

Introduction to ‘Celebrating Mutabilitie: Essays on Edmund Spenser’s Mutabilitie Cantos’, ed. Jane Grogan (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), pp. 1-23

Introduction

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But time shall come that all shall changed bee,
And from thenceforth, none no more change shall see. --- (*The Faerie Queene*,
VII.vii.59)

An anniversary only matters if what it commemorates is worth remembering. This collection celebrates the 400th anniversary of the first publication of the ‘Two Cantos of Mutabilitie’, a contentious and ‘vnperfite’ fragment of a putative seventh Book of *The Faerie Queene*, a ‘Legend of Constancie’, as Matthew Lownes, the publisher would have us know. Notoriously little of the relevant circumstantial details are known to us: what is it exactly? Why was it written? When did the printer get hold of it, and how? Where should it be situated with respect to *The Faerie Queene*, and indeed within early modern literary culture? Only the ‘who?’ is reasonably clear: that this is the work of Edmund Spenser, and that in its two cantos and two stranded stanzas of a third, first printed in a 1609 edition of the six complete Books of *The Faerie Queene*, Spenser delivers 116 stanzas in the formal structures of his unfinished epic but in a startling new vein.¹

¹ The internal evidence for the ‘close relationship’ of the Cantos to *The Faerie Queene* is summarised as part of a larger argument seeking to date them and argue for their integrity on other grounds, in J.B.

However uncertain their literary status, however belated their appearance, the Cantos comprise probably the most challenging, complex and surprising part of Spenser's poem, England's first national epic. Yet Spenser had been dead ten years by 1609, and the first readers of the Cantos lived in a radically changed political landscape, with a Stuart king, peace with Spain, calmer days in Ireland and, for the first time, a relatively unified and peaceable 'Great Britain'.

If the Mutabilitie Cantos were not quite *of* the time of their first appearance, they were in good company. 1609 saw the publication of the most complex, challenging and surprising work of poetry by England's first national dramatist, a publication which, like the Mutabilitie Cantos, joined a quality of belatedness with a tactic of functional prolepsis. *Shake-speare's Sonnets* was printed in 1609, also in somewhat obscure circumstances, a clear decade or so after the vogue for sonnet sequences had passed and with a marked orientation towards future readers. Critical readings of both texts have been disproportionately shaped by considerations of their obscure circumstances and purposes; in the case of the sonnets, readers must console themselves with the 'delighted mystification' that they produce by force of those and other internal ambiguities, according to their most recent Oxford editor.² Nonetheless, it would be a poor critical

Lethbridge's 'Spenser's Last Days: Ireland, Career, Mutability, Allegory', in *Edmund Spenser: New and Renewed Directions*, ed. by J.B. Lethbridge (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2006), pp. 313-16 (p. 313).

² Colin Burrow (ed.), *The Oxford Shakespeare: the Complete Sonnets and Poems* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 91-92 (p. 92). Patrick Cheney adds another layer of interest to the 1609 coincidence in 'Perdita, Pastorella, and the Romance of Literary Form: Shakespeare's Counter-Spenserian Authorship', as does J.B. Lethbridge in his introduction to *Shakespeare and Spenser: Attractive Opposites*,

practice that would ascribe all of the challenges and aporias of the Cantos (or Sonnets) to their historical and material uncertainties, or to consider all approaches to these texts necessarily compromised by our lack of these facts. The question of what and why these texts are – formally, stylistically, philosophically, politically – remain important, however partial the answers must be. The essays in this collection take on those questions, seeking new grounds for enquiry in a wide range of broadly historical – and commensurately philosophical – approaches.

An anniversary only matters if what it commemorates still has relevance beyond historical interest alone, still speaks to or shapes the present or future. For example, *Two Cantos of Mutabilitie* also shares an anniversary with the beginnings of the Ulster plantation, another slightly belated formation of a prospective project in which its author was already ideologically invested.³ Historical approaches to the Mutabilitie Cantos cannot afford to shirk the pressing question of consequences, realised or unrealised, not least because of the conspicuously proleptic ambitions of the Cantos. If Shakespeare's sonnets obsessively dwell on their future prospects and notional future readers, perhaps scornful of the 'stretched' hyperbole of the poet's yellowed pages, perhaps sceptical of the strength of the poet's love, the Mutabilitie Cantos reach towards readers of the future

ed. by J.B. Lethbridge (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), pp. 121-42 (Cheney) and 1-53 (Lethbridge).

³ This remains a sensitive anniversary, not widely commemorated: a series of historical radio documentaries marking the anniversary and broadcast on RTE, the Irish national broadcaster, were recorded in Irish (Gaelic), a language more commonly spoken in 1609 than today, thanks in large part to these and later colonial endeavours.

no less intensively.⁴ But they do so through the more diffuse concerns of metaphysics and within the residual form of an epic that had always sought to enlist active readers of the present and future, albeit lacking the more forceful apostrophic prerogatives of Shakespeare's sonnet form. Of course, the future imagined by the Cantos is one of inexorable cosmic dilation until the day of Last Judgement 'when all shall changed bee' and a new order of being will commence. But rather than consign all pre-apocalyptic readers and readings to redundancy in the face of this vision of ghastly ruination, the Cantos exhort present and future readers to adopt this eventuality as the new measure of all worldly knowledge and action, at the very least, a cautionary monument, and, as several of the essays in this volume suggest, a new grounds for ethical action and philosophical enquiry.⁵

Signs of the Cantos' orientation towards futurity are diverse and plentiful across both Cantos. They include a medullar geopolitical re-working of Ovidian mythography masquerading as Irish origin myth, one that concludes with a pagan god's 'heavy haplesse curse' (VII.vi.55), the prognosis of which is already ominously confirmed (but not necessarily concluded) in the poet's own time. A poetic pageant of the most enduring and immutable human figurations of time (seasons, months, hours, day and night, life and death) is presented dramatically and accessibly for the judgement of readers present and

⁴ See, for example, Shakespeare's sonnets 17, 55 and 73; sonnet 59 seems to address likely concerns of the Mutabilitie Cantos themselves.

⁵ For example, Christopher Burlinson's essay emphasises the exemplary role of the narrator in the 'vnperfite' Canto VIII, in this respect. Robert Lanier Reid, too, investigates the ways in which the metaphysical concerns of the Mutabilitie Cantos are shaped to serve readerly ethical formation, as Books I-VI had done. See also the essays by Ayesha Ramachandran and Gordon Teskey.

future. The legal case on no less a subject than the sovereignty of ‘the Empire of the Heauens bright’ (VII.vi.33) and the causes of earthly decay has a supplicatory structure the force of which endures after Dame Nature’s judgement, and that judgement freely speaks its own temporal and generic limits. Even the concluding stanzas are laden with expectation of futures unimaginable, futures in which the present ‘state of life so tickle’ (VII.viii.1) will finally give way to a time when ‘all shall changed bee’ (VII.vii.59). This burden of expectation presses itself on the poem to breaking-point and another mysterious abrupt ending, this time a turn away from the world of the poem and from the time of the poet to seek eternal rest of the ‘Sabbaoth God’ (VII.viii.2). Add to this proleptic habit a supporting vocabulary full of direct petitions or appeals for witness: ‘(Who knowes not *Arlo-hill*?)’ (VII.vi.36), ‘Yet as she is, a fairer flood may no man see’ (VII.vi.40), ‘men vse to say’ (VII.vii.50), ‘Which who will read ... / Go seek he out’ (VII.vii.9), as well as the opening apostrophic challenge (‘What man that sees the euer-whirling wheele / Of Change [...] / But that therby doth find, and plainly feelee’ (VII.vi.1)).⁶ Thus, in their prospective cast, their prophesying, their ambitious reach into cosmic history and in their concluding turn to prayer, the *Mutabilitie Cantos* firmly direct themselves to future points at which both past and present will be more fully (though not finally) realised.⁷ It has been much remarked that all of Spenser’s writing is animated by

⁶ For example, ‘So that *as changefull as the Moone* men vse to say’, is Spenser, through *Mutabilitie*, anticipating a future in which ‘men’ look back on Elizabeth and complain of her changefulness – an act of treason, in fact, if that is what it is. This kind of anticipation of future readers is absolutely characteristic of the *Cantos*.

⁷ Harry Berger Jr.’s classic essay on the *Mutabilitie Cantos* describes the trajectory of the *Cantos* (as of Spenser’s thought) as ‘evolutionary’. See Berger, ‘The *Mutabilitie Cantos*: Archaism and Evolution in

a historical consciousness: retrospective patternings, ‘ruines’ and ‘moniments’, the investigation of the past or of the present in terms of the past.⁸ But the focus of that historical consciousness is never simply the past or present. The Mutabilitie Cantos are just the most persistent and thoughtful of Spenser’s works in their pursuit of historical futures – and even, perhaps, futures beyond history. As a result, a strict historicist scholarship alone cannot do justice to the complexity of Spenser’s work, to the ways in which the Cantos face up to and predicate at least some of their meaning on imagined futures.

Faced with a similar challenge, some Shakespeare scholars have begun to seek ways of taking account of their subject’s ‘precocious modernity’ through a critical

Retrospect’ (1968), reprinted in *Revisionary Play* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 243-73.

⁸ Berger finds the evolutionary objectives of Spenser’s poetry realised through the ‘subjective mode’, its ‘historical sense’ (pp. 243-44). Gordon Teskey deems Spenser ‘a haunter of ruins’ in ‘Thinking Moments in *The Faerie Queene*’, *Spenser Studies*, 22 (2007), 103-25 (p. 119), an idea of Spenser as ‘archaeological’ thinker that he goes on to contrast with Milton’s prophetic spirit in *Delirious Milton: The Fate of the Poet in Modernity* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 6. Angus Fletcher argues that Spenser ‘presses his argument in the Cantos toward the elusive problem of the nature of time itself [...] [and] goes out of his way to show that rebellion actually generates history, insofar as history means profane time’ (*The Prophetic Moment: An Essay on Spenser* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), pp. 254-56. See also Bart Van Es, *Spenser’s Forms of History: Elizabethan Poetry and the ‘State of Present Time’* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). Famously, Sir Philip Sidney disapproved of Spenser’s taste for archaic language, in his *Apology for Poetry* (another important work of English Renaissance literature posthumously printed).

practice styled ‘presentism’.⁹ As its proponents point out, ‘presentism’ is not simply a matter of identifying the critical biases of the present in our selective study of the literary past, but also takes on the responsibility of unlocking a text’s prescience, its implications in the present, meanings that were never confined to its own historical context.¹⁰ The case is, arguably, all the more pressing when Spenser is our subject. Seamus Heaney adds an overtly political dimension to this intuition, one that exceeds the historical purview and purposes of this collection of essays, but that must, ethically, stand over it: ‘it would be an instructive, self-educational thing at this minute to read Edmund Spenser in relation to Iraq, for example, You wouldn’t have to accuse Spenser of writing bad poetry, but you’d have to understand him historically, in the full and present realization that civilized people can do wrong things.’¹¹ It seems to me that – notwithstanding the stronger and explicitly political terms Heaney reaches for – this imperative to understand Spenser’s writings ‘historically’, where that impulse incorporates both a fixed and a migratory historicity, both ‘then’ and ‘now’, is in fact a demand that Spenser makes of us in the *Mutabilitie Cantos* – and which the essays here seek in their different ways to answer.¹²

⁹ ‘Precocious modernity’ is Kiernan Ryan’s term for the prospective qualities of Shakespeare’s *Troilus and Cressida* in ‘*Troilus and Cressida*: The Perils of Presentism’, in *Presentist Shakespeares*, ed. by Hugh Grady and Terence Hawkes (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 164-83.

¹⁰ See the essays collected in *Presentist Shakespeare*, ed. Grady and Hawkes.

¹¹ Dennis O’Driscoll, *Stepping Stones: Interviews with Seamus Heaney* (London: Faber & Faber, 2008), p. 455.

¹² Heaney’s terms are somewhat less easily applied in the *Mutabilitie Cantos* where, as Teskey notes, ‘[t]here is simply no access to the political thought of the poem except through the metaphysical veil the poet has drawn over its surface’. See Teskey, ‘Mutability, Genealogy, and the Authority of Forms’, *Representations*, 41 (1993), 104-22 (p. 112).

Such imperatives aside, we cannot get far in any analysis of the Mutabilitie Cantos without making some preliminary assumptions. These have tended to begin with the acceptance that the Mutabilitie Cantos are by Spenser; that they are part of *The Faerie Queene*; that they are indeed from a projected Legend of Constancy, as the printer asserts; that they (or Cantos vi and vii, at least) have some degree of unity. These assumptions lean in turn on certain *idées fixes* about Books I-VI (the centrality of Spenser's stanzaic form, the moralising dynamics, the political mythologies, and so on) but have not always been as closely historicised as they might. One significant achievement of the essays in this collection considered as a whole is to tease out and reformulate some of those assumptions in more careful historical terms: Andrew Zurcher, for example, conducts a rigorous analysis of the bibliographical evidence to uncover the relationship of the Cantos to *The Faerie Queene* as the printer may have understood it; Christopher Burlinson examines possible sources for a Spenserian virtue of constancy and, in light of the debates surrounding neostoic conceptions of constancy, weighs up the Cantos as they stand for evidence of the kinds of moral dynamics that Spenser might have sought to pursue in a Legend of Constancy. Richard Danson Brown turns to the micro-level of style and language to assess the aesthetic unity of the Cantos and their contribution to Spenser's literary politics. While the methodologies of this small sample differ widely, the gains of such mobile, even at moments openly speculative historical approaches to the Cantos are clear.

Nonetheless, tried and tested approaches to the first six Books of *The Faerie Queene* have been applied to the Mutabilitie Cantos with respectable results. Scholars pursuing Spenser's sources and intertextuality have moved assiduously across the classical

(among them Plato, Aristotle, Lucretius, Hesiod, Ovid, Seneca, and even some of the pre-Socratic philosophers), medieval (Alain de Lille, Chaucer, Boethius, Sylvestris, and others) and Neoplatonic (Ficino, even Bruno) and back to the classical, where Ovid and Lucretius are the favoured intertexts of the moment.¹³ Ovid, too, has provided the meat for investigation of Spenserian mythography, along with Natalis Comes.¹⁴ Spenser's habit of thinking through other texts is long established, and the eagle-eyed unfolding of significant analogies and allegories is a particularly fruitful pursuit – and a specialism of James Nohrnberg's, as his essay here demonstrates. Despite the mysterious circumstances of the Cantos' appearance, historicism new and old has found much to investigate in its allegories and allusions, most of all in its insistence, for the first time, on a particular, localized Irish landscape and context. This newly-explicit significance of Ireland in the Cantos – both the garden despoiled, abandoned by Diana to 'Wolues and Thieues' (VII.vi.55) and the site of the heavenly assembly at Arlo-hill – remains deeply ambivalent, however. Thus Richard A. McCabe's recent claim that Ireland 'functions as a metonym for the accumulated failures of the poem's idealism' is both something more

¹³ See the Bibliography at the end of this volume for full details, especially Cumming, Ringler, Holahan, Hall, Pugh and Lyne for Ovid, and Greenlaw and Esolen for Lucretius; Ayesha Ramachandran also pursues the Lucretian influence in her essay in this volume and in 'Edmund Spenser: Lucretian Neoplatonist: Cosmology in the *Fowre Hymnes*', in *Spenser Studies*, 24 (forthcoming 2009).

¹⁴ See John Erskine Hankins, *Source and Meaning in Spenser's Allegory: A Study of 'The Faerie Queene'* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), especially pp. 286-97. See also Jean Seznec, *The Survival of the Pagan Gods* (New York: Harper, 1953); Edgar Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance* (New York: Norton & Co., 1969); and Reid's essay in this volume.

and something less than the Cantos allow.¹⁵ Reading the Mutabilitie Cantos horizontally, or recursively, alongside Books I-VI is not so much a separate approach as a recurring strategy across different approaches: it has become something of a critical commonplace that the Cantos ‘recall and revise much of Spenser’s earlier poetry’, especially the preceding six Books of *The Faerie Queene*.¹⁶ With its accumulation of perspectives and ideas, visions and revisions, we can see how the Mutabilitie Cantos replay motif and method in interrogative mode: the ‘numinous’ women; the conflicted narrator; the romance-like, abrupt interruption of the climactic moment, and so on.¹⁷ The reception history of the Cantos has also included a strong attraction to the biographical as a critical approach, what we might call a hyper-historical desire to pin the Cantos onto the shoulders of the man: the struggling poet-planter in a colonial war-zone, his last words and testimony. Certainly, Spenser’s ‘autobiographical mythopoeia’ throughout his career has been striking (and much analysed), and its transmuted form in the Cantos (enacted through place perhaps more than through poetic persona – an autochorographical mythopoeia?) a metamorphosis less often noted.¹⁸ But the ‘last words’ model owes at

¹⁵ *Spenser’s Monstrous Regiment*, p. 257.

¹⁶ This is how William Oram puts it in ‘Spenserian Paralysis’, *SEL*, 41 (2001), 49-70 (p. 65), but see also Lethbridge, ‘Spenser’s Last Days’, p. 332 on ‘a summing up’ of *The Faerie Queene*.

¹⁷ See Theresa M. Krier’s influential work on the ‘numinous’ women of *The Faerie Queene: Gazing on Secret Sights: Spenser, Classical Imitation, and the Decorums of Vision* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990).

¹⁸ David Lee Miller cites Louis Montrose’s use of this term in a paper given at the Renaissance Subject/Early Modern Object conference at the University of Pennsylvania, in ‘The Earl of Cork’s Lute’, in *Spenser’s Life and the Subject of Biography*, ed. by Judith H. Anderson, Donald Cheney and David A. Richardson (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), pp. 146-71 (p. 162). My thanks to Andrew

least part of its attraction to our own critical needs and paradigms, and shows the influence of recent scholarly work on Spenser's modelling of a literary 'career'. Such poignant intimations of a sense of an ending as can be identified in the *Mutabilitie Cantos* do not necessarily reflect Spenser's situation in the late 1590s, however, but they certainly support their prospective orientation, directed towards futures unrealised and out of concerns far larger than simply intimations of Spenser's own mortality and/or the demise of his Irish projects.¹⁹ Nonetheless, scholars of the biographical persuasion have produced valuable historical work, particularly in the topical and personal allegorical interpretations of the Faunus episode and in the close attention given to the intensely local geopolitics of the *Cantos*.²⁰

Zurcher for the nice corollary suggestion of 'autochorographical mythopoeia' to describe this *Mutabilitie Cantos* phenomenon. In 'Spenser's Last Days', Lethbridge emphasises Spenser's self-discipline in *not* simply allegorising the personal trauma of his last days in the *Cantos* (p. 328), although he still finds the *Cantos* reflective of them but in a more diligently didactic way (pp. 328-31).

¹⁹ Patricia Coughlan has dated the *Mutabilitie Cantos* to sometime after 1589 in 'The Local Context of *Mutabilitie's Plea*', *Irish University Review*, 26 (1996), 320-41. Lethbridge, however, argues that her points hold later on too, allowing him to argue that the *Cantos* were compiled in the direct context and aftermath of Tyrone's rebellion, that is, after 15th October 1598 ('Spenser's Last Days', pp. 319-26). S.P. Zitner has also supported a late date of composition in his edition: *The Mutabilitie Cantos* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1968), p. 3.

²⁰ On Faunus, for example, see the numerous possibilities listed in Richard N. Ringler, 'The Faunus Episode', *MP*, 63 (1965), 12-19. James Nohrnberg argues for Faunus-as-Spenser in 'Britomart's Gone Abroad to Brute-land, Colin Clout's Come Courting from the Savage Ire-land: Exile and the Kingdom in Some of Spenser's Fictions for "Crossing Over"', in *Edmund Spenser*, ed. Lethbridge, pp. 214-85 (pp. 267, 270-74, 280-82). Judah L. Stampfer more contentiously argues that Faunus stands for Hugh O'Neill, in 'The *Cantos* of Mutability: Spenser's Last Testament of Faith', *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 21 (1952),

The Cantos have also set their own terms for critical readings, of course. Their dominating metaphysical concerns demand (and have received in abundance) bespoke attention.²¹ More recently, valuable work has been done on the Cantos' explicit engagement with contemporary (and contested) jurisprudential models, especially in the Irish context.²² The Mutabilitie Cantos also lend themselves even more productively than Books I-VI to analysis of style, tone and especially mode: pastoral, comic, rhetorical, apocalyptic, devotional, pageantry, ceremonial, theophanic, and much more.²³ Finally, essays devoted to the incompleteness, independence or otherwise of the Cantos on various terms have proliferated.²⁴ Indeed, this wide array of viable critical approaches

140-56. See also Thomas Herron, *Spenser's Irish Work: Poetry, Plantation and Colonial Reformation* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 147-64.

²¹ See, for example, Sean Kane, *Spenser's Moral Allegory* (Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 1989), pp. 211-25; Elisabeth Bieman, *Plato Baptized: Towards the Interpretation of Spenser's Mimetic Fictions* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988); and Brents Stirling, 'The Concluding Stanzas of "Mutabilitie"', *SP*, 30 (1933), 193-204.

²² See Coughlan, 'The Local Context'; Elizabeth Fowler, 'The Failure of Moral Philosophy in the Work of Edmund Spenser', *Representations*, 51 (1995), 47-76 (especially pp. 67-71); Andrew Zurcher, *Spenser's Legal Language: Law and Poetry in Early Modern England* (Woodbridge: Brewer, 2007), pp. 183-202; Herron, *Spenser's Irish Work*, pp. 147-64.

²³ See, for example, Angus Fletcher, 'Marvelous Progression: The Paradoxical Defence of Women in Spenser's "Mutabilitie Cantos"', *MP*, 100 (2002), 5-23; Berger, 'The *Mutabilitie Cantos*'.

²⁴ Northrop Frye argues that the Mutabilitie Cantos complete the poem, in 'The Structure of Imagery in *The Faerie Queene*' (1961), reprinted in *Fables of Identity: Studies in Poetic Mythology* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1963), pp. 69-87. See also Joanne Field Holland, 'The Cantos of Mutabilitie and the Form of *The Faerie Queene*', *ELH*, 35 (1968), 21-31, and the summary and footnote references in Lethbridge, 'Spenser's Last Days', pp. 302-5.

from both within and without the Cantos finds representation in the diverse (and sometimes contradictory) approaches, interests, methodologies and even lengths of the essays in this collection: the Cantos's complexity invites a correspondingly complex and multi-stranded critical engagement.

But the hard facts of their difference – evoking materials of Books I-VI but conspicuously diverging from them, overturning the mechanisms of meaning and the bases of value and judgement in those previous Books, instating new aetiologies and eschatologies – give the Mutabilitie Cantos a charge of oppositionality, of recalcitrance, perhaps even of resistance to the Books published in Spenser's lifetime. This oppositional charge, along with the outright difficulty of the Cantos, have tended to be quietly subsumed into the cherished critical narratives of *The Faerie Queene*, narratives rooted instead in the structures and momentum of the first six Books. This inalienable difference and difficulty of the Cantos must not be sacrificed to the critic's impulse to assimilate and synthesise, I would suggest: their difficulty and resistance is their hallmark. Spenser perplexes readers trained by previous books of the poem to judge whether Mutabilitie is to be admired or deplored, for example, by showing her to be scapegoated by such powerful authorities as Nature and Jove – but conspiratorially and injudiciously so – and heroised within the political imaginary of the Cantos – but not within the longer political memory of the poem.²⁵ To read backwards from her is to re-read figures such as Lucifera,

²⁵ Or, working from Mutabilitie's radical dismantling of the iconography of Elizabeth to which Spenser had already contributed so much, she lends herself to parody or critique of Queen Elizabeth herself, as William Blissett first noticed in 'Spenser's Mutabilitie', in *Essays in English Literature from the Renaissance to the Victorian Age, presented to A.S.P. Woodhouse*, ed. by Millar MacLure and F.W. Watt (University of Toronto Press, 1965), reprinted in A.C. Hamilton (ed.), *Essential Articles for the Study of Edmund Spenser*

Radegund, even Duessa, but with the conventional moral shading dramatically reversed. As Gordon Teskey noted in his influential 1993 essay, *Mutabilitie* makes visible the camouflaged histories of struggle and conquest upon which establishment values and the prevailing ‘natural’ social and political order are based.²⁶ To note this kernel of resistance in the Cantos (and the political is only its most obvious form) is not to return to the easy excuses of historical uncertainty, nor to the nostalgia for a lost imagined whole epic within which every last strand of the Cantos would make sense. Instead, we must take our cue from the selfsame Cantos to pause a little longer over the questions that we ask of (and answers we expect of) them – as well as to acknowledge the questions that they ask of us.

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Any reader of Spenser, and especially of *The Faerie Queene*, must learn early on to deal with the copiousness of his verse and vision, the multiplicity of perspectives, the build-up

(Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1972), 253-66. For *Mutabilitie* as subject to misogyny, see Richard J. Berleth, ‘Fraile woman, foolish gerle: Misogyny in Spenser’s “Mutabilitie Cantos”’, *MP*, 93 (1995), 37-53; as a test-case against misogyny, see Angus Fletcher, ‘Marvelous Progression’. Sean Kane sees *Mutabilitie* as a romance heroine betraying Spenser’s sympathy for a classical utopianism, one belied by the Augustinian *contemptus mundi* of the closing stanzas (*Spenser’s Moral Allegory*, pp. 221-23, 218). The term ‘political imaginary’ is that of Louis Montrose in ‘Spenser and the Elizabethan Political Imaginary’, *English Literary History*, 69 (2002), 907-46.

²⁶ See ‘Mutability, Genealogy, and the Authority of Forms’. Teskey’s later, important essays also have their roots in this essay: ‘Thinking Moments in *The Faerie Queene*’ and “‘And therefore as a stranger give it welcome’: Courtesy and Thinking, *Spenser Studies*, 18 (2003), 343-59. William Blissett finds Radegund to be *Mutabilitie*’s ‘closest parallel’, in ‘Spenser’s *Mutabilitie*’ (p. 260).

of semantic layers, the resistance to closure or finality.²⁷ No mere narratological whimsy, these characteristics actually structure the poem's semantic cargo, notably its moral codes, political outlook and historical sensibility. In this respect, the Mutabilitie Cantos are no different. While Mutabilitie's eventual recourse to legal trial seems to privilege a jurisprudential model as being sufficient to tackle her grievance, it does not take long for readers to note its inadequacies in answering the metaphysical problems of being and becoming, first causes and last things, even when it is framed in terms of sovereignty and dominion. It is as much through the reader's vicarious full 'hearing' of the case as it is in the evident fallacies and hasty circumscription (and later narratorial doubt) of Nature's judgement both as a judgement of the issues and as a final resolution of the problem, that the Cantos resist closure or emblematic certainty in that characteristically Spenserian way. Within the poetic fiction, Mutabilitie and Jove are legally bound by Nature's judgement, but even there, the reader is not. But for all the continuities of style and structure, the Mutabilitie Cantos stand apart by virtue of their apparent abandonment of the quest-centred moral framework that grounded Books I-VI in favour of a more

²⁷ Post-structuralist criticism has been predictably strong on this aspect of *The Faerie Queene*: see Jonathan Goldberg, *Endlesse Worke: Spenser and the Structure of Discourse* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981) and David Lee Miller, *The Poem's Two Bodies: The Poetics of the 1590s 'Faerie Queene'* (Princeton and Guildford: Princeton University Press, 1988). But more traditional and historicist Spenser scholarship has always acknowledged this too: see, for example, Elizabeth Heale, *'The Faerie Queene': A Reader's Guide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). In his essay here, James Nohrnberg reminds us to bear in mind that *The Faerie Queene* is avowedly an 'endlesse worke', and the lack of a sense of finality is also a sense of the insufficiency and transience of every moment, up to and including the moment of Spenser's composition and the reader's reading of it (p. 000).

fundamental exploration of metaphysics, one that necessarily throws the values and achievements of the preceding Books – moral, social, political – into doubt. In so doing, they also allow for – even solicit? – a renewal of moral, social and political values, this time adjusted not by contemporary exigencies or historical paradigms of order or teleology, but by the newly-conceived eschatological scenario announced by Nature.

In a powerful but neglected reading of the Mutabilitie Cantos, Sean Kane has suggested that they ‘seem to typify *The Faerie Queene*: they are at once process and form’ (a perception the readerly implications of which Judith H. Anderson develops in her essay here).²⁸ The nature and mechanics of process and form are, of course, the overriding metaphysical concerns of the Cantos themselves, but Kane’s statement foregrounds the re-modelled interlocking of form and theme in the Cantos, as well as their continuing involvement in the aspirations and narratological structures of Books I-VI. Thus, for Kane, Jove and Mutabilitie each personify form and matter, respectively, on traditional gender lines, and their engagement also speaks to the very ungraspable form of the Cantos themselves.²⁹ ‘However we regard them it can be said that the Mutabilitie cantos enact the dilemma of being and becoming which is at the centre of Spenser’s meditation upon the foundations of value’, a meditation that Kane sees as already present in the epic project of Books I-VI.³⁰ But where that dilemma is imagined primarily in terms of ethical formation and political application in the first six Books, it is presented in metaphysical terms in the Mutabilitie Cantos. Is the universe in a constant process of

²⁸ Kane, *Spenser’s Moral Allegory*, p. 211.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 219.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 211.

flux, of ‘continuall change’ (VII.vii.21)? Does anything – besides change – remain constant? Is there a stable and supervenient cosmic order and does it manage to contain the disruptive potential of change? Can there be a stable or constant basis of value for all human actions and ideas? These are some of the central metaphysical questions raised by the quarrel between Jove and Mutabilitie, but they are played out in terms of a competition for supremacy and sovereignty between flawed deities.

Stirrings of that quarrel appear in the very first instalment of *The Faerie Queene*, as Ayesha Ramachandran notes, in the account of the degeneration and unassisted regeneration of form (‘Transformed oft, and chaunged diuerslie’) and the primacy and durability of matter (by succession made perpetuall’ (III.vi.47)) in the Garden of Adonis episode in Book III (III.vi.30-50).³¹ This link is made explicit when, in appropriately modified mythological terms, Venus keeps Adonis ‘eterne in mutabilitie’ (III.vi.47) by imprisoning the fatal boar within a feminised, sexualised earthly structure. But it is not just the prospect of mutability as decay, the agent of mortality, that challenges the idea of a constant world order in the Cantos: it is also the problem of becoming, of changefulness. As it happens, 2009 also marks the 150th anniversary of a seminal text in the theorisation of the problem of becoming in the sublunary world: Charles Darwin’s *The Origin of Species* (1859). Primarily through ideas of intelligent design, creationists continue to seek battle with Darwinians, and the terms in which they challenge evolutionary theory, while ultimately theological, are also philosophical, contesting such concepts as the impetus of evolutionary changefulness and the idea of order underlying

³¹ See p. 000

evolutionary theory.³² In this unwinnable clash between exponents of radically different forms of authority, the debate bears a passing resemblance to that conducted by Mutabilitie and Jove, reminding us that Spenser presents the problem of being and becoming first and foremost in secular terms. Only through the plaintive concluding stanzas of Canto viii do the questions and partial resolutions of cantos vi and vii take on a Christian aspect, only by retrospective reading does Christian hope tentatively emerge from a world of materialist chaos. Ayesha Ramachandran's essay here assesses the implications of these conflicting Spenserian world-views.

Despite the ultimate recourse to Christian eschatology, then, in the first instance the Mutabilitie Cantos grapple with the problem of changefulness in an almost entirely non-Christian metaphysical context.³³ In turn, the metaphysical concerns of Cantos vi and vii present themselves already accommodated within (secular) political and legal frameworks, and each of those embedded in turn in a rousing mythological fiction. Mutabilitie is personified to tackle Jove, the representative of the established world order, and their quarrel takes them from the 'Circle of the Moone' (VII.vi.8) and Jove's

³² From the Darwinian point of view, Dame Nature is both right and wrong: 'all things' *are* 'changed from their first estate', but they *do* also 'work their owne perfection' (VII.vii.58) not by 'fate' or a prime mover, but by their own innate and localised adaptive capacities. Darwinians tend to be less sure-footed with the metaphysical implications of those capacities, however.

³³ Admittedly, the fates of Faunus and Mutabilitie can be read distantly (and through at least one intermediary, Ovid) as fall-narratives, but Cantos vi and vii are striking for their studied avoidance of Christian theological support. Likewise, we must acknowledge that classical metaphysics emerges within a system of belief in a pantheon of pagan gods even if (as with Lucretius) the philosopher in question seeks to deny their relevance.

heavenly palace to the fated ground of Spenser's Arlo-Hill where their case will be heard: Galtymore, north-east Cork, Ireland, a location that carries its own more immediate traces of conflict, as Thomas Herron's essay shows.³⁴ But the political framework is sorely tested by Jove's arrogant insouciance and the obvious strengths of Mutabilitie's case, and the legal framework is compromised by the various inadequacies of Nature's judgement and the doubts raised by Spenser's poetic rendering of it. Quite evidently, neither provide an adequate response to the pressing metaphysical questions raised.³⁵ On the back of these failures, the turn to prayer in the most mysterious Canto of all, the eighth, 'vnperfite' Canto, comes into its own: faith thus looks to be the only place to turn, the necessary place to turn, but it is also the only place necessarily to refuse to provide rational, comprehensible answers to those pressing cosmological questions.³⁶ In many

³⁴ Just as Mutabilitie's otherworldly touring is not unprecedented in the poem, the Irish setting, too, is part and 'parcell' of Faeryland's fiction. Here, however, it is an unruly element, disrupting the fictional frame with its urgent 'too-too true' (VII.vi.55) complaints, its geographical definition and abundant topical allegories.

³⁵ Arguably, the fiction itself fails the metaphysical challenge by its limiting personification of Mutabilitie and the compromising of her case by her embodiment in this way, treated in this fundamentally ironic mode. See, for example, Sean Kane on the problems of Mutabilitie's personification: *Spenser's Moral Allegory*, pp. 211-13.

³⁶ There has been a strong compulsion among critics (for example, Berger, 'The *Mutabilitie Cantos*', p. 270, and Angus Fletcher, 'Marvelous Progressions', p. 23) to read the words of Canto viii as being in Spenser's own person, as direct communications from the dying, despairing man. Some have found the concluding prayer not to necessarily produce a sense of an ending, but rather to be in keeping with Spenser's ruminative narratorial interventions in Books I-VI. See, for example, Lesley Brill, 'Other Places, Other Times: The Sites of the Proems to *The Faerie Queene*', *SEL*, 34 (1994), 1-17.

ways, the cardinal hermeneutic question of the Cantos is that of accounting for the suspension of secular enquiries and the turn towards prayer enacted in the ‘vnperfitte’ Canto viii with its consoling sense of poetic resolution or even closure, and from there, measuring its significance with respect to the preceding two Cantos, and indeed *The Faerie Queene*. It finds some answers – and not always congruent answers – in this collection, notably in the essays by Reid, Ramachandran, Burlinson and Teskey.

The first questions asked of the Cantos have not always been the metaphysical questions, however. Of more immediate concern to readers and critics over the centuries has been the formal question of what kind of text the Cantos comprise – an issue within which the Cantos’ metaphysical questions (and indeed its hallmark intransigence) might subsequently be evaluated. The old chestnut: are they – indeed, is *The Faerie Queene* – unfinished or incomplete?³⁷ And the newer chestnut: can we understand them in any historical sense as a unified textual object? The idea initially presented by Lownes, that the Cantos are a fragment, a ‘parcell of some following Booke of the *FAERIE QVEENE*’, has dominated; in his essay, Andrew Zurcher looks to the history of the book to reconstruct the physical and conceptual properties of Lownes’s ‘parcell’. Early readers are quick to accept Lownes’s explanation, drawing on the fragment’s rhetoric of loss to blame any deficiencies (as they could thus frame any difficulties encountered) on the accidents of fortune (the ‘fates hostile to things begun’) that saw the rest of *The Faerie Queene* lost.³⁸ But this rhetoric of loss is extraordinarily confining of the Cantos’ breadth

³⁷ See, for example Balachandra Rajan, *The Form of the Unfinished: English Poetics from Spenser to Pound* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985) and Frye, ‘The Structure of Imagery’.

³⁸ These are Robert Jegan’s words, given in *Spenser: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by R.M. Cummings (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), p. 168. In his preface to *A View of the Present State of Ireland*

of ambition. Here, a more insistently historical approach can help to recuperate a literary or textual understanding of the Cantos as fragment that will be more true to the prospectiveness and plenitude that they so eloquently express and celebrate.³⁹ In other words, if we must be satisfied with the Mutabilitie Cantos as fragment, should we not therefore seek for a more sophisticated, historically-sensitive and Spenserian concept of the fragment?⁴⁰

(1633), Sir James Ware blames a servant for losing later Books. The accounts of Spenser's last days given by Ben Jonson and William Camden seem to deliberately cultivate a sense of pathos and loss that endow later reflections on the 'euer liuing Fayerie Queene' (William Browne, *Spenser*, ed. Cummings, p. 133) 'which never shall decay' (Samuel Sheppard, in Cummings (ed.), *Spenser*, p. 181) with considerable poignancy. John Hughes is still commending the Mutabilitie Cantos in 1715 as 'the Noble Fragment' of 'the remaining Six Books, which were to have completed this beautiful and moral Poem' (in *Spenser*, ed. Cummings, p. 271).

³⁹ Mutabilitie's 'louely face' (VII.vi.31) is a curious and telling attribute for a personification of entropy, perhaps signifying Spenser's attachment to the physical world even in the face of Christian teaching. See Kane, *Spenser's Moral Allegory*, pp. 218-19. Sherman Hawkins also points out the joyous plenitude of the pageant of the months in 'Mutabilitie and the Cycle of Months', in *Form and Convention in the Poetry of Edmund Spenser*, ed. by William Nelson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), pp. 76-102. For a closer argument delineating Spenser's struggle with the world as both good and vain, his fascination with its richness and variety (and the poem's emulatory tribute to that variety) and his theological and philosophical distrust of just such variety and mutability, see Oram, 'Spenserian Paralysis', esp. pp. 65-67. Judith Owens also comments on the 'considerable appeal' of Mutabilitie herself, allying it to a Spenserian moral and political sensibility more ample and nuanced than some of his critics allow: 'Professing Ireland in the Woods of Spenser's *Mutabilitie*', *Explorations in Renaissance Culture*, 29 (2003), 1-22 (p. 10).

⁴⁰ In 'The Structure of Imagery', Frye announces that 'the Mutabilite Cantos are certainly not a fragment: they constitute a single beautifully shaped poem that could not have had a more logical beginning,

In fact, early Renaissance literary culture was already a culture of the fragment: the lost classical texts haunting the fragments recovered by the self-heroising humanists, making the texts thus ‘discovered’ all the more revered for being snatched, however partially, from the jaws of oblivion.⁴¹ Printers, publishers and sometimes editors frequently sought a comparable role in their (only quasi-apologetic) paratextual self-congratulations on having, for their readers’ benefit, rescued private or endangered manuscripts from too-humble authors or aghast friends. English translators’ jaunty prefaces on having redeemed valuable texts from foreign hands might be regarded as another spin on the trope. Both kinds of rhetorical formulations suggest that what is at issue in the idea of the fragment – as in the idea of the fortuitously ‘found’ manuscript – is not just the loss of a complete whole, stirring symbol of an unattainable golden age, but also (and perhaps more immediately) the locus of present textual authority. We might, therefore, contextualise Spenser’s interest in fragments in his own evident and *literary* interest in textuality, and his inter-relating of textual and poetic authority: think of the playful personae, misleading arguments and mock-commentaries of E.K. in *The Shepheardes Calender*, and in *The Faerie Queene*, Colin Clout, the narrator, the alternative ending to Book III, not to mention the extraordinary textual and political

development, and end’ (p. 71). The stern and authoritative tone is not quite merited by the evidence marshalled in the essay (from imagery rather than allegory), but there is, to my mind, a niggling quality to Frye’s discomfort with the term ‘fragment’ and his intuition that ‘[t]here is, at least, nothing in the poem as we now have it that seems to depend for its meaning on anything unwritten’ (p. 70).

⁴¹ As Stephen Greenblatt dryly noted, in “‘Stay, Illusion’: On Receiving Messages from the Dead”, *PMLA*, 118 (2003), 417-26 (pp. 417-18).

brinkmanship of the dedicatory sonnets to it.⁴² In this view, the sense of loss works not so much within a mode of self-consuming nostalgia, but instead supports the textual authority of the rescuer of the fragment. And if Lownes is the primary authority and ostensible hero of the Cantos as fragment, we would be foolish not to suspect some degree of authorial collusion in its integrity as fragment, not just because of the ‘notes of finality’ sounded throughout, most sonorously in the ‘vnperfite’ canto viii – but because Spenser has form.⁴³

Spenser was not averse to playing the self-heroising fragment game, as the paratextual pyrotechnics of *The Shepheardes Calender* or indeed the suspiciously numerous lost works attested to in the published letters to Gabriel Harvey and E.K.’s musings might hint. We might even add the Letter to Raleigh to Spenser’s habitual playfulness with fragments. Just as the Letter became dislocated from its retrospective position at the end of Book III by 1596 and thereby became a functional, unified fragment of *The Faerie Queene*, so too the fragmentary status of the Mutabilitie Cantos allows them a retrospective vantage point protected but not dominated by a notional, lost

⁴² See Wayne Erickson, ‘Spenser’s Letter to Raleigh and the Literary Politics of *The Faerie Queene*’s 1590 Publication’, *Spenser Studies*, 10 (1989), 139-74.

⁴³ ‘Notes of finality’ is how Raphael Lyne describes the Cantos’ evocation of a sense of an ending, in his overview, ‘Shorter Verse After 1595’, in *A Critical Companion to Spenser Studies*, ed. by Bart Van Es (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2006), pp. 230-43 (p. 237). Christopher Burlinson’s identification of a critical history within which the ruins of Kilcolman come to stand for the fragmentary fate of Spenser’s poem is a salutary reminder of the kinds of narratives attached to fragments that can obscure their historical significance as fragment. See *Allegory, Space and the Material World in the Writings of Edmund Spenser* (Woodbridge: Brewer, 2006), pp. 149-63, especially 154-57.

whole, reviewing and re-playing the ideas of Books I-VI as the Letter to Raleigh would have done in 1590.⁴⁴ But Spenser plays the fragment game most revealingly in providing Prince Arthur with a mutilated copy of *Briton Moniments* in Book II, crudely (and cruelly) ending suddenly ‘as if the rest some wicked hand did rend, / Or th’ Authour selfe could not at least attend / To finish it’ (II.x.68). Arthur’s text reaches an ‘vntimely breach’ (II.x.68) at (for him) the most crucial point of the ‘historical’ narrative; the imagined (lost) whole asserts its authority precisely at the point where the possibility of ever finding it disappears. Here, Spenser most explicitly subjugates the putative authority of the lost whole to his own textual authority: the working concept of ‘th’ Authour selfe’ in Arthur’s narrative *is* the author himself, the embedded fragment his signature.⁴⁵

It is worth noting, too, that readers, unlike Arthur, can keep on reading after the ‘vntimely breach’, and should have a fair idea of what might have come next in the narrative by virtue not just of poetic irony but also of their position just ahead of the

⁴⁴ That the Letter effectively loses its positionality forever after the 1596 edition is Teskey’s persuasive argument in ‘Positioning Spenser’s “Letter to Raleigh”’, in *Craft and Tradition: Essays in Honour of William Blissett*, ed. by H.B. deGroot and Alexander Leggatt (Calgary, Alberta: University of Calgary Press, 1990), pp. 35-46. For an exposition of Thomas Nashe’s clever parody of the Letter’s lack of positionality, see Andrew Zurcher’s ‘Getting it Back to Front in 1590: Spenser’s Dedications, Nashe’s Insinuations, and Raleigh’s Equivocations’, *SLI*, 38 (2005): 173-98 (p. 183). On retrospective readings generated by the Letter, see Peter C. Herman, ““With-hold till further triall”: Spenser’s Letter to Raleigh and Modes of Rereading in the 1590 *The Faerie Queene*”, in *Second Thoughts: A Focus on Re-reading*, ed. by David Galef (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998), pp. 196-227.

⁴⁵ This mischievous comment on the over-exalted cult of the fragment, allowing that a less committed author – and not a malevolent intervening history – may be to blame for such losses, surely remains a possibility that cannot be discounted in the case of the *Mutabilitie Cantos* either.

knights, in Faeryland's future. The implied futurity of such readings, beyond the temporalities of Faeryland, is in one sense simply a plank of didactic Protestant poetics: the injunction that readers carry the lessons they read into their lives beyond the text. But this episode gives us a glimpse of the larger implications of the Spenserian fragment: if the *Mutabilitie Cantos* end in Spenser's time, with his death or the ruin of Kilcolman or the neglect of a servant or any other infelicity of history, it is already embedded in the very nature of the Spenserian fragment that its fragmentariness is an authorial gambit. The isolated Spenserian fragment – whether the Letter to Raleigh, the *Mutabilitie Cantos*, or Arthur's *Briton moniments* – postulates much of its poetic and textual authority on that very fragmentary status, and to that end, it solicits future readings that will help to realise it, in both prospective and retrospective modes. But so comprehensively 'endlesse' is the poem that no such reading can ever masquerade as the culmination of the work of *The Faerie Queene*.⁴⁶ Thus, at least, goes one version of a more historicised, Spenserian literary understanding of the fragment, one that draws together the Cantos's prospective orientations, their formal and thematic unity and intransigence, and the ultimate return to the lone figure of the poet in the concluding stanzas, certain only of his uncertainty, trudging into the future with wandering steps and slow.

The possibilities for a more historicised, Spenserian *textual* model of the fragment are arguably even greater, and are more ably elucidated by Andrew Zurcher in his essay here than I could attempt. In preparation, we might, like Shakespeare's Oxford editor, begin with D.F. McKenzie's reminder that a printed text is never a transparent

⁴⁶ This suggestion comes close to Berger's argument in 'The *Mutabilitie Cantos*', although Berger locates this lack of finality within interconnected levels of existence (see his brief summary pp. 244-45).

incarnation of its author's intentions, but necessarily 'deformed by the [material] processes of its transmission'.⁴⁷ The Mutabilitie Cantos as we know them are not simply a fragment: they are a printed textual fragment. But this status need not necessarily imply authorial indisposition or print-shop carelessness or any other diminishing effects suggested by the idea of 'deform'. Rather, with daily involvement with a vast and diverse array of literary and non-literary texts, and its shifting relationships with manuscripts and manuscript culture, the material conditions of printing itself may make greater allowance for the textual fragment than even literary-historical analysis does. This is, in fact, the tantalising possibility raised by Zurcher in his essay here. Sifting through the bibliographical evidence in order to re-construct and re-consider Lownes's copy-text, Zurcher analyses the collation and presentation of the 1609 printing of the Cantos to find tell-tale traces of its manuscript origins. The evidence, thus marshalled, speaks loudly, and Zurcher uncovers the fascinating story of a 'literary historical disaster' of printing narrowly averted. Following the printer's description of the Cantos as a 'parcell' (though it seems to have done Lownes no favours in helping to decipher what kind of text he was dealing with), Zurcher links an ambivalent notion of 'parcell' from print culture with a more forgiving understanding of the literary fragment as a unified textual form from manuscript culture, in order to read the Cantos as a unified but discrete fragment of *The Faerie Queene*, borrowing its forms and styles and epic pretensions even when these had all but run out. Zurcher ultimately returns to J.C. Smith's suggestion that the Mutabilitie

⁴⁷ D.F. McKenzie, *The Sociology of Texts*. The Panizzi Lectures, 1985 (London: The British Library, 1986), p. 25. See also the fuller discussion in his *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

Cantos may have circulated in manuscript form in advance of printing – or even in advance of plans for printing. The markers of a previously-obscured manuscript tradition of Spenser in this reconstruction of the printing of the Cantos are startling and significant, and even in the absence of further evidence, should prompt re-evaluations of vast swathes of the terrain of Spenser scholarship that we currently take for granted.⁴⁸

A re-evaluation of critical approaches and orthodoxies is also in order if we are to read the Mutabilitie Cantos in appropriately Spenserian terms, as Judith H. Anderson here contends. Anderson's argument is a nicely judged mediation between engagement with the Cantos and the ways in which they have been read, one that is intended to be exemplary in its own refusal to mark off, encapsulate or otherwise prescribe set-piece interpretations of Spenser. Her open challenge to some of the more dogmatic critical orthodoxies of Spenser studies creates a new space in which the Mutabilitie Cantos might be read, and her essay imagines itself as a propaedeutic to these new readings.

Spenser's writings have enjoyed the commensurably encyclopedic attentions of James Nohnberg for some time now, and his essay's allusions to *The Analogy of 'The Faerie Queene'* are a salutary reminder of the many strands and ideas in that work that remain to be fully explored. Here, Nohnberg offers a typically rich analysis built around eight loci, ranging from explorations of resonant allegories, genres, tropes and

⁴⁸ Career-criticism of Spenser, for example, has been particularly invested in the idea of Spenser's self-construction in print. See, for example, David Lee Miller, 'Spenser's Vocation, Spenser's Career', *ELH*, 50 (1983), 197-231 and Patrick Cheney, *Spenser's Famous Flight: A Renaissance Idea of a Literary Career* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), as well as Richard Helgerson, *Self-Crowned Laureates: Spenser, Jonson, Milton and the Literary System* (Los Angeles, Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1983).

emblematic figures (notably Momus) to philosophical readings of the Neoplatonic and other shadings of Time, Eternity, Order and Nature in the Cantos. In an apt tribute to the plenitude of the Cantos, Nohnberg gathers argument upon argument to suggest that we should understand the Cantos as a supplement to *The Faerie Queene*, foreshortened but completed or, in an appealing, somewhat Miltonic image, as a pendant to the ‘mother ship’ of *The Faerie Queene*.⁴⁹

The diverse ambitions and methodologies of even these three essays in turn registers the varied weave of the Mutabilitie Cantos, their hospitality to contrasting (even contradictory) critical approaches and arguments. (Never a man to confine himself to simple (or single) correspondences where more might be suggested, whether in his language or poetic images, Spenser himself could only be gratified by the variety of historical identifications of Faunus explored in this volume!) Nonetheless, the essays in this collection are united by a commitment to a broadly historical understanding of the Cantos – but a markedly open or interrogative historical understanding. Gordon Teskey has been particularly influential in noting and honouring the openness of Spenser’s poetry, and his essay here is a companion-piece to three important essays on Spenser’s ‘poetic thinking’ in *The Faerie Queene*.⁵⁰ His argument that such poetic thinking is ‘self-identical’ (ever-dynamic, self-reflexive, performed in and through the poetry) and ‘material’ (constituted of Spenser’s obsessive forking through the material remains of the past) has been particularly helpful for reading the heterogenous and deeply philosophical

⁴⁹ See pp. 000 and 000

⁵⁰ ‘Thinking Moments in *The Faerie Queene*’, p. 117. See note 26.

Mutabilitie Cantos.⁵¹ In his essay here, Teskey re-reads the quarrel between Jove and Mutabilitie to bring out the Cantos' central preoccupation with what a thing might be in a world of change, and how a poem as a 'made thing' is 'founded on what is inimical to it' (a 'turning', or change). Teskey meets Zurcher's made yet unmade (and unmaking) 'parcell' by a different road, drawing out Spenser's metaphysical previsioning of precisely the physical problems that were soon (and forever) to attach themselves to that very work, as Zurcher shows. It is fitting that his meditation be the opening essay of this collection, and that his reminder to readers to allow the Cantos the space and freedom to do its thinking stand over the diverse approaches of the essays that ensue.

Much of that thinking challenges the fixed forms of thought of Spenser's culture, as Supriya Chaudhuri shows, including ideas of sovereignty and its aim, glory. Chaudhuri argues that Gloriana, too, is on trial, and that the verdict she is handed down both confirms and denies her sovereignty. Jean Bodin, Ovid and Machiavelli are among the probable sources Chaudhuri enlists to examine Spenser's allegorical critique of power and glory in the *Mutabilitie Cantos*, and she finds Spenser's misgivings presently addressed in Giorgio Agamben's analysis of what she succinctly terms the 'theological economy binding power to glory'. To confirm and deny Elizabeth and her office is not to be limited to political critique, Chaudhuri shows; rather, it is to explore the very limits of sovereignty and the social, moral, political and theological ideals it fosters.

There is nothing nugatory about the cumulative threads of allegories of Spenser's local geopolitical context unwoven in Thomas Herron's essay. Herron walks us through the contested landscapes of Spenser's plantation and those of his neighbours, tracing

⁵¹ Ibid.

Spenser's literary re-mythologising of the river-routes so that 'the historical memory of the New English [...] [might] trace its way back up that same network to connect with the planter politics of northeastern Cork'.⁵² Spenser's unprecedented move of situating the cosmic events of the Cantos in the denominated, identifiably Irish site of Arlo-Hill has ensured that the local context of Mutabilitie's plea has long been noted. But Herron shows us the multiple and overlapping ways in which the Mutabilitie Cantos draw inspiration (and aggravation) from Spenser's immediate surroundings, and perhaps even seek to intervene in urgent local disputes. The feared resurgence of the MacCarthys is a new narrative that Herron brings to scholarship of Spenser in Ireland in this detailed historical outline of a period of intense and specific uncertainty and disquiet in north-east Cork. Ironically, this period had largely receded by the time the Cantos were first printed in London so that the urgency of these fears had also largely receded into the folds of the Cantos. But the specific local anxieties embedded in the Cantos and elucidated by Herron cast new light on how Ireland works in Spenser's poetry – and, perhaps, remembering that vestigial manuscript-Spenser glimpsed in Zurcher's essay (and embodied in *A View of the Present State of Ireland*), how Spenser's poetry works in Ireland. If Spenser's Irish context has been heavily plumbed for its theoretical resources, whether in the service of postcolonial theory or the New British history or anything else, Herron shows us that close historical scholarship and attention to Spenser's literary responses to his Irish situation, remain rich and rewarding approaches. But, of course, critics are not alone in pursuing Spenser's literary responses to his situation in Ireland: confronting Spenser's Irish literary legacy has been the self-appointed task of some of Ireland's greatest poets,

⁵² See p. 000.

most persistently and productively W.B. Yeats and Seamus Heaney. My own essay considers Yeats's conflicted response to Spenser, the terms of which Heaney takes up anew as he, in turn, tackles Yeats's Spenser – and Spenser's Yeats. Reconstructing Spenser as a poet of place (following Yeats's cue), Heaney's humane art ultimately ushers Spenser into the ranks of Irish poets, but not before he has dismantled the various ideological bindings of that category and moved into the larger, more culpable estate of global poets.

Heaney's global is nonetheless a more modest domain than Spenser's cosmic, the radical, even anti-Christian Lucretian sources and implications of which are Ayesha Ramachandran's subject. Challenging the subordination of metaphysics to politics so prevalent in criticism of the past twenty or thirty years, Ramachandran seeks to recover the radical nature of Spenser's thinking by tracing the materialist contours of his metaphysical projects in the *Mutabilitie Cantos*, and the implications of such metaphysical thinking in the period: as she suggests, 'grasping the metaphysics of change [was] the first step towards understanding and re-establishing a disintegrating human political and ethical order'.⁵³ Finding *Mutabilitie*'s great speech shaded as much with Lucretius as with Ovid, she emphasises Spenser's 'systematic' use of Lucretian materialism and the sceptical position to which it brings him: challenging the bases of 'knowledge, order and authority'.⁵⁴ Nature's verdict thus interpreted, far from being a conservative reassertion of order, instead proves a tense and unstable conclusion, one that for Ramachandran (in contrast to Burlinson) trivialises the crucial shift enacted by the

⁵³ See p. 000.

⁵⁴ See p. 000.

narrator of the eighth, ‘vnperfite’ Canto. In this reading, Nature’s verdict shows no way out of the ‘first estate’ of matter, predicated as it is on processes of cyclicity and return that pointedly do not subjugate temporality to a supervenient order – or even to a providential God.

Robert Lanier Reid also takes on Spenser’s metaphysical concerns in the Cantos. Writing against the tendency to read the Mutabilitie Cantos as a conclusion to *The Faerie Queene*, Reid takes the lonelier but inviting path of arguing that they are transitional but effective realisations en route to a planned whole that Spenser still kept in view, and which would culminate in a vision of a holy, eidetic city, a vision ‘heralded in the rhapsodic phrases of the Mutabilitie Cantos’. Reworking A.S.P. Woodhouse’s famous distinction between the orders of nature and grace in *The Faerie Queene*, Reid finds in the Mutabilitie Cantos a staged contest between Christian and pagan gods, where Mutabilitie’s challenge reveals the serious flaws in the Olympian gods and the necessary subjugation of their values to those of Christian (and Briton) piety, especially charity. Reid’s sense of the Mutabilitie Cantos as keeping the ethical imperative of previous Books in view, but situating them in a spiritual journey of attaining heavenly vision has some affiliations with Christopher Burlinson’s essay and its argument about the ‘deliberate insufficiency of the definition of constancy provided by the two complete cantos of Book VII’.⁵⁵ Like Ramachandran, Burlinson looks to Michel de Montaigne as a guide to the prevailing currents of intellectual thought in the period, but where Ramachandran selects strands of scepticism, Epicureanism and Lucretianism as critical lenses for reading the Cantos, Burlinson looks to Montaigne’s neostoicism. By reading

⁵⁵ See p. 000.

Mutabilitie's case through the resonant terms of neostoic debates about the ethics of constancy, Burlinson elegantly argues that ethics remains present and 'live' within the metaphysical concerns of the Cantos, but that the ethical imperative is grounded in the exemplary structure of the 'vnperfite' Canto where the narrator turns to prayer for 'that Sabaoths sight'. Burlinson concludes that the responsibility for Christian constancy dramatised through the Mutabilitie Cantos is squarely laid at the reader's door, a proleptic imperative towards extra-textual futures familiar from earlier Books and here redoubled by the internal semantic structures of the fragment.

Finally, the sudden interpolation of the pseudo-origin myth of Arlo Hill (VII.vi.37) into the fast-paced narrative of the gods' quarrel is mirrored by a peculiar staged moment of stylistic self-consciousness by the seasoned poet, prompting Richard Danson Brown to investigate the aesthetic strategies, effects and implications of the Cantos. More than simply the gesture of autobiographical mythopoeia in terms of which they have most commonly been read, and more, too, than fussy poetic pedantry, Danson Brown finds in the rhetorical framing of the Cantos something close to that courteous thinking project that Teskey has described, and close, too, to the attentive Spenserian reading practices exemplified by Anderson. His essay shows how Spenser's invitation to the reader to consider and weigh the 'aptness of the language used to the events described' amounts to a stylistic strategy by which the reader is encouraged involve him or herself in the dynamic, interpretative and self-evaluative work of the poem. Fragment, supplication, mystery: the Mutabilitie Cantos are perhaps the most quintessentially 'Spenserian' of Spenser's writings.

An anniversary has a habit of imposing a retrospective – and often deceptive – sense of order (and order of sense) onto previously recalcitrant materials. As a vantage point, it presents itself as a logical endpoint, a happy culmination, a point of pure reflection from which the contents of what went before, material and immaterial, can be fully grasped in fixed, tractable or conveniently portable forms. But as Spenser and the contributors to this volume show, we would do well to suspect this anniversary promise. Mutability (and particularly Spenser's mouthy Mutabilitie) trumps any such hopes; the Mutabilitie Cantos hold still more in reserve; apparent vantage point becomes elusive vanishing point. And yet the qualities of mutability focalised in the Mutabilitie Cantos – dynamic, reflexive, intransigent, never final or fixed, always in process – perhaps allow for a tentative point of arrival, an opportunity to look back as well as forward: as a recipe for reading *The Faerie Queene*, and a reminder to look (and live) beyond it towards the future. 'But time shall come that all shall changed bee ...'

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A final note on nomenclature, with another on the Bibliography: the title of the Cantos as we have it from Lownes's head-note lacks fixity and, indeed, authorial authority, and as Teskey points out, creates its own difficulties even at the level of referring to it (to treat it as a singular or plural form?). Contributors therefore vary in their use (and formatting) of that title, in line with the demands of their arguments or methodologies. *Two Cantos of Mutabilitie* has obvious authority as the given title in Lownes's edition, whatever its origins, although it makes no reference to the momentous concluding stanzas and brings with it a set of assumptions about the unity and definition of the Cantos. Alternatively

(and as I have chosen here), we can write of ‘the Mutabilitie Cantos’ as the historical textual object comprising two Cantos and two additional stanzas of a third, and incorporating the given title. A bibliography of critical work on the Mutabilitie Cantos appears at the end of this volume, comprising essays and books that directly address the Cantos, or that contain substantial or important treatments of the Cantos within a larger discussion, but it excludes dissertations. The more familiar journal titles therein (and throughout this volume) have been abbreviated using the conventional MLA abbreviations.