# Ploughing Virgilian Furrows: The Genres of *Faerie Queene* VI

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It is commonly recognized that Book VI of *The Faerie Queene* is more pastoral than epic or chivalric, and it is usually argued that this is so because Spenser wants to treat his virtue ironically. Courtesy is not the public or courtly virtue it should be, but an internal or private one that is inevitably corrupted as it is set to work in a corrupt society. Without denying the ironies of Book VI, I would here like to reverse this line of argument: instead of seeing the choice of the book's genre as determined by the manner of treating the virtue, I want to suggest that the portrait of Courtesy is conditioned by Spenser's manipulation of genre. In the course of re-turning Spenser's generic furrows, I hope also to make some observations on the broader subject of how literary genres affect poetic meaning.

As we all know, the Renaissance poet was acutely aware of the literary models tradition bequeathed to him; and whether this awareness produced an anxiety of influence or simply a groundplot of forms against which the particular poem might stand in crisp relief, there is little doubt that much Renaissance literature engages in overt intertextual dialogue with its generic forbears. Rosalie Colie suggests two strategies by which such generic dialogues are conducted: first, by using the conventional images, themes, and even poetic structures of a given genre as textual synecdoches for the genre as a whole; second, by using the genres themselves as textual metaphors.[1]

In the first instance, a single generic element—say, a reed pipe—could be employed to call up the entire literary panorama of pastoral: shepherds and sheep-hooks, love and spring, leisurely lays and song-contests. In the second instance, the same element could be used to suggest alternative generic and moral choices: a shepherd who dons armor or blows a stern trumpet invokes a panorama in which pastoral and chivalric modes of thought or behavior confront and clash with one another. The pastoral becomes, in consequence, as metaphoric of one attitude or way of

life as the epic is metaphoric of another set of values and perspectives. Pushed far enough, this argument uncovers perhaps the most important didactic function of generic elements, for it implies that the poet's literary decisions regarding genres can be employed as metaphors instructing the reader in his own decisions regarding ethical actions. That is, we are invited to interpret the poet's models for generic choice as metaphors of the reader's models for ethical choice. The metaphoric nature of genre, therefore, is one of the poet's surest guarantees that he is not just building imaginary castles in the air, but teaching his audience something about moral action.[2] Each of these metaphoric aspects of genre occurs in Book VI of *The Faerie Queene*.

We can begin with the opening lines of the book's proem:

> The waies, through which my weary steps I guyde,
> In this delightfull land of Faery,
> Are so exceeding spacious and wyde,
> And sprinckled with such sweet variety
> Of all that pleasant is to eare or eye,
> That I, nigh ravisht with rare thoughts delight,
> My tedious trauell doe forget thereby.[3]

By what seems, initially, to be merely a happy coincidence, Spenser's final book returns him imaginatively and generically to the pleasing, idyllic provinces of his first poem, *The Shepheardes Calendar*. To the modern reader, such a return is aesthetically pleasing and comfortably closural, a final, mature affirmation of the lasting poetic value of the pastoral vision. Yet we ought not accept too readily the rhetorical and aesthetic logic of Spenser's final generic turn lest we fail to appreciate either the calculation which determines or the necessity which compels it.

The uniqueness of Spenser's concluding pastoral lies, first and foremost, simply in its position. As Renato Poggioli reminds us, the momentary sojourn in the "pastoral oasis" is a common feature of Renaissance poetry, prose, and drama. The narrative and thematic purposes of such sites of sweet variety are to allow the fictional hero a temporary escape from the rigors of the quest, time to reflect in contemplative leisure upon himself and upon the nature of his task, and to furnish him therefore with the knowledge necessary to successful completion of that task. The oasis is not a cessation but a respite, not an end but a means—a spatial and temporal interlude which exists solely in order to be transcended.[4] The traditional usage can be seen in Spenser's story of Calidore—who begins his quest in Gloriana's court, is for a brief time refreshed and educated in Melibee's "arcadia," only to return to the court at the end of the book with the Blatant Beast in tow. This narrative faithfulness to the convention, however, conceals the larger violation that Spenser's own epic-romance apparently concludes in a

bucolic pastoral. The generic means suddenly become an end, and our ostensible respite turns out to be the poet's cessation.

Spenser's use of the pastoral to shape his final book is all the more intriguing when we recall Poggioli's assertion that the rise of literature of chivalry coincides with the literary decline of pastoral.[5] Coincidence, in this case, implies something close to causation, for it would appear that modes of chivalry are called into being by, and thus point directly to, the failure of pastoral modes. Indeed, part of Poggioli's intention was to chart the course of this literary history, to show that once man insists upon defining himself in terms of a social, political, religious, and economic commonwealth, and consequently with the problems of corruption and injustice attendant upon such a commonwealth, the leisurely life of the shepherd becomes less viable as both literary and ethical model, and is therefore replaced by the more militant ethic of chivalric knighthood. This is not to say, of course, that poets stopped writing pastorals, only that the status of pastoral changed. Where pastoral once—at least theoretically—served as a valid literary model for all ethical activity, in the Renaissance its capacity to speak for and to man's moral actions was severely restricted. Pastoral became the lowest of a series of hierarchically arranged genres, became, in effect, an apprentice genre, a sort of *rite de passage* to higher and more meaningful forms.[6] This implicit progression up a temporal ladder of genres found a convenient emblem in the fabled and universally annotated career of Virgil.

Spenser, of course, both knows and makes use of this emblematic progress. When he initially turns to write his greatest poem, he directly invokes the Virgilian scheme as a paradigm for his shift in literary mode:

> Lo I the man, whose Muse whilome did maske,
> As time her taught in lowly Shepheards weeds,
> Am now enforst a far vnfitter taske,
> For Trumpetts sterne to chaunge mine Oaten reeds.
> (I.Pr.1)

Enunciating and announcing the chivalric quests of *The Faerie Queene* are made, in these lines, to depend upon an apparent renunciation of the poet's earlier pastorals. Implicit in that renunciation is the judgment that pastoral has failed to provide an adequate model for social reform and that "higher argument remains." Even in *The Shepheardes Calender*, once Spenser gets beyond the private woes of individual shepherds and begins to treat man's relationships to other men, he articulates the necessity of going beyond the pastoral. Cuddy, in the October eclogue on poesy, complains that his pastoral poems yield no social reward, and Piers therefore counsels him to

> Abandon then the base and viler clowne:
> Lift vp thy selfe out of the lowly dust,
> And sing of bloody Mars, of wars, of giusts:
> Turne thee to those that weld the awful crowne,
> To doubted knights, whose woundlesse armour rusts,
> And helms vnbruzed wexen dayly browne. (ll. 39-42)

E. K. later approves this counsel as "the perfecte paterne of a Poet" by directing the reader to the generic progress figured in the Virgilian model:

> In these . . . verses [i.e., ll. 55-60] are the
> three severall workes of Virgile intended. For
> in teaching his flocks to feede, is meant his
> AEglogues. In labouring of lands, is hys
> Bucoliques. In singing of wars and deadly dreade,
> is his diuine Aeneis figured. (ll. 119-24)

It should be noted that E. K. blunders slightly in this description by naming Virgil's *Georgics* bucolic. For the Renaissance, as for us, these two terms are clearly distinct. *Bucolic* refers to the idyllic pastoral, the pagan golden age of pre-lapsarian innocence, of love, of unity between man and nature, of the happy life; the *georgic* treats the necessities of labor, the human sweat, the disunity, and the unhappy work to be done as a consequence of the Fall.[7] The *chivalric* defines the particular kinds of work that must be carried on in a post-lapsarian world, and the kinds of responsibilities that accrue to man as a social and fallen being. There are, to be sure, other ways of defining this generic division—bucolic generally treats man as an individual, georgic treats him as a family, the chivalric treats him as a community; the pastoral centers on pleasure, the georgic centers on planting, the chivalric centers on promoting and pruning—but the point is that Virgil's three works established a necessarily progressive relationship among the three literary genres.

At the close of *The Shepheardes Calender*, Colin Clout, according to A. C. Hamilton,[8] sets off for pastures and postures new by hanging up his pastoral pipe:

> And I, that whilome wont to frame my pype,
> Vnto the shifting of the shepheards foote,
> Sike follies nowe haue gathered as too ripe,
> And cast hem out as rotten and vnsoote. (ll. 115-18)

Whether Colin is, in fact, turning to chivalric poetry, the similarity between the narrative stance of these lines and that in the proem opening *The Faerie Queene* underscores the renunciation of pastoral implicit in the commitment to sing "of wars and deadly dreade."

It is of some consequence, then, that the proem to Book VI is spoken not by the chivalric Virgilian narrator who begins the poem and who reiterates his militant guise in each of the first five proems, but by a shepherd-poet seemingly lost in the "spacious and wyde" ways of a rejuvenated pastoral. Similarly, the numerous public and chivalric poet-figures that have dotted the poem's militant landscape throughout Books I to V here give way to a resurrected Colin Clout who has somehow got his pipe together again and who now sings to his private love on the solitary oasis of Mt. Acidale. We might begin to wonder to what extent Spenser has deliberately inverted the Virgilian model and what his purpose was in doing so. More specifically, if Spenser begins *The Faerie Queene* by announcing the failure of pastoral in order to turn to the chivalric, does he return to the pastoral in Book VI in order to announce the failure of chivalry?

Even to ask such a question is to raise again the possibility that Spenser loses faith in the humanistic vision of communal reform, because the chivalric quest of *The Faerie Queene* is for nothing less than a fully Christianized society in which all men are brought to "as high a perfection as . . . [they are] capable of."[9] It is clear that the progression of books in the poem is designed to reveal the growth of such a society. Spenser moves from the private, internal virtues of Books I and II, through the interpersonal virtues of Books III and IV, to the public, external virtues of V and VI. But it is just here, where the poet turns to societal concerns, that the chivalric vision, even as an imaginative mode, begins to falter.

At the end of Book V, the militant Artegall frees Irena from the tyranny of Grantorto and sets out to reform her tattered commonwealth. Chivalry is first called upon to suppress discord, then enlisted to create concord. But the latter, more important, task is never completed. Artegall is called back to the faerie court and Irena's realm is left to the disconcerting voices of Envy, Sclaunder, and the Blatant Beast:

> During which time that he did there remaine,
> His studie was true iustice how to deale,
> And day and night employ'd his busie paine
> How to reforme that ragged common-weale:
> . . . . . .
> But ere he could reform it thoroughly,
> He through occasion called was away
> To Faerie court, that of necessity
> His course of iustice he was forst to stay. (V.xii.26-27)

In *A View of the Present State of Ireland*, Spenser glosses his own text and explicates Artegall's failure: "where ye think that good and sound lawes might amend and reform things there amiss, ye think surely amiss. For it is vain to prescribe laws where no man careth for keeping them nor feareth the danger for breaking them. But all the Realme is first to be reformed and laws are afterwardes to be made . . ." (p. 147). Chivalry, in brief, cannot accomplish the task of conversion—ironically, the very end which initially called knighthood into being—and thus cannot establish the lawful order of the commonwealth. The return of the pastoral in Book VI, then, would seem to be conditioned by the failure of chivalry in Book V and by the need to redirect the societal quest toward individual and private reform. Until man is reformed as an individual, it is foolish to think that he can be amended socially by laws or militant force.

The very presence of the pastoral in Book VI thus criticizes the mode of Books I through V. Spenser concedes the inability of chivalry to effect the desired reforms within the poem, or to serve as an effective metaphor of such reform outside the poem. And that concession, it can be noted in passing, provides a different entry into another perennial concern of Spenser criticism—namely, whether or not the poem is finished. Spenser may have used the pastoral in Book VI to announce the very closure that we experience: the poem, as he originally envisioned it, has failed, and he returns to his own beginnings in order to signal the work's abortive conclusion.[10]

But why has the chivalric mode failed? For the poet, who has, after all, followed the Virgilian model in his own poetic career, the private education and reformation granted by the pastoral *has* preceded the public reform sought by the chivalric. If his later mode fails, does not that implicate his prior pastoral as well? That Spenser encourages such questions is clear from the most intriguing emblem of Book VI, Calidore himself, just at the point where the pastoral world and his personified Pastorella are threatened by the lawless brigands. Calidore is dressed as a shepherd, but under his pastoral cloak he has re-dressed himself in his knightly armor:

> So forth they [Calidore and Coridon] goe,
> Both clad in shepheards weeds agreeably,
> And both with shepheards hooks: but *Calidore*
> Had, underneath, him armed privily. (VI.xi.36)

The opening turn of genre in Book VI is here re-turned, and Calidore's secret arming of himself again affirms the failure of the pastoral ultimately to sustain itself. But if the emblem questions the validity of the pastoral, it also impugns the sufficiency of the

chivalric. For Calidore succeeds in this instance, not because his chivalric guise presents an overt warning or threat to the forces of disorder, but because he hides it under a pastoral disguise. Ethically, the emblem asks us to consider the conditions under which either mode may legitimately be adopted.[11] It implies that the public quest must, on some occasions at least, be conducted through private means, and that the private quest sometimes forces recourse to public means. Since neither ethical mode is privileged as a universally appropriate way of acting, the emblem casts suspicion on the temporal progress of the Virgilian model.

As my discussion now implies, and as Spenser's own usage confirms, the literary genres have assumed the status of metaphors. In fact, it is precisely because they are metaphors that the genres can represent both ethical and literary choices, both the narrative actions of the poem's heroes and the alternatives of self-presentation or poetic mode available to the poet himself. The literary value of such metaphors is that they force us to recognize the relationship between ethical and poetic models. The conditions which lead the hero to adopt a disguise, like those which lead the poet to adopt one literary mode rather than another, are analogous to the conditions which lead us to choose one moral action rather than another.

The emblematic Calidore is again the clearest sign that Spenser is directing us to these relations. For Calidore, armed in the guise of chivalry but disguised as a shepherd, paradoxically both inverts and mirrors Spenser's own generic postures: the militant narrator of Book I, we recall, puts his chivalric armor over his shepherd's weeds, just as the narrator of Book VI puts his weeds over his armor. By the proem of Book VI, the narrator may remind us of a character out of Elizabethan drama: a shepherd playing a knight playing a shepherd. If the relation between ethical and literary models obtains, then these guises and disguises of the poet's own narrator ought to reveal both the ethical use and the usefulness of the literary forms.

In two recent articles, Richard Helgerson has argued that the poetic options available to the serious Renaissance poet were two: he could sing as a private shepherd or as a public knight, and his admissible modes were, respectively, the private pleasures of the pastoral idyll or the chivalric wars of public dread.[12] To Helgerson, these options were rigorously antithetical and Renaissance rules of decorum enforced a strict choice between them. Yet nothing is clearer in Book VI than Spenser's insistence that so long as such literary choices are seen as exclusive or disjunctive, either poetic posture is inevitably a diminished thing. Each posture, in fact, draws its strength from and is thus dependent upon its generic opposite. The presence of the pastoral poet in the chivalric

romance, like the presence of Calidore's armor beneath his shepherd's weeds, argues that only by simultaneous commitment to and accommodation of both poetic possibilities can the Renaissance maker live up to the demands and obligations of his profession. And in these terms, we can see that the Virgilian progress is a false model of the poet's own choices. He succeeds, in fact, only to the extent that he violates that model by denying its temporal restrictions and its rhetorical antitheses.

For the poet who began his career by accepting and following the Virgilian model, his rejection of it here is no simple matter. For one thing, rejection of the model cannot imply a rejection of the modes comprising the model. Yet in order to ensure the validity of those modes, the poet must free them from the fallacious temporality imposed by the convention. He must, that is, prove that his generic turn from the chivalric to the pastoral in Book VI is not, symbolically, a return or regression. He must transform the pastoral from a Virgilian mode of the past into an active project for the future. One of the ways this is accomplished is by undergirding the present pastoral with the ethical demands of the preceding books of chivalry. Like Calidore, the poet in Book VI does not so much adopt a guise as a self-conscious and conspicuous disguise, just as he does not reject the chivalric so much as re-dress it. Only the presence of the chivalric makes possible or appropriate the use of the pastoral at this point in the poem. Thus the pastoral is protected from misinterpretation as a retreat or regression by collapsing the Virgilian antitheses. To be rendered viable now, at the end of the romance-epic, and in the reformed time of the Protestant poet, the pastoral is re-created so as to incorporate and subsume the *miles Christi* quest.

If such a poetic strategy, or my analysis of it, seems unnecessarily complicated, it is because we have become so accustomed to the Christian accommodations of pastoral prevalent in the Renaissance that we have forgotten how fundamentally alien the pastoral ethos is to the Christian ethos. Unlike Johnson, whose censure of *Lycidas* is based in large measure on this uneasy mixture of antithetical strains, we seem ever willing to overlook incompatibilities for the aesthetic pleasure of an ostensibly synthesized whole.[13] Like Christian tragedy, Christian pastoral has become not only an accepted but an expected model of literary discourse. As a result, we have lost the sense of shock that ought to be elicited by the intrusion of the pastoral world into the Christian chivalry of *The Faerie Queene*.

Spenser and his Renaissance peers were more alert than we are to the problems involved in such a conflation. They never forgot that it was only by a deliberate act of altered signification, by a conscious imposition of a typological or allegorical interpretation,

that Virgil's Fourth Eclogue was "redeemed" for later Christian poets.[14] And no matter how often they chose to rewrite Virgil's other eclogues, or to use the pastoral conventions which those eclogues popularized, they were forced continually to defend their revisions against the charge that the pastoral represents and speaks for an un-Christian and un-chivalric ethic, that it prefigures the urge to take off rather than the obligation to put on the militant armor of St. Paul.

Calidore's entrance into the pastoral realm is a convenient illustration of Spenser's defensive problem. The poet's insistence that we recognize there is a problem is measured by the fact that he frames this narrative event by two rhetorical debates. The first is between Calidore and Melibee, Calidore envying the happiness and contentment evident in the simple cottagers, Melibee arguing that envy represents a failure fully to accept the lot and consequently the task to which one has been providentially assigned. The second, more intriguing, debate is between the poet himself and an implied reader outside the narrative. Fully aware that such a reader might condemn Calidore for forsaking his appointed quest, Spenser tries to defend his hero:

> Who now does follow that foule Blatant Beast,
> Whilest Calidore does follow that faire mayd,
> Vnmyndfull of his vow, and high beheast
> Which by the Faery Queene was on him layd,
> That he should neuer leaue, nor be delayd
> From chacing him, till he had it attchieued?
> But now entrapt of Loue, which him betrayd,
> He mindeth more how he may be relieued
> With grace from her whose loue his heart hath sore
> engrieued.
>
> That from henceforth he meanes no more to sew
> His former quest, so full of toile and paine:
> Another quest, another game in vew
> He hath, the guerdon of his loue to gaine:
> With whom he myndes for euer to remaine,
> And set his rest amongst the rusticke sort,
> Rather than hunt still after shadowes vaine
> Of courtly fauor, fed with light report
> Of euery blaste, and sayling alwaies in the port.
>
> Ne certes mote he greatly blamed be,
> From so high step to stoupe vnto so low,
> For who had tasted once (as oft did he)
> The happy peace which there doth ouerflow,
> And prou'd the perfect pleasures which doe grow
> Amongst poore hyndes, in hils, in woods, in dales,

Would neuer more delight in painted show
Of such false blisse, as there is set for stales,
T'entrap vnwary fooles in their eternal bales. (VI.x.1-3)

Clearly, Spenser equivocates in his judgment of Calidore, in part because Calidore's ambivalent position mirrors his own: both have apparently turned aside from their announced chivalric quests in order to enjoy the leisure and the pleasure provided by the pastoral oasis. Indeed, it is not Calidore who is being defended here, but Spenser himself; and his own uneasiness about the place of the pastoral in his epic is signified by the extent of the narrative parenthesis.

Once we understand this fact, then the poet's judgment of Calidore opens upon larger issues. The most obvious is the central problem of the choice itself. Calidore has come to a moral crossroads, a Pythagorean Y, and he is asked—or thinks he is asked—to choose between private love on the one hand and public virtue or honor on the other. That choice is unfolded in the antithesis between the happy peace and perfect pleasure resident "in hils, in woods, in dales," and the "toile and paine" which come to those who seek after "courtly fauors." We recognize here conventional pastoral oppositions of place and behavior: contented country versus contentious city, the leisurely path to love versus the tortuous path to honor. Yet we should also recognize a deception, for such oppositions are generic synecdoches which reach out to our initial literary and metaphoric modes—the pastoral and the chivalric. And since the poet has already shown us that these generic options are not disjunctive, we are better able to understand the error of Calidore's ethical choice. Spenser ensures that understanding by labeling both of Calidore's options as "entrapping." In turn, the error of Calidore's perception of his choices recapitulates and reaffirms the flaw in the literary model. The city is contentious only by pastoral fiat, just as the country is leisurely only by chivalric nostalgia. The genres propose alternative points of view, not moral antitheses; like Hamlet's "To be or not to be," their opposition is falsely contrived and must be voided by a poetic form capable of invoking both options at once. If man lives in the city and the country, in public and in private, for honor and for love, then neither the chivalric nor the pastoral can be an appropriate metaphor for all his ethical behavior.

In these terms, we can redefine Spenser's task in Book VI as the development of a literary mode which can serve as a suitable model for moral action in general. And since neither pastoral nor chivalric is privileged in this way, we must seek another generic form. The best place to do so is in those passages of the book in which Spenser poses his central moral questions—what is Courtesy

and in what sphere does it operate? Early in the proem, Spenser asks the muses to guide his footing through the "strange waies" he is about to tread, and to

> Revele to me the sacred noursery
> Of vertue, which with you doth there remaine,
> Where it in siluer bowre does hidden ly
> From view of men, and wicked worlds disdaine;
> Since it at first was by the gods with paine
> Planted in earth, being deriu'd at first
> From heauenly seedes of bounty soueraine,
> And by them long with careful labour nurst,
> Till it to ripeness grew, and forth to honour burst.
>
> Amongst them all growes not a fayrer flowre,
> Then is the bloosme of comely Courtesie,
> Which, though it on a lowly stake doe bowre,
> Yet brancheth forth in braue nobilitie,
> And spreds it selfe through all ciuilitie.

The growth of Courtesy in these lines mirrors the progress of the Virgilian paradigm—from country to court, from love to honor, from the pastoral to the chivalric. The seed which becomes the flower and the lowly stalk which becomes the tree are metaphors for the process by which virtue is transferred from the sacred nursery of the self to all civility, from the private individual to public nobility. The center of this process-progress is figured forth in the key phrase "with careful labour nurst."

It is no accident that Pastorella, the lowly stalk bowered in Melibee's cottage nursery but soon to become the narrative's emblematic fair flower of Courtesy, is twice associated with the process Spenser here identifies. In Canto ix we are told that Melibee found her all alone in an open field, brought her home, and "noursed her well"; in Canto xii, Spenser repeats the tale, explaining how the abandoned infant was "nurst" by Melibee's wife. Pastorella is the personified Courtesy; her nursing is a metaphor for what Biblical commentary frequently calls "soul-husbandry." Philo Judaeus, for example, explicates the moral allegory of Eden by suggesting that "we must conceive that the bountiful God plants in the soul as it were a garden of virtues and *the modes of conduct* corresponding to each of them."[15] Barnabe Googe offers a popularized version of this tradition in his 1565 translation of Palingenius's *The Zodiake of Life*:

> And first, as nature so disposing it the rude and Countrie fielde,
> Except it oftentimes be tild, and eke with labour sore,
> The hurtfull weedes with plough and rakes be causd to grow no more;

> Nor this enough, it needefull is good seedes therein to cast,
> And dayly for to husband it till daunger all be past.
> Euen so the minde whilst it is bounde within the body here,
> Is ouergrowne with Briers sharp, and wilde it doth appeare:
> Except it ayded be with helpe of one that tilleth well,
> And aptly vertues therin plantes, and vices doth expell.[16]

Spenser's phrase, "with careful labour nurst," thus encompasses both tilling and weeding, and both of these ethical activities are brought directly to bear upon the poet's literary task by Spenser's principal source for Book VI, Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano*:

> Therefore even as in the other artes, so also in the vertue it is behofefull to have a teacher, that with lessons and good exhortations may stirre up and quicken in us those moral vertues, whereof wee have the seede inclosed and buried in the soule, and like the good husbandman till them and open the way for them, weeding from them the briers and darnell of appetites, which many times so shadow and choke our mindes, that they suffer them not to budde nor to bring forth the happie fruites, which alone ought to be wished to growe in the harts of men.[17]

Castiglione makes explicit the generic model that Spenser only hints —the cultivation of virtuous seeds, of those seminal Ideas of virtue that God has implanted within us, is the task of the georgic husbandman. If we recall that the georgic is the middle mode in the Virgilian progress, we can begin to understand Spenser's strategy and the necessity of his calling both the pastoral and the chivalric modes into question. By setting those modes against one another, Spenser is able to accommodate the demands and obligations of each to the *via media* of georgic action.

In the opening lines of Book VI proper, Spenser identifies the etymological origin and the ethical end of his sought virtue:

> Of Court, it seemes, men courtesie doe call,
> For that it there most useth to abound;
> And well beseemeth that in princes hall
> That vertue should be plentifully found,
> Which of all goodly manners is the ground,
> And roote of ciuill conuersation.

Covertly, Spenser here asks the question that his final book is designed to answer: how, by what "goodly manner," do we get

from origin to end, from court to courtesy, from ethical Idea to moral action? That Spenser intends this question to be turned upon the book itself should be clear, for the progress from origin to end informs and directs the poetic task itself—the literate and literary process by which the poet's solitary and private word becomes a public and "ciuill conuersation."[18]

What we usually hear in these lines, however, is an irony: there is no court in the Book of Courtesy. The only book of *The Faerie Queene* to specify that its virtue derives from the court is the only book in which the court is conspicuously absent. Yet this statement is not exactly true. Calidore chases the Blatant Beast through a well-charted sequence of provinces:

> Him first from court he to the citties coursed,
> And from the citties to the townes him prest,
> And from the townes into the countrie forsed,
> And from the country back to private farmes he scorsed.
>
> From thence into the open fields he fled,
> Whereas the heardes were keeping of their neat,
> And shepheards singing to their flocks, that fed,
> Layes of sweete loue and youthes delightfull heat.
> (VI.ix.3-4)

As James Nohrnberg correctly sees, this "progress" carefully reverses the Virgilian model, which, it may be noted, is now completed by the reference to the georgic implicit in the central locale of "private farmes."[19] But since the Beast's spatial movements mirror the poet's own course—both literally in the narrative settings of Book VI and metaphorically in the generic choices shaping that narrative—we need to push this insight a bit further. The Beast is the narrator's analogue to Calidore's armor, and his presence protects the poet as the armor protects the hero. The Beast, in other words, is the pastoral poet Spenser might have become had he not defended his own generic turn. As its actions at the end of Books V and VI suggest, the Beast's apparent "progress" is a fall, a retreat and a regression, a corruption of courtesy into discourtesy, grace into disgrace, civil conversation into uncivil slander, the harmonious voices of many people into the solitary screams of one.[20] For Spenser, the Beast provides a narrative antithesis to his own intentions and a narrative occasion to put those intentions to work, to manifest them in action: he follows the Beast in order to turn evil into good, to rewrite regress into progress, discourtesy into courtesy, incivility into civility. Unlike the Beast, he does not try to sever honor from love or love from honor, but to accommodate one to the other; similarly, he does not move from court to

country in order to establish disparity between man's possible places of habitation, but to offer a unity of both place and action.

Extending this line of argument, we could say that the absence of a court from Book VI is only secondarily an attack on contemporary corruption, and only superficially a sign of the failure of chivalry. The court and its chivalric conduct must be seen as both preceding and following the narrative moment of the book. We have come to Book VI by way of both courts and chivalry. The pastoral in Book VI ensures that we leave *The Faerie Queene* for the same site: the court that is to be when we take up the chivalric quest of chaining the Blatant Beast and turning his uncivil words into "ciuill conuersation." By returning to the solitude of the pastoral, Spenser ultimately reaffirms the Virgilian model: the conversation of the many depends upon the conversion of the one. In the literary oasis, the reader is taught about himself and the nature of the task that is before him. But because it is *before* him, that task lies outside the poem; moved to action, the reader is now called upon to act.

Spenser himself begins the transfer of virtue from self to society, from pastoral to chivalry. To see how he does this, we need to recall the poem's first ethical paradigm. In Book I, the history of Redcross is given by Heavenly Contemplation. The knight, we are told, began as an elfin innocent in an idyllic, pastoral faerieland. From there, he was placed "in an heaped furrow," where he was discovered by a farmer guiding "his toylesome teme"; he is subsequently raised "in a ploughman's state" and thus called Georgos. Now that he is a man, he has been "prickt with courage" to "proue [his] puissant armes." Here, in clear and archetypal terms, Spenser defines the ethical dimensions of the Virgilian progress: pastoral, georgic, chivalric.

To return one final time to Spenser's own literary guises in Book VI, it is obvious that he begins as a pastoral shepherd. But that guise is significantly altered in Canto ix:

> Now turne againe my teme, thou jolly swayne,
> Back to the furrow which I lately left,
> I lately left a furrow, one or twayne,
> Unploughed, the which my coulter hath not cleft:
> Yet seem'd the soyle both fayre and fruteful
> eft. . . .[21]

Spenser ends the book, in other words, in the condition Castiglione describes. In the guise of the husbandman-teacher, he cultivates the seeds that have been planted by God in the human mind. "Vertues seat," he says in Canto i, "is deep within the mynd, and not in outward showes"; but this is not enough, for "the gentle mind by gentle deeds is known." The Idea of virtue, which the poet reminds

us of, cultivates, and opens the way for, must now be put to work or action, made manifest in the fruits and the flowering of our labor. The poet's courtesy towards us elicits our courtesy to him, and as he has turned from the pastoral to the georgic, he teaches us the subsequent necessity of turning both with and beyond him. It is important to observe that the first line of the passage just cited points directly to the reader, for he is the "thou" that is to "turne" the narrator's "teme." In so doing, he "turns" himself as well, from "jolly swayne" to laboring ploughman. Spenser has thus situated the reader on the progress of the Virgilian paradigm and called him to the obligations that progress imposes. To make our moral turning manifest, we must now return to St. George, put on the armor which St. Paul has urged, and bear living witness to our "puissant armes." Not to do so is to frustrate our own desires and our own ends—the reform of the court, a reforming conversation, a redemptive conversion.

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NOTES

1 Colie treats these subjects extensively in *The Resources of Kind* (Berkeley:Univ. of California Press, 1973), but see also *"My Ecchoing Song": Andrew Marvell's Poetry of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1970), and *Shakespeare's Living Art* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1974).

2 See also my "The Dialectic of Genres in *The Shepheardes Calender*," *Renaissance Papers 1975* (1976), pp. 1-10.

3 All quotations from Spenser are taken from *The Works of Edmund Spenser: A Variorum Edition*, ed. Edwin Greenlaw et al., 9 vols. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1932-49).

4 Poggioli, *The Oaten Flute* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1975), pp. 9-10.

5 See Poggioli's chapter on "Naboth's Vineyard," pp. 194-219, especially p. 203.

6 The standard hierarchy is explicated in O. B. Hardison's *The Enduring Monument* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1962), pp. 68-106. It is worth emphasizing, however, that while pastoral and epic are antithetically positioned on the scale of literary genres, they share many of the same motives. This is most evident in Spenser's usage, for the urges toward variety, comprehensiveness, wholeness, even toward a *genus universum* generate both *The Shepheardes Calender* and *The Faerie Queene*. The differences between pastoral and epic, therefore, are frequently and paradoxically not *in kind*, but in degree.

7 See William A. Sessions, "Spenser's Georgics," *ELR* 10 (1980), 202-38. Sessions also anticipates the thrust of my argument about Book VI in the concluding pages of this essay. The fullest study of the pastoral in Book VI, and one to which I am obviously indebted, is Humphrey Tonkin's *Spenser's Courteous Pastoral* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1972).

8 "The Argument of Spenser's *Shepheardes Calender*," reprinted in *Spenser*, ed. Harry Berger (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1968), p. 33.

9 Sir Philip Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry*, ed. Geoffrey Shepherd (Manchester: Univ. of Manchester Press, 1973), p. 104. For fuller studies of Spenser's loss of faith in Book VI, see Richard Neuse, "Book VI as Conclusion to *The Faerie Queene*," *ELH* 35

preparing an edition of the complete works of Abraham Cowley (1618-1667). The edition will be published by the University of Delaware Press (326 Hullihen Hall, Newark, Delaware, 19711, U.S.A.) and Associated University Presses, Inc. The editors would appreciate hearing from those having information useful to the edition. Of particular interest is information about letters written by or to Abraham Cowley, and citations of or allusions to Cowley's poetry or prose made prior to 1800. Please reply to the University of Delaware Press.

### Southeastern Renaissance Conference

The 40th Annual Meeting of the Southeastern Renaissance Conference will take place March 25-26, 1983, on the campus of The University of Virginia at Charlottesville. Inquiries should be sent to Professor Brewster S. Ford, Southeastern Renaissance Conference, Department of English, Virginia Military Institute, Lexington, Virginia 24450.