercules and Hebe, and the rest Of Venus dearlings, through her bountie blest,
And lie like Gods in yvorie beds arayd,
With rose and lillies over them displayd.
There with thy daughter Pleasure they doe play Their hurilesse sports, without rebuke or blame,
And in her snowy bosome boldly lay Their quiet heads, devoyd of guilty shame, After full joyance of their gentle game. (282-91)

This picture departs strikingly from the neoplatonic script in abandoning the infinite desire of the eros for happy rest and chastely sensual play. ([10]) The departure from neoplatonic convention comes as a mild shock after the neoplatonic language of earlier stanzas. Nor is the vision Christian. However appealing the picture of innocent, happy, and playful sexuality, its source is not an epithalamion resulting from a real courtship but the fantasy of a rejected lover.

The poem's final stanzas insist on this context when the speaker asks Love to help him "come at length unto the wished scope / Of my desire, or . . . my selfe assure, / That happie port for ever to recure" (296- 98). Spenser repeats elsewhere that earth offers no assurance, so that this hope of earthly security seems delusory. The next stanza's offer of a "heavenly Hymne, such as the Angels sing" (302) reemphasizes the substitution of eros for agape. Fowre Hymnes was published with a reissue of Daphnaida, and Alcyon, that poem's protagonist, seems to embody a darker version of this first hymn's wandering speaker. Both focus on the loves of this world and forget those of the next.

By the second hymn, "An Hymne in Honour of Beautie," the speaker has changed. His vacillation between Petrarchism and neoplatonism has vanished, and he has become the spokesman almost in spite of himself for a neoplatonic Cupid. He begins in midflight, caught in a rush of divine inspiration. "Ah whither, Love, wilt thou now carrie mee? / What wontlesse fury dost thou now inspire / Into my feeble breast, too full of thee?" (1-3). The claim to be inspired by a divine furor or madness appears often in neoplatonic

writers, especially the poets of the French Pléiade. ([11]) The speaker steps forward as Venus's spokesman, trying with his praises to raise "The ravisht harts of gazefull men" (12) to admire her heavenly light. He assumes a divine authority: instead of addressing Cupid or Venus, many stanzas now lecture an imagined group of :faire Dames" (162).

Yet while the hymn treats philosophic material, it does so to dramatize the speaker's still-uneasy quest for love. His main purpose in praising Venus, he says in the fourth stanza, is not to ascend to a vision of Beauty but to gain his earthly lady. He asks Venus to beautify her "sacred hymne":

That both to thee, to whom I meane it most.
And eke to her, whose faire immortall beame,
Hath darted fyre into my feeble ghost,
That now it wasted is with woes extreame.
It may so please that she at length will strcame
Some deaw of grace, into my withered hart,
After long sorrow and consuming smart. (22-28)

While the speaker insists that he means his praise "most" to Venus, the stanza focuses largely on the lady who has wasted his feeble spirit. Even Venus's pleasure has as its end the gaining of some "deaw of grace" from the lady. The poem's purpose thus diverges from the ultimate goal of neoplatonic loving and suggests a limitation in the speaker's understanding of what he is doing, a shortsightedness that will, result in the hymn's bathetic ending.

The speaker first develops the nature of Venus, or Beauty, which he argues must be more than a harmony of colors and shape, for two reasons: such harmony alone cannot move men as Beauty can, and whereas colors decay with time, Beauty's power is eternal (64-105). Instead, Beauty is the "goodly Paterne" (32), or form, by which Love created the world. Its vivifying influence shapes the "grosse matter of this earthly myne" (46) into the world we know:

For through infusion of celestiall powre,
The duller earth it quickneth with delight,
And life-full spirits privily doth powre
Through all the parts, that to the lookers sight
They seeme to please. (50-54)

The language makes the form-giving principle of Beauty seem a divine energy pouring into inert matter to give it life. In individual human beings the form is the soul, which creates in the womb a house of matter for herself, adorning it with the heavenly riches of its origin. Since the soul shapes the body, a beautiful body is testimony to a beautiful soul (120-40).

This assertion raises the hymn's first serious difficulty, for the speaker must now explain why some beautiful souls do not have beautiful bodies and—worse—why some beautiful bodies lack beautiful souls. He accounts for the first by the continued tension

between form and matter: at times "by chaunce, against the course of kynd,/ Or through unaptnesse in the substance fownd" (143-44), the soul cannot prevail against the imperfection of matter. But he raises the second possibility only to avoid it. For a neoplatonist, the soul is ultimately good, although often distracted and blinded by the body's appetites and fears. The idea of a bad soul raises the disturbing specter of Christian sinfulness. The speaker avoids this idea, treating instead the soul's vulnerability to external attack or seduction; he concludes that the soul itself remains beautiful "things immortall no corruption take" (161)—and the ensuing sin is that of the seducer, not the seduced (155—56). ([12])

The speaker further appeals to a Christian truism- that all things of this world can be corrupted if wrongly used ("Nothing so good, but that through guilty shame / May be corrupt, and wrested unto will" [158-59]). But he does not consider how the "will" comes to be corrupt in the first place. For a thoroughgoing neoplatonist, the problem is simple: the soul's contact with matter corrupts and blinds it. To reverse the blindness one rejects the body and ascends inward and upward to the mind. But this neoplatonist has already shown unwillingness to leave the body behind, and he does not mention this alternative. For a Christian, on the other hand, matter is neutral and the will's corruption derives from Adam: it is not matter but pride that blinds us and prevents us from acknowledging our inherited evil and dependence on God. An uneasy awareness of these unpleasing alternatives makes the speaker rather awkwardly elide the problem, turning instead to lecture "faire Dames" (162). Avoiding consideration of human sinfulness—a consideration that would undercut the argument that the incorrupt soul imprints itself in the beautiful body— he stresses the need for chastity and wisdom in choosing one’s lover.

Such a lover possesses a similar soul and has been born under the influence of the same star. But in treating the similarities the speaker raises a second problematic issue—the lover's creation of the beloved's image. As in the earlier hymn, the topic elicits considerable ambiguity: true lovers draw "out of the object of their eyes "
A more refyned forme, which they present
Unto their mind, voide of all blcmishment;
Which it reducing to her first perfection,
Beholdeth free from fleshes frayle infection. (213-17)

The problem with this scenario of the mind's stripping away the lady's corruptible matter to envision her original perfection is its tendency toward an unreal grandiosity. The language describing the lover’s "conform[ing]" the lady's image to the light within has overtones of narcissism:

Thereof he fashions in his higher skill.
An heavenly beautie to his fancies will,
And it embracing in his mind entyre,
The mirrour of his owne thought doth admyre. (221-24)

"His fancies will" is an ambiguous phrase: will is a corruptible faculty, even if one omits the sexual associations of the word. The account of the lover's idealizing permits

two readings. It describes the traditional neoplatonic ascent to a truer, less material view of the beloved, stressing the innate sympathy between like souls. But it also suggests a narcissistic idolatry as the speaker makes an idol of the beloved and disregards the actual lady he faces. The speaker betrays an underlying fear that this feigning may again be delusion. ([13])

The following stanzas further suggest that uneasiness. The playful account of what lovers' sharper-sighted eyes can see—the "Armies of loves" (240) and the "thousand Graces"—are cliches of actual courtship. Again the halfhearted neoplatonist goes only halfway. For neoplatonic eros to work, the lover must ascend beyond the individual and beyond the flesh, but this lover is unwilling to do so; he remains at the level of the particular and the material.

This stalemate accents the hymn's curious ending. The last two stanzas return not to the triumph of Beauty but to the lover's condition as he addresses his lady:
When your faire eyes these fearefull lines shal read,
Deigne to let fall one drop of dew reliefe,
That may recure my harts long pyning griefe,
And shew what wondrous powre your beauty hath,
That can restore a damned wight from death. (283-87)

The exaggeration and the clichéd language of the final line look back to the first hymn. The speaker's vision of a transcendent love seems incompatible with the "damned" condition he claims for himself. The lover's exaggerated rhetoric has a bathetic effect, pointing to his continued unease.

Spenser links the second pair of hymns to the first with an intricate series of parallels and contrasts. ([14]) The wounded, self-sacrificing Christ in the third hymn. "An Hymne of Heavenly Love," opposes the wounding, ruthless archer-Cupid in the first; Sapience in the fourth hymn corrects Venus in the second. The earlier hymns concern eros, the love driving the self toward Beauty; the later hymns concern agape, the selfless love that God extends to his creatures and that they can only attempt to imitate. Whereas the proems of the first hymns were self -concerned and self-serving, the speaker here attempts to turn away from his own condition except as it prevents him from worshiping God. The contrast recalls the familiar Christian pattern of type and fulfillment—of the flawed Old Testament, event that is perfected in Christ's life. Fully understood, the neoplatonic Venus foreshadows the characteristics of Sapience. Spenser's retractation involves a reworking of the poem's images so that the initial vision of love appears as a figure of Christian truth, inadequately understood.

In the opening stanza of the third hymn, the speaker admits that he needs the aid of Love's wings to help him rise above this "base world" to a divine vision, and the second stanza explicitly repudiates the earlier hymns. Regardless of what Spenser may have felt, his speaker unequivocally rejects the "mad fit" (9) of secular love: "But all those follies now I do reprove, / And turned have the tenor of my string, / The heavenly prayses of true love to sing" (12-14). These hymns thus announce themselves from the start as a turning point or conversion. Later, the speaker tells himself that "All other

loves, with which the world doth blind / Weake fancies, and stirre up affections base, / Thou must renounce, and utterly displace" (262-64). Sensual love blinds the imaginations ("Weake fancies") of its devotees; one must renounce it to see clearly.

Accordingly, these hymns concern themselves with the redeployment of the imagination. If in the first hymns, the imagination elevates the lover as he reforms the image of the beloved in accordance with ideal Beauty, it here reshapes him by humbling him with an account of God's love. In "An Hymne of Heavenly Love," God creates man in his own image: "For love doth love the thing belov'd to see, / That like it self in lovely shape may bee" (118-19). The lines echo earlier hymns in which the lover creates the beloved in ..his own image, as a mirror to himself; it is only God's love, agape, not eras, that remains free from the egocentricity implicit in the earlier feigning. Verbs of seeing now recur frequently in contexts that suggest a new understanding of vision. In these later hymns the speaker's difficulty comes in imagining his subjects, whereas the initial hymns merely stress the difficulty of putting conceptions into words. The later hymns exhort the mind to transcend the limiting imaginations of this world: "Lift up to [God] thy heavie clouded eyne, / That thou his soveraine bountie mayst behold" (222-23). The art of the hymn tries with God's aid to strip away the clouds of the fallen imagination.

Like the first of the secular hymns, "An Hymne of Heavenly Love" is largely narrative in form. Both start with the world's creation, although the picture has now changed: the neoplatonic vision of Cupid and Venus yields to a picture of God the Father generating out of his overflowing goodness the rest of the Trinity, the angels, and mankind. By recalling the earlier hymns, the later ones rewrite their pagan truths as Christian belief. In the sixteenth stanza, for instance, the speaker describes God creating man "According to an heavenly patterne wrought, / Which he had fashiond in his wise foresight" (108-9): the account of creation here places the divine "patterne" in the mind of God. The speaker now sets the atemporal platonic cosmology of the earlier hymns into the traditional Christian history of creation and fall. And the Fall— that aspect of human existence that the earlier hymns necessarily avoid— here occupies center stage as the reason for man's sinfulness and the condition of God's greatest generosity. Accordingly, as Bjorvand argues, the hymn's central stanzas deal with Christ's incarnation (25): "In flesh at first the guilt committed was, / Therefore in flesh it must be satisfyde1' (141—42).([15]) In this moment the divine comes into fullest contact with the human, and the speaker, potentially at least, overcomes the blindness that has limited the loves of the earlier hymns. The divine enters the human spirit, not by man's action in reshaping the lady, but in God's humiliation of himself by becoming flesh.

According to Leigh DeNeef, the hymn as a whole, forms a meditation on God's overflowing bounty and goodness, proceeding chronologically with an account of Christian history from creation to Christ's death on the cross ("Spenserian Meditation," 317-34).([16]) The purpose of such meditations, a defined, semiliterary form in the sixteenth century, was to inspire a movement of pious feeling through vivid imagining of spiritual truth, opening the soul to God's presence. This poem is personal in a new way in Fowre Hymnes. Imagining the Crucifixion, the speaker addresses himself:

With sence whereof whilest so thy softened spirit
Is inly toucht, and humbled with meeke zeale,
Through meditation of his endlesse merit.
Lift up thy mind to th'author of thy weale.
And to his soveraine mercie doe appeale;
Learne him to love, that loved thee so deare,
And in thy brest his blessed image beare. (253-59)

The speaker now tries to submit his imagination to this new discipline of learning to love. He addresses neither Cupid, Venus, nor the reader but himself, in a dramatized attempt at self-awakening:

And looke at last how of most wretched wights,
He taken was, betrayd, and false accused,
How with most scorne full taunts, and fell despights
He was revyld, disgrast, and foule abused,
How scourgd, how crownd, how buffeted, how brused. (239-43)

Yet this rhetoric of self-address and self-humiliation is hortatory rather than visionary. It is less a meditation than a command to meditate, a scolding of the recalcitrant self. After imagining the crucified Christ, he continues: "Then let thy flinty hart that feeles no paine, / Empierced be with pittifull remorse" (246-47). The attack on the stony heart suggests that the speaker is not sufficiently moved by the picture of Christ's suffering, however much he might like to be. The final stanzas of the poem imagine what the speaker would feel were he to come to an awareness of God's love:

Then shalt thou feele thy spirit so possest.
And ravisht with devouring great desire
Of his deare selfe, that shal thy feeble brest
Inflame with love, and set thee all on fire. (267-70)

The difference between this prescription and a fully successful meditation is the absence of a moment of colloquy in which the speaker loses him self in addressing God. The speaker desires such a moment but fails to achieve it. The final stanzas anticipate the time when the soul commits itself fully to God: "Thenceforth all worlds desire will in thee dye, / And all earthes glorie on which men do gaze, / Seeme durt and drosse in thy pure sighted eye" (274-76). But the speaker has not achieved this visionary state. The restlessness of the earlier hymns recurs in muted form: the speaker still looks to the future, his quest unfinished.

Like the second hymn, the fourth, "An Hymne of Heavenly Beautie," begins in a rush of inspiration;

Rapt with the rage of mine own ravisht thought,
Through contemplation of those goodly sights,
And glorious images in heaven wrought,

Whose wondrous beauty breathing sweet delights,
Do kindle love in high conceipted sprights:
I faine to tell the things that I behold,
But feele my wits to faile, and tongue to fold. (1-7)

The speaker is again "ravisht," possessed by the divine spirit he has looked toward earlier, and allowed a measure of the vision that he has sought. Perhaps the discipline of the previous poem has worked. As he beholds the sights of heaven, his capacity to speak about what he sees fails him: "I faine to tell the things that I behold" uses "faine" in its meaning of "joy," but the sense of "make up" is present as well, for any telling of these divine truths in human language must fall short of the reality.

Yet the speaker's purpose in this feigning has changed, and with it his role: in the second stanza he prays for illumination "that I may show / Some litle beames to mortall eyes below" (11-12). As in "An Hymne in Honour of Beautie," the speaker becomes an inspired teacher. Whereas in "An Hymne of Heavenly Love," he addresses himself, he now prepares to address the reader, showing him how to see. Like the speaker of th first two hymns, the reader has fed on "vaine delight," and the speaker must provide new food.

His central task in this context is to make the reader see, enabling him to know God with his inner eye. Verbs of seeing and beholding, which suggest the problem announced in the first stanza, occur unusually often in this hymn. If the speaker's tongue fails when confronted with the Beauty beyond earthly language, how can one bring a sense of the divine to the human? The speaker's initial - and very traditional—response is to display God through his works:

Beginning then below, with th'easie vew
Of this base world, subject to fleshly eye,
From thence to mount aloft by order dew,
To contemplation of th'immortall sky. (22-25)

These four lines encapsulate the progression of the poem's first half, from the easy to the difficult, the visible to the invisible, the fleshly to the spiritual. The upward progression emphasizes the order of the cosmos: each level of creation is more "cleare" ("bright”) than the last one, and so. by analogy, the realm beyond the end of the universe, beyond the "fleshly eye," is brighter still.

The speaker makes room in this hierarchy of the invisible for the heaven "where those Idees on hie / Enraunged be, which Plato so admyred, / And pure Intelligences from God inspyred" (82-84). The pattern of Beauty in the second hymn—an idea of its own—recurs in a Christian context. The ideas are as much a part of the structure of the cosmos as the spheres or the nine orders of angels that surround God. This incorporation of the platonic ideas in a Christian scheme, as Elizabeth Bieman argues, looks back to Augustine (115-32). but in this context, it takes the idea of Beauty in the earlier hymn and makes it good by showing that it is not so much wrong as partial, in need of a Christian context for full comprehension.

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Yet the speaker's opening rapture gradually falters. Spenser typically treats the desire for God, not its fulfillment, and by the sixteenth stanza the speaker turns from his audience to address himself: "Cease then my tongue, and lend unto my mynd / Leave to bethinke how great that beautie is, / Whose utmost parts so beautifull I fynd" (106-8). Whereas in the opening verse the tongue fails, it is now the mind that needs to refresh itself with an awareness of not only the external glory of God's kingdom but its spiritual qualities. The following stanzas dwell on the limitations of human beings, who, unable to look on the physical sun, are the more incapable of perceiving God's majesty (120-26).

This increased stress on human limitation causes a shift in the means by which the speaker tries to mirror the divine. The hymn's second half imagines God less through his works than through revelation. The speaker avoids the attempt to show divine things directly, and he turns in discussing heaven to traditional metaphorical language derived largely from the Bible: "His throne is built upon Eternity... His scepter is the rod of Righteousnesse ... His seate is Truth, to which the faithfull trust" (152, 155, 159). ([17])The speaker will not try to describe God or even to develop a new metaphor for him; he uses biblical language accommodated to the human capacity for knowledge.

This language appears most clearly in the description of Sapience (Wisdom), which is heavily indebted to the Book of Proverbs. One common tradition associates this half-Hebraic, half-Greek figure with Christ, and hence with the creation of the world that the first half of the hymn has praised. ([18])Through her God's works are accomplished on earth: "Both heaven and earth obey unto her will, / And all the creatures which they both containe: / For of her fulnesse which the world doth fill, / They all partake" (197-200). The lines recall the Venus in the second hymn whose "life-full spirits privily doth powre / Through all the [world's] parts" (52-53). The comparison with Venus is explicit in the thirty-first stanza, where the speaker denies that the goddess herself could not "once come neare this beauty sovcrayne" (217). The sovereign Beauty is at once governing and healing: it is the supreme glory of which Venus is only a shadow. Had Anacreon, who praised Venus, "Seene but a glims of this, which I pretend, / How wondrously would he her face commend, / Above that ldole of his fayning thought" (220-22). Anacreon's Venus is feigned, while Sapience represents truth beyond fiction.

Yet in considering the artists who have rendered the divine, the speaker returns to his own situation, and the assured exposition of the earlier parts of the poem ceases. He dwells on his own inadequacy: "How then dare I, the novice of his Art, / Presume to picture so divine a wight?" (225-26). He retreats from the role of a divine visionary: angels see Sapience face to face, but "Enough is me t'admyre so heavenly thing" (236). In mortal life moments of vision, like the one with which the poem started, do not last long.

The recurring metaphor of food suggests how far the speaker has come and how far he has yet to go. Whereas in "An Hymne in Honour of Love" the lover is compared to Tantalus "feed [ing] his hungrie fantasy, / Still full, yet never satisfyde with it" (198—99), the lovers of God in this final hymn are content:

So full their eyes are of that glorious sight,
And senses fraught with such satietie.
That in nought else on earth they can delight,
But in th'aspecl of that felicitie,
Which they have written in their inward ey;
On which they feed, and in their fastened mynd
All happie joy and full contentment fynd. (281—87)

This account of final satisfaction, however, describes not the speaker but the lover of God who has gained his desire. The stanza echoes the end of "An Hymne in Honour of Love," in which the speaker thinks of the happy lovers who "feede on Nectar heavenly wize" (282) and wishes himself among them. Again the speaker envisions what he would like but has not so far achieved. The final section of the poem (stanzas 35—41) once more turns away from his own experience to contemplate that of the "thrise happie" (239) man who can envision Sapience. But this final vision will come only after death, and so the final stanzas turn back to the self-address of the third hymn:

Ah then my hungry soule, which long hast fed
On idle fancies of thy foolish thought,
And with false beauties flattring bait misled,
Hast after vaine deceiptfull shadowes sought...
…………………………………………………….
Ah ceasse to gaze on matter of thy grief.
And looke at last up to that soveraine light,
From whose pure beams al perfect beauty springs,
That kindleth love in every godly spright,
Even the love of God which loathing brings
Of this vile world, and these gay seeming things;
With whose sweete pleasures being so possest,
Thy straying thoughts henceforth for ever rest. (288-91, 294-301)

The speaker ends by exhorting himself, not the reader. The final vision, here as in the Mutabilitie Cantos, is still to be enjoyed, and like that poem, this one ends looking toward a rest that signifies an end to straying. The visionary remains a pilgrim on the road.

One of Spenser's few occasional poems, Prothalamion celebrates the betrothal of Elizabeth and Katherine Somerset, two daughters of Edward Somerset, the fourth earl of Worcester. We do not know the exact date of the betrothal, which probably occurred between mid-August and late September, but the double marriage was celebrated on 8 November 1596. The two brides were married to Henry Guildford and William Petre. both followers of the earl of Essex, who figures crucially in Prothalamion's final stanzas. The poem very likely builds, in ways we cannot now see, on the implications of the occasion itself, which involved a uniting of families under the auspices of the queen's last favorite. It is thus very different from Fowre Hymnes. but like that poem,

it "focuses on the mind of the poet," as Oram writes (xiii), to depict the unfolding drama of the speaker's active thought . ([19])

Poetry was sometimes associated with the celebration of Renaissance betrothals, ([20])but Spenser seems to have made up the poem's title and to have fashioned it out of other kinds—epithalamium, dream- vision, pastoral masque. Like an epithalamion, this poem pictures the bride's progress toward her future husband (a double procession here) and creates a strong sense of celebratory ritual. The sixth stanza's song of blessing recalls the epithalamic speaker's formal good wishes at the poem's close, and as in many epithalamia, including Spenser's own, the natural world unites with the human to celebrate the marriage. Yet the poem differs greatly from the epithalamic norm, and these changes make an essential part of its meaning. It describes an event in the remembered past, not the unfolding present, and alters the principals so that the brides by metathesis become birds—swans. The poem's speaker, far from being the central occasion's stage manager, appears at the start isolated from the community he observes. Each of these alterations has meaning.

The poem also recalls the visionary emblems of The Ruines of Time and the Visions in the Complaints. The sccond stanza begins, "There in a Meadow, by the Rivers side, / A (flock of Nymphes I chauneed to espy," and the third starts, "With that I saw two Swannes of goodly hewe": either might begin a stanza of The Visions of Petrarch. (The verse form, an elaborate Italian canzone stanza divided into three by rhyme scheme and short lines, also recalls Petrarch's visionary poetry.) Yet if Spenser returns to an earlier mode, he does so in his new manner. In the second stanza, "1 chanced to espy" stresses the uneasy wandering of the speaker: he differs markedly from the impersonal visionary of the Ruines, who records divine hieroglyphics and responds with proverbial truth. Prothalamion's speaker presents another version of Spenser, a disappointed courtier whose early patron, Leicester, is dead, and who hopes in time to sing Essex's deeds. The poem's subject is partly this Spenser's transcendence, through his public vocation, of an initial mclancholy isolation.

Like much of Spenser's poetry, Prothalamion meditates on process. Its title, Prothalamion (pro [before] plus thalamos [bedchamber]), distinguishes it from an epithalamion (epi [upon]) in stressing the movement toward marriage. An Elizabethan betrothal was the legally binding commitment to marry, the start of the bride's passage from girl to matron with responsibilities for a household. Many poems recognize that the passage could be daunting. Catullus's epithalamia (for instance, 61: 80-81; 62: 20-24, 39-47) emphasize the opposition between maidenhood and marriage, stressing the bride's unwillingness to give up her girlhood and her family for the new house of her husband.

Like Catullus, the speaker imagines the brides' unwillingness—in this case by picturing them in their maiden state as immaculate swans. The poem's final stanza describes them immediately before their betrothal as "two faire Brides, their Loves delight" (176), but earlier they are not brides but birds associated with a purity unstained and untrammeled by the everyday:
Two fairer Birds I yet did never see:

The snow which doth the top of Pindus strew,
Did never whiter shew,
Nor Jove himself when he a Swan would be

For love of Leda, whiter did appeare:
Yet Leda was they say as white as he,
Yet not so white as these, nor nothing neare;
So purely white they were,
That even the gentle streame, the which them bare,
Seem'd foule to them, and bad his billowes spare
To wet their silken feathers, least they might
Soyle their fayre plumes with water not so fayre,
And marre their beauties bright,
That shone as heavens light,
Against their Brydale day, which was not Jong. (39-53)

Yet the insistence on a hyperbolic purity creates an awareness of its opposite. The additional comparisons—snow, Jove, Leda—bring with them, as Harry Berger notes in "Spenser's Prothalamion," the memory of Jove's seduction of Leda, which resulted in the birth of Helen of Troy and hence a world of blood and mire and ruined empires far removed from "heavens light." Compensating, the speaker insists that Leda and Jove were "nothing neare" the swans, "So purely white they were" (512-13). But his authorial protectiveness suggests that this fantasy of absolute purity is vulnerable. The concern is mirrored in the protectiveness of the river, which, punningly, seems "foule to them" and avoids wetting their feathers lest he mar their beauty.

Such perfection cannot last. When the speaker says that the swans' beauty "shone as heavens light / Against their Brydale day, which was not long," "Against" may mean "in preparation for," but it may also mean "in opposition to." The unearthly purity of the birds, Harry Berger contends, will not survive marriage but will change into something less perfect and more human (514). The birds are brides-to-be, and the speaker plays with their human nature in a crucial genealogical pun. When the nymphs stand amazed at the swans, having never seen "a sight so fayre, / Of Fowles so lovely" (60-61), the narrator comments:
For sure they did not seeme To be begot of any earthly Seede,

But rather Angels or of Angels breede:
Yet were they bred of Somers-heat they say,
In sweetest Season, when each Flower and weede The earth did fresh aray, So fresh they seem'd as day. (64-70)

Although the birds seem to be angels, they are in fact the progeny of "Somers-heat"—of Somerset and of the generative heats of the season. ([21]) The pun emphasizes that for all their bird -idealization. these birds are women, daughters of an earl and members of a family. Yet it redeems the animal in the human: "In sweetest Season" stresses life's fresh renewal; even the sexual associations of "in season" emphasize a "sweet" and

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proper generativity. This familiar paradox—that women (and men) are both angels and animals—reappears in the punning of "Fowles" (60-61): these are fair fowls, but the word carries its earthly baggage.

The opposition between untouched purity and human love reappears as an opposition between motion and stasis. The birds appear almost motionless as they are borne on the river's stream: they come "softly swimming" (37) and "floating on the Crystal Flood" (57). When the nymphs look at them, "they stood amazed still, / Their wondring eyes to fill" (58-59). The image recalls the wondering stasis attendant on the epiphany of a changeless classical goddess. Yet the swans are swimming "downe along the Lee" toward the Thames and. ultimately, the human world of London: they journey away from the purity of heaven and toward the impurities of love. ([22]) Their road is the river. Spenser's most familiar image of process. The opposition of swan and river has already appeared when the river fears that he may "Soyle their fayre plumes with water not so fayre / And marre their beauties bright," as in the end he will. Spenser's brilliant refrain focuses on time: "Against their Brydalc day, which was not long: / Sweete Themmes runne softly, till I end my Song." The bridal day is not far off, but it, too, will not last long: the joyful rite will yield to a new' world of social duties. The Orphic appeal to the river whose name recalls "times," like the apostrophe to the sun in the Epithalamion, asks for a world made temporarily sweeter and softer by the poet's song—and quieter, for if the song is to be heard, nature must cooperate. With the song's ending, its protective charm will lapse.

Spenser develops the shift from stasis to movement through the poem's third major image, the flowers that appear in several stanzas. These have several meanings, as Alistair Fowler points up (61-73), but the most important is their traditional association with virginity. Spenser describes them as the "honour of the field" (74), and the nymphs who gather them are agents of process, "Daughters of the Flood," whose hair is unbound as if they were themselves brides (23). "And each one had a little wicker basket, / Made of fine twigs entrayled curiously, / In which they gathered flowers to fill their flasket" (24-26). As in the Garden of Adonis, Spenser stresses the fruitfulness—the abundance—time makes possible. The slightly awkward repetition (after basket) in "To fill their flasket" enables him to stress the act of filling. Against the wish for untouched purity is the hope of plenty, imaged here in the "store of vermeil Roses" (33). The uniting of abundance and transience appears when the nymphs strew flowers on the water:

Then forth they all out of their baskets drew,
Great store of Flowers, the honour of the field,
That to the sense did fragrant odours yield,
All which upon those goodly Birds they threw,
And all the Waves did strew,
That like old Peneus Waters they did seeme,
When downe along by pleasant Tempes shore
Scattred with Flowres, through Thessaly they streeme,
That they appeare through Lillies plenteous store,
Like a Brydes Chamber flore. (73-82)

The traditional association of the lilies with purity tempers the sensuous abundance of "Lillies plenteous store," and the final line joins richness, sensuousness, and mutability with shocking power. "Like a Brydes Chamber flore" superimposes on the fluid transience of the river the intimate enclosure of the bridal chamber in which consummation will take place.

The second part of the stanza also moves toward the moment of humanization in which birds will become brides:

Two of those Nymphes, meane while, two Garlands bound,
Of freshest Flowres which in that Mead they found,
The which presenting all in trim Array,
Their snowie Foreheads there with all they crownd,
Whil'st one did sing this Lay,
Prepar'd against that Day. (83- 88)

For a moment the allegory falters as the nymphs crown the "snowie Foreheads" of the swans. Swans do not have crownable foreheads, and the image seems silly unless one recalls (as one does automatically) that brides, not birds, receive garlands. The fiction of the brides as swans turns momentarily transparent, anticipating the final stanza's resolution of the swans back into the women. The song that follows, sung by one of the nymphs, is striking precisely for its ordinariness—its common eulogistic diction and familiar epithalamic good wishes. Although the nymph addresses the brides as "birds," they are "the worlds faire ornament / And heavens glorie" (91-92): both this-worldly and otherworldly. The song celebrates the "happy hower" (92) that leads them to their lovers. The good wishes—for joy, content, peace, plenty, and fruitful issue—are the standard wishes of the community on such occasions: they sum up what a human bride can hope for. With the reference to Venus's ability to "remove / All loves dislike, and friendships faultie guile / Forever to assoile" (98-100), the singer refers directly to the dangers of the world the brides are about to enter. She cannot know7 that Venus will smile on the brides: all the community can do is to offer its best wishes.

In stanzas 1, 8, and 9, Spenser frames this meditation on the brides' commitment of themselves to a world of process, the primary subject of stanzas 2-7, with a second, related story involving the speaker's relation to the larger world. As Patrick Cheney indicates, it dramatizes the speaker's own commitment—or recommitment—to the stream of time and to his vocation as poet (240-45). His sympathy with the brides' imagined wish to stay unmarried stems from his own analogous impulse to retreat from a world in which time has not run softly, and the poem charts his gradual return. It opens with an elaborate suspended sentence that sets his discontent against the temperate beauty of the countryside:

Calme was the day, and through the trembling ayre.
Sweete breathing Zephyrus did softly play
A gentle spirit that lightly did delay
Hot Titans beames, which then did glyster fayre:

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When I whom sullein care,
Through discontent of my long fruillesse stay
In Princes Court, and expectation vayne
Of idle hopes, which still doe fly away,
Like empty shaddowes, did aflict my brayne,
Walkt forth to ease my payne
Along the shoare of silver streaming Themmes,
Whose rutty Bancke, the which his River hemmes,
Was paynted all with variable flowers,
And all the meades adornd with daintie geinmes. (1-14)

This treatment of the speaker's frustration with his fruitless stay at court restates the repeated Spenserian concern with useless, destructive "care" or grief. It looks back as far as The Shepheardes Calender, although Colin's cares—or Scudamour's, or Alcyon's—are amorous, not political. These cares have continued up to the present, for the speaker's hopes "still doe fly away, / Like empty shaddowes" (italics mine). As in the past, Berger notes, he leaves the social world of the city for the relief of the country, so in the present he re-presents that countryside in an idealizing language of pastoral fantasy with its mythologized natural forces (.Zephyrus and Titan), its "silver streaming Themmes, "and its painted flowers ("Spenser's Prothalamion," 510-12). Syntactically, Debra San sees that these lines make "one sentence." She shows that "[t]he syntactic spine of the sentence is: 'Calme was the day ... When I ... Walkt forth.' "Hence, she believes that

Spenser's physical dispersal of syntax manifests the subject matter of the lines: the speaker who introduces himself in line 5 and walks forth in line 10 is distancing himself both physically and psychologically from the Prince's Court and all its attendant woes.

"In the split between subject and verb," she explains, "we see enacted the split between court and nature, politics and the pastoral (148).

The speaker thus stands, at the opening of the poem, in both the past and the present, gloomily opposed to the city-world he has left. He is ready to see in the brides (whose thoughts he can never share) a reluctancc to leave a state of virginal purity for the toils of marriage and to protect them in the idealizing rhetoric of his song. It is not he who wishes the brides joy in the sixth stanza, as would the speaker of an epithalamion, but one of the nymphs, a representative of the larger community from which he feels himself excluded. Yet as the poem develops, his sympathetic identification with the brides in their eventual joy leads him beyond the limiting self-concern with which he began. The nymph's words are, after all, his words at one remove, and in the seventh stanza he envisions an cchoing landscape attempting (like him) to lend its "best service" (124) to' the swans, a joyful unanimity that leads to a radically changed tone when he returns in the eighth verse to the city:

At length they all to mery London came.
To mery London, my most kyndly Nurse,

That to me gave this Lifes first native sourse:
Though from another place I take my name,
An house of auncient fame.
There when they came, whereas those bricky towres,
The which on Themmes brode aged backe doe ryde,
Where now the studious Lawyers have their bowers,
There whylome wont the Templer Knights to byde,
Till they decayd through pride. (127 36)

London now appears merry because the speaker's immersion in the joys of the brides has enabled him to see his own situation afresh. He mentions his name—and hence his connection with the greater world— with pride and sees the city itself as his "most kyndly Nurse" because she has brought him up in a tradition of civility, a tradition that has resulted in the writing of this poem. The city, symbolically riding on the "brode aged backe" of the river, as Lawrence Manley puts it, embodies process, not personal but historical (224-25). The medieval order of the Templars has given way to the "studious Lawyers," arms to laws, and the vision of process recalls the poet to his own changes:

Next whereunto there standes a stately place,
Where oft I gayned giftes and goodly grace
Of that great Lord, which therein wont to dwell.

Whose want too well, now feeles my frecndles case:
But Ah here fits not well
Olde woes but joyes to tell

Against the bridale daye which is not long:
Sweete Themmes runne softly till I end my Song. (137-44)

As the poet recalls Leicester's lost patronage and his present situation, he is tempted to self-pity, but he explicitly rejects that temptation in the name of poetic decorum. This decision has vocational implications: as he looks outward toward the "joys” it is his present task to tell, he returns to a renewed sense of his role as poet.

It is as a public poet that, in the ninth stanza, he addresses the earl of Essex, "a noble Peer, / Great Englands glory and the Worlds wide wonder" (145—46). His praise is certainly extravagant, and it has the practical end of attracting a new patron. But the recording of merited praise is also what a heroic poet does, and the praise of Essex's "dreadfull name” (147) extends to England in its battle against Spain. The suddenly heightened style of this stanza marks the poet's reassumption of his role as England's epic bard as he speaks directly to the earl:
Faire branch of Honor, flower of Chevalrie,
That Fillest England with thy triumphes fame,
Joy have thou of thy noble victorie,

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And endlesse happinesse of thine owne name That promiseth the same:
That through thy prowesse and victorious armes,

Thy country may be freed from forraine harmes:
And great Elisaes glorious name may ring
Through al the world, fil'd with thy wide Alarmes,
Which some brave muse may sing
To ages following,

Upon the Brydale day, which is not long:
Sweete Themmes runne softly till I end my Song. (150-62)

The passage transforms the language of the poem's earlier praises in this new, heroic context so that it becomes Englands betrothal song. The poet wishing Essex joy of his victory recalls the nymph who wishes the brides joy of their marriage: the speaker can now take his proper place—the place of an epithalamic writer—offering his good wishes at the poem's end. The "endlesse happinesse" of the earl's name parallels the earlier wish for "endlesse Peace" in marriage (101); filling baskets with flowers reappears as filling the world with the earl's fame and that of his queen. In this national context, the "Brydale day" of the refrain cannot be the marriage of the two daughters, but the queen's accession day on 17 November, which, as Frances Yates records, was often celebrated as the marriage of the queen to her people (Astraea 29-111). ([23])The stanza attempts to bind together the earl's fame, Elizabeth's, and that of the poet himself, the "brave muse" who will sing of them "to ages following."

The final stanza brings the various strands of the poem together. The poet presents an idealized vision of the city with its "high Towers" from which Essex issues "Like Radiant Hesper when his golden hayre / In th'Ocean billowes he hath Bathed fayre, / Descended to the Rivers open vewing, / With a great traine ensuing" (164 67). The earl's seeming descent to the river is coordinated with the movement of the star upward, arising out of the Ocean's billows, so that he moves simultaneously downward toward the world and upward toward the heavens: immersion in process leads to glory beyond it. The image of Essex as Hesper, the evening star, reworks the familiar Spenserian image of the single guiding star that enables human beings to find their way in darkness (see, for instance, Faerie Queene, I.i.7, I.ii.l; Amoretti, 34; and Epithalamion, 286-93). But Hesper, as Spenser's readers would know, is the evening star and the guide for lovers invoked frequently toward the end of epithalamia: he becomes a guardian spirit watching over this marriage and over all England.

The two grooms appear in the earl's train like Castor and Pollux, and the mythological comparison recalls the dangerous reference to Leda in stanza 3: if Leda bore Helen of Troy, she also bore these heroes, later transformed into stars (YESP 763, notes to lines 42-44). They descend to meet their brides at "the Rivers side" (175), the place of process itself. The final lines stress the harnessing of time:
Which at th'appointed tyde,
Each one did make his Bryde,

Against their Brydale day, which is not long:
Sweete Themmes runne softly, till I end my Song. (177 80)
"Tyde" is time as well as the movement of water: here the ceremony appoints the tide, making it fruitful. The women become brides in preparation for the actual wedding, giving forma! consent to their new lives. The final line is curiously inconclusive, since the speaker asks the river to continue to run even as the song ends. Perhaps this is a final gesture toward another song the poet hopes to write?

This poem, as Patrick Cheney has emphasized, looks in a very different direction from the end of the final book of The Faerie Queene, Fowre Hymnes, or the Mutabilitie Cantos with their fatigue and desire for a final sabbath. It advertises Spenser's patriotism, his epic ambitions, and his continued willingness to serve his queen and her favorite. It also shows his unending search for a patron. It is a poem about the attempt to rise above private woes and to become once more a public poet. Spenser had many faces, and this one turns resolutely toward the world and the river's open view.

We know little about the composition of the Mutabilitie Cantos. In 1609, Matthew Lownes republished books 1 -6 of The Faerie Queene and added a poem entitled: "TWO CANTOS / OF / MUTABILITIE: / Which, both for Forme and Matter, appeare / to be parcell of some following Booke of the / FAERIE QUEENE / UNDER THE LEGEND / OF / Constancie. / Never before imprinted." As both Sheldon Zitner and Russell Meyer emphasize, we do not know how Lownes acquired the poem, nor when Spenser wrote it, although it is probably a late work (2-4; 115-31). ([24])It remains unknown who named the piece Constancy or divided it into cantos 6, 7, and two stanzas of 8, although it is difficult to imagine anyone but Spenser doing the latter. (The division with its two-stanza tail looks like a characteristically meaningful Spenserian joke.) While resembling the rest of The Faerie Queene in its stanza form, the poem is self-contained and, unlike the other books, lacks a human hero: with its inset pastoral myth it resembles a short Ovidian narrative like Muiopotmos.

In any event, the cantos embody a coda to Spenser's epic and his career. They look back at earlier work, notably the Complaints and The Shepheardes Calender, from a new viewpoint. They present an inventory of Spenserian themes and motives, including a complaint about mutability and the loss of the golden age; the revolt of a Titan; a parodic epic conflict between classical deities; an (Irish) pastoral interlude; a rewritten Ovidian myth; a comic fall; a river-marriage; a trial judged by a mysterious bisexual Nature; an allegorical procession of the seasons; and an expression of longing for final rest in God. Like many Spenserian poems, they mix the personal and the philosophical, the local and the universal, the playful and the serious.

They embody Spenser's most comprehensive consideration of process, the abiding concern of his poetry since the translations of the Theatre for Worldlings. Because mutability, or change, is associated with the fallen world, the cantos present in their quiet, undramatic way a theodicy, or defense of God's goodness in the face of the world's evil. The Fall appears explicitly in the opening stanzas and recurs in comic form in the inset myth of Faunus and Diana; the poem attempts to put it in its proper place. In this effort the cantos draw on much of Western culture (the variorum edition of the

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poem lists more than 100 relevant titles in its index of sources and analogues) and look particularly to the tradition of epic in which theodicy is a traditional concern, to Ovid and to Chaucer.

Like Fowre Hymnes, this poem dramatizes the education of the narrator's imagination as he tries to understand a truth beyond human comprehension; ([25])an issue which Glenn Steinberg stresses when he writes that "disorder in the cosmos seems to be an inherent and pervasive characteristic of the cosmos itself, beyond the capacity or understanding of human beings" (29). The narrator intrudes directly four times.: these punctuations of the poem—his opening complaint (vi.1-5), his shift into pastoral digression (vi.37), his seventh-canto invocation (vii.1-2), and his final solitary meditation on Nature's decision (viii.1-2)—signal its generic and philosophic changes. He moves from an Ovidian, anthropomorphic view of the forces behind events to a Christian vision that unfolds God's goodness while leaving his nature a mystery. Like the narrator of many pastoral elegies, he begins in "pagan" darkness and moves toward an awareness of Christian truth. These shifts allow no simple, final view of the problem of evil as they present it in increasingly inclusive, if never conclusive, form.
The narrator begins with a personification:

What man that sees the ever-whirling wheele
Of Change, the which all mortall things doth sway,
But that therby doth find, & plainly feele.
How MUTABILITY in them doth play
Her cruell sports, to many mens decay? (vi. 1.1-5)

The opening line announces a theme Change -and by the fifth line Change has become a female divinity who, like the goddess Fortuna, sadistically raises men up only to cast them down again. The narrator's genealogy of Mutability soon becomes a complaint about the world's corruption for which she is blamed:

For, she the face of earthly things so changed,
That all which Nature had establisht first
In good estate, and in meet order ranged.
She did pervert, and all their statutes burst:
And all the worlds faire frame (which none yet durst
Of Gods or men to alter or misguide)
She alter'd quite, and made them all accurst
That God had blest; and did at first provide
In that still happy state for ever to abide, (vi. 5)

The lines dramatize an essential confusion in the narrator's thinking, for as Berger has pointed out, in envisioning Mutability as a Titaness he loses track of what she refers to ("The Mutabilitie Cantos," 252). Mutability is the name of a process, a word for the changes that have resulted from Adam's fall. But this stanza makes Mutability not only the effect of the Fall but its cause. Human beings, according to this view of events, as Sheldon Zitner remarks, are mere passive sufferers and lose their responsibility for the world's original evil (MC 18-20). Mutability, the destroyer of God's order, appears as a

force comparable to God himself, able to undo his work. The parodic narrative that follows plays with this tendency to conceive of Mutability as if it were an independent force, and it makes her a Titan struggling for territory with the Olympian gods. The narrator thus begins by envisioning a cosmos in which divine forces appear as anthropomorphic deities.

The great literary repository of such thinking is Ovid's Metamorphoses, which develops an account of a world without stability or justice. The gods of Ovid's poem are powerful, greedy, capricious, petty, and often foolish: they look like projected images of human rulers. In the poem's final book, Ovid sums up this picture of the world by having Pythagoras, half-visionary, half-crank, argue that nothing is stable except change itself. The Metamorphoses thus speak, as Michael Holahan has argued, directly to the issues of Spenser's poem, creating a picture of a world without purpose or justice (244-70). The Cantos suggest the limits of such a vision.

The narrator's original, simplified picture of Mutability as the source of all evil begins to dissolve in the opening narrative. While she may appear to be another Eve in her attempt to rise beyond her proper sphere, Jove's view of her as a "fraile woman" (vi. 25.7) or as the "off- seum of that cursed fry," the Titans (vi.30.1), is markedly one-sided. On reaching his palace she appears "of stature tall as any there / Of all the Gods, and beautifull of face / As any of the Goddesses in place" (vi. 28.3- 5). Change is not always ugly. She pities the fate of fallen men (vi. 11.5), for she embodies all attitudes toward change, including an awareness of its cost. Sheldon Zitner remarks that Mutability and the Olympian gods engage in a family squabble (MC 16), and Spenser's treatment makes her their equal or their superior.

It does so in part by treating the Olympian gods with parodic Ovidian humor. While Renaissance writers, including Spenser, often treated the Olympians in terms of moral or scientific allegory, ([26])his treatment here deprives them of allegorical dignity. Mutability and Cynthia squabble over her ivory throne like two fishwives (vi. 11-13), and the resulting eclipse causes the other gods to run in disorder to Jove's palace (vi.l5). Later, when she asserts her claim, they stand "all astonied, like a sort of Steeres" (vi,28.6). In having Jove send Mercury down to arrest her, that Spenser repeats the familiar epic topos, dramatizing the imposition of divine will on the world, as Thomas Greene points out (7, 214-17), but in this case the result is anticlimactic. When Mercury arrives and asserts his authority, Mutability frowns and announces that she plans to take over Jove's kingdom as well as Cynthia's. Stalemated, Mercury returns to Jove, his mission unaccomplished. The parodic treatment of the gods extends to Jove himself, who, despite the portentous rhetoric describing his "black eye-brow" (vi.22.2), does very little. When Mutability enters his palace, the gods rise in disorder, but Jove, "all fearelesse, forc't them to aby; / And in his soveraine throne, gan straight dispose / Himself more full of grace and Majestie, / That mote encheare his friends, & foes mote terrilie" (vi.24.6-9). With all the foolishness of an earthly ruler, Jove tries to look his best.

Spenser further stresses Jove's weakness by giving Mutability an excellent case. Medieval and Renaissance accounts divided the universe into three spheres: the

terrestrial, below the moon and seemingly dominated by random change; the celestial, encompassing the physical universe above the moon, where change was recurrent and circular; and the super celestial, the realm of God beyond alteration. Mutability rules the terrestrial sphere at the start of the poem, as she does at the end. The question is whether she will dominate the celestial realm as well. Despite Jove's contemptuous rhetoric, Spenser gives Mutability stronger genealogical credentials than the Olympians, for as the daughter of the Titans, she descends from Saturn's elder brother. In fact Jove bases his claim less on legal descent than on superior strength, having overthrown Saturn, his father, as well as the Titans. When he claims the heavens "by Conquest of our soveraine might, / And by eternall doome of Fates decree" (vi.33.5-6), he gives the game away. To claim the heavens by conquest is to admit the right of challengers: if Mutability can in turn conquer the gods, the universe is rightly hers. Jove's second line of defense, "doome of Fates decree," does claim legitimacy by right but does so by positing a power beyond that of the gods—the power of fate. This defense allows Mutability's appeal to the god of Nature. As a subordinate power Jove is partial to his own cause (vi.35.1); he must unwillingly order "Dan Phoebus Scribe her Appellation seale" (vi.35.9). The legal appeal ends the war in heaven and prepares for Nature's judgment.

Yet first the narrator intrudes, marking a change in modes. He begins by returning to earth: the trial, he says, will occur "upon the highest hights"
Of Arlo-hill (Who knowes not Arlo-hill?)
That is the highest head (in all mens sights)
Of my old father Mole, whom Shepheards quill
Renowmed hath with hymnes fit for a rurall skill, (vi.36.5-9)

The passage accomplishes a dizzying return to the familiar—to the local landscape Spenser celebrates in Colin Clouts Come Home Againe, "Who knowes not Arlo-hill?" is partly foolery, suggesting that this Irish place has been made famous by Spenser's verse, but it also sets Arlo-hill in a line of visionary mountains from Sinai to Acidale. While the narrator points to the indecorum involved in this shift from epic to pastoral (vi.37.1), the shift to the local and the humble enables Spenser to suggest in small the patterns that govern the universe. The pastoral fable bears effortlessly the burden of epic.

This myth presents another assault on the moon goddess by an irreverent intruder, ([27]) but it lacks the portentous epic machinery of the canto's opening. Its unpretentious comedy treats the Fall differently and more subtly. Instead of attempting to spell out divine mysteries, it points toward them, suggesting their meaning in playful myth without insisting on literal likeness. Its token Irish "fall" occurs when Faunus persuades Molenna to place him where he may see Diana naked, bribing her with cherries and "Queene-apples" as well as an offer to unite her with the River Fanchin. The myth's comic surface suggests that the Fall originates in a mortal creature's desire to know more of Godhead than he should. Faunus's peeping at Cynthia's "somewhat" and breaking into silly laughter suggests the foolish inability of any mortal to comprehend divine mysteries. In all likelihood, there is also self-reference here, for Faunus peering

at Cynthia also images the poet in his attempt to understand truths beyond his comprehension.

William Ringler notes that the episode limits the dimensions of the Fall, partly by departing from its primary source in the Metamorphoses (292-97). The story of Actaeon constitutes one of the most brutal moments in Ovid's poem. Unlike Faunus, Actaeon comcs across the bathing Diana by accident while hunting; the furious goddess turns him into a deer so that his own hounds, not recognizing their master, tear hirn to pieces. The story displays without comment a world in which divine powers are unjust and pitiless and bad luck can strike at any time. The allegorizing of the story in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, according to Abraham Fraunce, tended to avoid the harshness of Ovid's treatment and to moralize the gods: it included the moral that "we ought not to be inquisitive in spying and prying into those matters, which be above our reache" (43), Such a moral fits Spenser's story much better than Ovid's, in which Actaeon has no intention of seeing Diana. But Spenser's version gentles the terrible Ovidian version, for despite her fury, Diana acts within limits. Although some of the nymphs would geld Faunus, they yield to the greater imperative that Faunus be able to continue his species (vi.50.3—4). ' Diana scares Faunus thoroughly by hunting him in a deerskin but does no more: there is a limit to divine wrath.

Further, the results of the Fall are mixed. In anger Cynthia leaves the Ireland in which she has taken pleasure, cursing it to abound in wolves and thieves (vi.55). Her abandonment recalls Astrea's departure after the golden age; in Christian terms, it figures the loss of man's direct contact with God after leaving the Garden of Eden. But the Fall also results in a marriage. Molenna receives Faunus's payment and mingles with the Fanchin: "So now her waves passe through a pleasant Plaine, / Till with the Fanchin she her selfe doe wed, / And (both combin'd) themselves in one faire river spred" (vi.53.7-9). Spenser emphasizes marriage when he first describes Molenna, whose rising occurs by a grove of oaks "That as a girlond seemes to deck the locks / Of som faire Bride" (vi.41.3 - 4). As in the Bregog myth of Colin Clout, this river-marriage involves both loss and gain, suggesting that the Fall issues in both disaster and fruitfulness. All things come at a price.

Whereas canto 6 begins, like Ovid's Metamorphoses, by stating its subject, canto 7 begins anew with an invocation. The description of the Muse sets the subject in a new context:

… who but thou alone.
That art yborne of heaven and heavenly Sire,
Can tell things doen in heaven so long ygone;
So farre past memory of man, that may be knowne. (vii.2.6-9)

All the Muses are daughters of Jove or of Apollo. ([28])The narrator's stress on this particular Muse's heavenly origins and her unique ability to tell of things done "in heaven so long ygone" suggests that he is not referring to Clio or Calliope. She is the spirit presiding over "An Hymne of Heavenly Love" and "An Hymne of Heavenly Beautie," whom Renaissance readers would probably equate with a Christianized

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Urania, Muse of astronomy, or with divine Wisdom herself. ([29])The truths of this Muse transcend human grasp, "so farre past memory of man, that may be knowne." The anthropomorphic comedy of the sixth canto leads in the seventh to the unfolding of divine mysteries.

Accordingly, the poem's genre changes again. The posturing Olympian gods fade to voices in a trial or debate, and they appear later allegorized as the planets. The mysterious Nature who judges differs from them in kind. Like the Venus of book 5, she is terrible and beautiful, a veiled, androgynous figure presiding over earthly generation. The narrator refers the reader for fuller descriptions to Chaucer's Parliament of Foules and Alan de Lisle's De Planctu Natura (Nature's Complaint): the references, like the invocation of the Muse, dramatize primarily the speaker's own lack of certain knowledge (Zitner, MC 48-50; Curtius, 106-27). In Chaucer and Alan, Nature is God's second-in- command, carrying out the work of creation through generation, according to the divine blueprint of providence. But Spenser goes further, associating Nature with the God of Nature to whom Mutability has appealed. She is "Great Nature, ever young yet full of eld, / Still mooving, yet unmouved from her sted; / Unseene of any, yet of all beheld" (vii.13.2-4)—the familiar paradoxes describe a deity whose nature is beyond time and human comprehension. Spenser compares her to the vision of the transfigured Christ on Mount Thabor (vii.7); veiled, she is unknowable except as "an image in a glass" (vii.6.9), which recalls Paul's God seen "through a glass darkly" (1 Corinthians 13:12). The poem now re-presents the quarrel of Titan and Olympian as a problem in a Christian cosmos.

Mutability's case divides into three parts: her argument about the sublunary world; a procession making her claim to both the sublunary world and the celestial world above the moon; and her argument about the celestial world. She echoes Ovid's Pythagoras (.Metamorphoses XV.237- 51) in showing that the world's four elements and their creatures change repeatedly "in restlesse wise" (vii.18.9), following it with the allegorical procession that dominates the canto. Here, as often in Spenser, a procession dramatizes an idea with resonant ambiguity: the picture of months and seasons develops Mutability's view of the world and simultaneously confutes it. For the temporal procession presents at once an image of change and order.

The inclusion of several cycles—the seasons followed by the months, for instance—as Sherman Hawkins has emphasized, displays the ordered continuity of time. Here, as in the Garden of Adonis, the cycles display the world's fruitfulness (76-102). The 12 months participate in agricultural tasks: March sows seeds; May produces flowers; June plows; September harvests; October makes wine. Even January and February, the dead months of the year, are absorbed in pruning as well as in cutting wood to warm themselves. Exceptions are April and May, whose sexuality appears in flowers, and December who is not concerned with agriculture so much as a fruitfulness of the spirit, feasting because "His Saviours birth his mind so much did glad" (vii .41.4). The procession shifts the implications of God's judgment that Adam would labor in the sweat of his face: like November, who has been "a fatting hogs of late, / That yet his browes with sweat, did reek and steem" (vii. 40.3-4), the months perspire with gusto.

This procession glances backward to the beginning of Spenser's career, the vision of inevitable process in The Shepheardes Calender. Yet while that pastoral progression stresses care and waste, this one emphasizes creation and fruitfulness. In "October" Piers advises Cuddie to write divine poetry, making flight to heaven, and the Mutabilitie Cantos fulfill Cuddie's program, but they do so not by abandoning the world but by celebrating it. Of the final poems Spenser published, Fowre Hymnes looks entirely toward heaven, and Prothalamion toward earthly glory. The Mutabilitie Cantos look in both directions, acknowledging the restless insufficiency of this world while nonetheless exalting the goodness of what God has created.

In response to Mutability's attack, Jove allows her claim to the earth but insists on the traditional division between the sublunary and celestial regions. Since we use the sun and moon to calculate the time, they must themselves be above it: "who is it… / That Time himself doth move and still compell / To keepe his course?" (vii. 48.4-6). Mutability responds by citing the scandal of change in the heavens that contemporary astronomers attested to, change that Spenser has already mentioned in the proem to book 5. Mercury and Mars move out of their Ptolemaic courses; Venus cannot be seen in daytime; and the sun suffers eclipses (vii.50-52). The celestial realm shares the disorder of the earth.

Nature fixes her eyes on the ground—the world's substance— before looking up cheerfully to give her judgment:

I well consider all that ye have sayd,
And find that all things stedfastnes doe hate
And changed be: yet being rightly wayd
They are not changed from their first estate;

But by their change their being doe dilate:
And turning to themselves at length againe,

Doe worke their owne perfection so by fate:
Then over them Change doth not rule and raigne;
But they raigne over change, and doe their states maintaine. (vii.58)

The crucial term here is "their first estate": things do not change from their essential nature. Rather, their existence in the world unfolds their potential in temporal sequence, seed becoming shoot, growing into plant, plant blooming, giving fruit, dying and returning again to earth. The potential being in the plant "dilate[s]" by developing itself in time's appointed stages. The plant's essence, its "first estate," thus determines the changes that ensue.

By extension, all change, however dismaying from ground level, forms part of a plan that guides the cosmos. Nature concludes with a Christian warning:
Cease therefore daughter further to aspire;
And thee content thus to be rul'd by me:
For thy decay thou seekst by thy desire:

But time shall come that all shall changed bee,
And from thenceforth, none no more change shall see. (vii. 59.1-5)
All things will change at the end of the world, and thereafter earthly change—mutability as we know it—will cease. Nature does not deny Mutability her rule of earthly things. She remains in charge of the earth, and—since Nature never speaks to the astronomical question—perhaps even in charge of the celestial realm. The judgment does not contradict Mutability's arguments so much as put them in a new context, insisting that an unseen order lies behind apparent randomness. For her not to aspire "further" may mean "no further than earth" or "not beyond the world of appearances," or it may refer to the temporal limit implicit in the time when change will cease. It may include all of these. The stanza ends with the neatness of a joke:

So was the Titaness put downe and whist.
And Jove confirm'd in his imperiall see.
Then was that whole assembly quite dismist,
And Natur's selfe did vanish, whither no man wist. (vii.59.6-9)

The sudden vanishing of Dame Nature attests to the brevity of clear vision: for a moment she has given judgment, her veil removed. But with that she vanishes, and we return to the confusions of our world.

It is this renewed confusion that the two stanzas of the final canto dramatize. Epic moves typically between heaven and earth, between the long vision of the world's destiny and the daily blindness of muddy battle. Nature's judgment belongs to the realm of the long vision; the last section of the poem returns us to the narrator, whose experience of daily disorder is not so easily satisfied. We move from the dialogue of canto 7 to the solitary monologue—a meditative lyric—of canto 8:
When I bethinke me on that speech whyleare,

Of Mutability, and well it way:
Me seemes, that though she all unworthy were
Of Heav'ns Rule; yet very sooth to say,
In all things else she beares the greatest sway.
Which makes me loath this state of life so tickle,
And love of things so vaine to cast away;
Whose flowring pride, so fading and so fickle,
Short Time shall soon cut down with his consuming sickle, (viii.l)
It turns out that Nature's reassurance in fact creates an increased awareness of the world's impermanence. The speaker remains divided, loving earthly things and wishing simultaneously to rid himself of that love, centered as it is on what Time will consume.

In this ambivalence he turns from Nature's judgment to her promise:
Then gin I thinke on that which Nature sayd,
Of that same time when no more Change shall be,
But stedfast rest of all things firmely stayd
Upon the pillours of Eternity ,

That is contrayr to Mutabilitie:

For, all that moveth, doth in Change delight:
But thence-forth all shall rest eternally

With Him that is the God of Sabbaoth hight:
O that great Sabbaoth God, graunt me that Sabaoths sight, (viii.2)
The dissatisfaction with this world yields to a desire for the next, the desire for final rest that appears in the first book of The Faerie Queene and even in Spenser's translations in the Theatre for Worldlings. The final line spells "Sabboath" in two ways and may, as critics have suggested, pun on two possible meanings for the word—as "armies" and as "rest" (Bieman, 238-40; Berger, "The Mutabilitie Cantos," 269-73). The narrator asks the God of rest for final peace. But he also looks forward to the time when he will see the God of Hosts; on such a reading, the prayer is not for an immediate end but for ultimate salvation. In both cases the poem ends, like "An Hymne of Heavenly Love," hoping for a final vision. With quiet originality Spenser concludes this "imperfect" or incomplete canto in prayer, because this life is necessarily unfinished, and its completion lies in God's hand.

References

[1] Spenser's gradual renunciation of the dream of acting the courtier-poet is a primary concern in John Bernard, Ceremonies of Innocence (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1989), esp. 107-10, 126-34, 153—62, and 163 -85.
[2] All quotations of Spenser's shorter poems, Fowre Hymnes, and Prothalamion are taken from William Oram et al., The Yale Edition of the Shorter Poems of Edmund Spenser (New Haven: Yale University' Press, 1989), referred to in the text and the footnotes as YESP.
[3] See Mary Oates, "Fowre Hyrnnes: Spenser's Retractations of Paradise," Spenser Studies 4 (1983): 143—69, for a valuable discussion of the meaning of "retractation." Oates's view that the poems dramatize the speaker's progress seems to me true to the Hymnes, although I think the psychoanalytic terms in which she charts that progress are not adapted to the particular problems on which the Hymnes focus (143-69).
[4] See Richard Helgerson, The Elizabethan Prodigals (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976). 1-15, on this convention.
[5] See Robert Ellrodt, Neoplatonism in the Poetry of Edmund Spenser (Geneva, Switzerland: Librairie E. Droz, i960), 13-24, 219-23, for the most convincing arguments in dating the hymns.
[6] See Einar Bjorvand, "Spenser's Defense of Poetry: Some Structural Aspects of the Fowre Hymnes," in Fair Formes, ed. Maren-Sofie Rostvig (Totowa, N.I.: Rowman and Littlefield. 1975), 13-53, hereafter cited in text; and Fnid Welsford, Spenser: Fowre Hymnes and Epithalamion: A Study of Edmund Spenser's Doctrine of Love (New York: Dames and Noble, 1967),
[7] The double parentage brings together several traditions: see Welsford, Spenser's Doctrine of Love, 145-17. The paradoxical age of love is discussed in Marsilio Ficino's Commentary on Plato's Symposium on Love, ed. and trans. Sears Reynolds Jayne (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1944), 178.

[8] For a literary version of this ascent, see Bembo's speech at the end of the fourth book of Castiglione's The Book of the Courtier, ed. and trans. Charles S. Singleton (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday/Anchor, 1959), 336-60.
[9] See William Rossky, "Imagination in the English Renaissance," Studies in the Renaissance 5, (1958) 49—73; and Murry W. Bundy, The Theory of Imagination in Classical and Medieval Thought (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1927).
[10] See, for instance, Welsford, Spenser's Doctrine of Love (40-41).
[11] On the furores, see Frances Yates, The French Academies of the Sixteenth Century (1947; Nendeln, Liechtenstein: Kraus Reprint. 1968), 80 94
[12] See Augustine, The City of God, trans. Henry Bettenson (Hammonds worth, England: Penguin Books, 1972), I. 16, on the soul's purity despite rape. The problem is simply that the speaker's discussion of external violence done to the unwilling ignores the more difficult problem of the truly vicious soul in a beautiful body.
[13] A characteristic equivocation occurs in lines 230-31, where the lover counts the created image "fairer, than it is indeede, / And yet indeed her fairenesse doth exceede."The lines are almost impossible to pin down—and that is their point.
[14] The parallels and contrasts are most fully developed in Bjorvand, "Spenser's Defense.
[15] Bjorvand argues that stanza 5, the central stanza of the whole poem, treats Christ as the second person of the Trinity, in his divine aspect, while stanza 21, the central stanza of the hymn, treats Christ in his human aspect (25).
[16] The classic work on meditation as it appears in English Renaissance poetry is Louis L. Martz, The Poetry of Meditation (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1955").
[17] See YESP, 743-47, for the scriptural references.
[18] Paul associates Christ with Wisdom in 1 Corinthians 1:24; See Ellrodt, Neoplatonism, 164-70. For fuller references, see YESP, 745-41.
[19] In this assumption as in much else, I follow the reading of Harry Berger Jr., "Spenser's Prothalamion: An Interpretation," Essays in Criticism 15 (1965): 363-80, reprinted in Essential Articles for the Study of Edmund Spenser, ed. A. C. Hamilton (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1972), 509-23; hereafter cited in text as EA.
[20] See Dan S. Norton, "The Tradition of Prothalamia," in English Studies in Honor of James Southall Wilson, ed. Fredson Bowers (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1951), 223 41.
[21] See Daniel H. Woodward, "Some Themes in Spenser's Prothalamion." English Literary History 29 (1962): 34 - 46.
[22] When the swans turn into the Thames to swim upriver to Essex House, Spenser skips immediately to "mery London": the movement of the swans is thus emphatically with the current of the river- downward, as if away from heaven.
[23] See also Roy Strong, The Cult of Elizabeth (London: Thames & Hudson, 1977).
[24] Edmund Spenser's The Mutabilitie Cantos, ed. Sheldon P. Zitner (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1968), hereafter cited in text as MC.
[25] In its treatment of the narrator, this discussion is indebted to Harry Berger Jr.'s discussion of the poem in "The Mutabilitie Cantos: Archaism and Evolution in Retrospect," in Revisionary Play: Studies in the Spenserian Dynamics (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); and to Sheldon Zitner, MC, 26-28.
[26] On this allegorization, see Jean Seznec, The Survival of the Pagan Gods, trans. Barbara F. Sessions (New York: Pantheon. 1953).

[27] See William Ringler, "The faunus Episode," Modern Philology 63 (1965): 12 19, reprinted in EA, 289-98; hereafter cited in the text.
[28] See The Teares of the Muses, 1-2.
[29] See "An Hymne of Heavenly Love," st. 7, and "An Hymne of Heavenly Beautie," st. 2-3. See also Du Bartas, "L'Uranie"; and Milton, Paradise Lost, VII. 1 - 12.

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