(UN)VEILING NATURE
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SPENSER'S POETICS
IN MUTABILITIE CANTO SEVEN

by

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B.A., The University of British Columbia, 1991

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

(Department of English)

We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

July 1993

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Abstract

This thesis investigates Edmund Spenser's projection of a poetic voice or persona into Mutabilitie Canto VII. I take the perspective that the persona and its poetic are Edmund Spenser's fictions of self-representation and as such are rationalizations of the poetic enterprise as a worthwhile social activity. The thesis consists of two principle divisions: in Chapters II through VI, I investigate the poetic which Spenser, through the persona, links with MC VII; in Chapter VII, I explore how this poetic relates to the practice of the canto. In the first six chapters, I will examine the invocation of the muse in stanzas one and two of Mutabilitie Canto VII, and the representation of Nature in stanza five through nine, in the context of Spenser's earlier work and the work of other poets and poetic theorists. After a scrutiny of the poetic persona and the terms of his relationship with the muse, I will elucidate the lineaments of the poetic which this material represents by placing the invocation in the context of a series of works: The Teares of the Muses, The Shepherdes Calendar, Sallust du Bartas's L'Uranie, Richard Wills's De re Poetica, Philip Sidney's Defense of Poesie, and the writings of the continental theorist, Cristoforo Landino. The invocation emerges from this comparison as a hybrid growth, in which Spenser fuses together elements present but separate in his earlier work, namely the figure of the muse Urania (in The Teares of the Muses) and the poetics of neoplatonic furor (in the October Eclogue). This synthesis represents a move against the poetic program developed by Sidney, and a choice in favour of the poetic of du Bartas's L'Uranie, and behind this, the poetics of continental neoplatonism.
The poetic persona’s failed attempt to describe Nature in stanzas 5-9 of Mutabilitie Canto VII ends with his referring the reader to Alan of Lille, who "perform’d the deed so as it ought" (MC 7.9.8). While this seems to suggest the failure of the invocation to gain the poet the skill necessary to describe the events in heaven, in actuality the personal insufficiency which this referral implies is feigned; Spenser’s Nature is veiled, a distinct departure from the representation of her by Alan of Lille, Chaucer and other writers who comprise the "School of Alanus" (Oruch 503). By veiling Nature, Spenser is following the poetic expressed in Macrobius’ In Somnium Scipionis. In this work, the initiate of Nature who knows her secrets (that is, who sees Nature unclothed) must, if he wishes to express his knowledge, veil Nature in the garments of allegory and fabulae. Nature’s veil vanishes in MC VII after Mutabilitie’s long oration which, through its calendar form, expresses all the possibilities of creation "dilated" in time (Heninger 311). The poet represents Nature, indirectly initiating the reader into knowledge of her through the tale of Mutabilitie. Once initiated, the reader is permitted to see the smiling face of Nature. Spenser’s choice of authorities -- Chaucer and Alan -- points the way back to Macrobius. His departure from the practice of those same authorities in veiling Nature is the first clear indication that he is following a Macrobian poetic as far as the representation of Nature is concerned. The poetic principles which emerge from the invocation and the representation of Nature thus complement one another: the poetic persona acquires authority from the muse, and Spenser derives from Macrobius a methodology for the representation of Nature. The focus of the final Chapter is Spenser’s use of this
poetic to structure the expression of both a crisis of faith and the subsequent resolution of that crisis through a "vision" of the order which underlies the seemingly chaotic universe. The muse makes Spenser's resolution of the crisis valid for the reader, and the poetic methodology of Macrobius provides Spenser with a means of expressing his experience in a manner which initiates the reader in the knowledge that resolves the crisis, only after the reader passes through a process of interpretation.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Spenser's poetic as expressed in the October Eclogue, the Letter to Raleigh, and the dedicatory letter of The Foure Hymnes has received substantial critical attention. The "Cantos of Mutabilitie" have been similarly scrutinized, on the premise that they are Spenser's last piece of poetry and hence represent a retrospective commentary on his life's work (Blissett 26-27). This thesis will investigate Spenser's projection of a poetic voice or persona into Canto VII. My aim will be to delineate the poetic of which the projected persona is an expression, and then to explore the Canto in light of that poetic.

A first step is to establish the implications of Spenser's use of a first person poetic voice, particularly as this bears upon author-text-reader relationships. The use of a persona who directly addresses the reader and narrates the poem in the present tense blurs the boundaries of time and space which separate the worlds of the historical author, the poem and the historical reader. The poetic which governs the persona's narration of the tale of heaven's king is thus the poetic of the historical author only for as along as the reader accepts the persona's unstated claim to the authorship of Canto VII (this claim is implicit in MC 7.1.5-9). But as soon as the reader separates the historical author from the persona, the persona and its poetic become (the historical) Edmund Spenser's fictions of self-representation. Viewed in this way, they function as justifications -- as authorizations -- not only of Spenser's poetic activity, but also of the reader's attention to the poem. In short, they are
rationalizations of the poetic enterprise as a worthwhile and even essential social activity.

This thesis consists of seven chapters with two principle divisions: in Chapters II through VI, I investigate the poetic which Spenser, through the persona, links with MC VII; in Chapter VII, I explore how this poetic relates to the practice of the canto. The focus of the final Chapter is Spenser's use of this poetic to structure the expression of both a crisis of faith and the subsequent resolution of that crisis through a "vision" of the order which underlies the seemingly chaotic universe. The finite human consciousness, which on its own is capable of seeing in the world only the rule of change, is the source of the crisis. Thus it is necessary that this consciousness be transcended in order for a reaffirmation of faith to take place. This is the role which the muse plays, as she lifts the poet beyond the confines of this world and into a state of super-human consciousness in which the poet is able to write of things past the memory of man. She makes Spenser's resolution valid for the reader -- for society -- and thereby makes the poet into a semi-prophetic figure whose experiences are more nearly universal than those of an ordinary mortal such as the reader. The poet's social value soars as, through the muse, he is able to offer his experiences and his art as a credible antidote to the anxiety which must (by the terms of the poem) inevitably plague every human mind.

The muse's authority, however, merely makes the author's experiences credible as insights of more than subjective relevance. In order to convince the reader that he possesses the solution to the problem, the author must modulate the expression of
his experiences to preserve the sanctity of his vision and at the same time to initiate and to educate the reader in the knowledge which has confirmed his (the author's) faith. The author achieves these ends by constructing a narrative which simulates for and within the reader, through the experience of reading the text, the author's successive experiences of crisis, knowledge (by "inspiration") and reaffirmation. The use of the first person narrator and the present tense achieves part of this goal by, as I mentioned earlier, collapsing the usual boundaries of time and space which separate the worlds of the author, the poem, and the reader. This mode of narration overcomes a variety of textual displacements: most importantly the author's necessarily after-the-fact account of his experiences of crisis and reaffirmation. The reader is drawn into the narrative and made a participant therein, as s/he stands next to the persona/author, watching with him the unfolding of the events of Mutabilitie's challenge of Jove's right to rule.

The use of a fiction -- a fable -- provides the means of expressing the vision in terms which veil its core until such time as the author wishes to disclose the essence of the truth which has confirmed his faith. The core of the vision is disclosed through the interplay of and the relationships of the characters of the fable: the meaning of any single event or entity must be established through the relationship which it has with the rest of the narrative. Thus the reader is initiated into the knowledge which resolves the crisis only by passing through and emerging from a dynamic process of interpretation.

The choices which Spenser makes in his crafting of the poetic persona and the
accompanying poetic must be defined and set in context prior to our considering of the ways in which these choices shape his practice. In the first six chapters of this thesis I will examine the invocation of the muse in stanzas one and two of Mutabilitie Canto VII, and the representation of Nature in stanzas five through nine, in the context of Spenser's earlier work and the work of other poets and poetic theorists. After a scrutiny of the poetic persona and the terms of his relationship with the muse, I will elucidate the lineaments of the poetic which this material represents by placing the invocation in the context of a series of works: The Teares of the Muses, The Shepherdes Calendar (specifically the October Eclogue), Sallust du Bartas’s L’Uranie, Richard Wills’s De re poetica, Sidney’s Defense of Poesie, and the writings of the continental theorist Cristoforo Landino. The invocation emerges from this comparison as a hybrid growth, in which Spenser fuses together elements present but separate in his earlier work, namely the figure of the muse Urania (in The Teares of the Muses) and the poetics of neoplatonic furor (in the October Eclogue). This synthesis represents a move against the poetic program developed by Sidney, and a choice in favour of the poetic of du Bartas’s L’Uranie, and behind this, the poetics of continental neoplatonism.

The poetic persona’s failed attempt to describe Nature in stanzas 5-9 of Mutabilitie Canto VII ends with his referring the reader to Alan of Lille, who "perform’d the deed so as it ought" (MC 7.9.8). While this seems to suggest the failure of the invocation to gain the poet the skill necessary to describe the events in heaven, in actuality the personal insufficiency which this referral implies is feigned;
Spenser's Nature is veiled, a distinct departure from the representation of her by Alan of Lille, Chaucer and other writers who comprise the "School of Alanus" (Oruch 503). By veiling Nature, Spenser is following the poetic expressed in Macrobius' *In Somnium Scipionis*. In this work, the initiate of Nature who knows her secrets (that is, who sees Nature unclothed) must, if he wishes to express his knowledge, veil Nature in the garments of allegory and *fabulae*. Nature's veil vanishes in MC VII after Mutabilitie's long oration which, through its calendar form, expresses all the possibilities of creation "dilated" in time (Heninger 311). Mutabilitie effectively unveils Nature. Or we might say that the poet represents Nature, indirectly initiating the reader into knowledge of her through the tale of Mutabilitie. Once initiated, the reader is permitted to see the smiling face of Nature. Spenser's choice of authorities -- Chaucer and Alan -- points the way back to Macrobius. His departure from the practice of those same authorities in veiling Nature is the first clear indication that he is following a Macrobian poetic as far as the representation of Nature is concerned. The poetic principles which emerge from the invocation and the representation of Nature thus complement one another: the poetic persona acquires authority from the muse, and Spenser derives from Macrobius a methodology for the representation of Nature. It is with the persona and the muse that I shall begin.
Chapter 2: Spenser's Muse: The Authority to Write of Heaven and Earth

Spenser’s poetic, as it is expressed in MC VII, accounts for poetic activity on the basis that a muse inspires the poet, who thereby experiences not only a vision but also the skill with which to express poetically his vision. Spenser unites in the invocation of MC VII the character of the muse Urania from *The Teares of the Muses* with the revised Platonic concept of the divine inspiration of the poet, which he had used in the October Eclogue to account for poetic activity. Spenser redevelops these two concepts in accordance with the theory of the "Christian Muse" expressed in Sallust du Bartas’s *L’Uranie*. In so doing, Spenser rejects the more recent developments of poetic theory in the works of the contemporary English poetic theorists Richard Wills and Philip Sidney. The poetic of the invocation of MC VII is therefore of considerable interest as a means of fixing Spenser’s position along the spectrum of late sixteenth-century poetic theory. In this chapter, I define Spenser’s poetic as it is expressed in the invocation of MC VII, and then contrast it with the poetic expressed in Sallust du Bartas *L’Uranie*. In the following chapter, I will compare Spenser’s poetic with the theories of Richard Wills and Philip Sidney.

i. The Invocation of Mutabilitie Canto VII

In the relationship between the muse and the poetic persona (hereafter the persona), the muse is the active partner in whom poetic "power" and authority are located. The persona is dependent on the muse for the skill to write poetry and for
the authority which makes his poem an object which can command and justify a reader’s attention. The persona is conscious of this dependence, and of the frailty of his spirit. The emphasis in MC 7.7.1-2 is on the poet’s "all too human" weakness and on the looming, commanding presence of the muse. The combination of the poet’s frailty and the muse’s power produces a double effect: on the one hand, the persona’s "unworthiness" as a figure to be favoured by the muse’s attentions is highlighted; and, at the same time, the muse, by contrast with the frail poet, is made into a credible source of the authority which supports the plausibility of the persona’s narrative.

The process by which the persona is inspired is expounded in stanza two:

Yet sith I needs must follow thy behest,
Doe thou my weaker wit with skill inspire,
Fit for this turne; and in my feeble brest
Kindle fresh sparks of that immortall fire,
Which learned minds inflameth with desire
Of heavenly things: for, who but thou alone,
That are yborne of heaven and heavenly Sire,
Can tell things doen in heaven so long ygone;
So farre past memory of man that may be knowne. (MC 7.2.1-9)

The persona’s only expression of an independent will in the relationship with the muse
is the request that she inspire his wit with the poetic skill "Fit for this turne" (MC 7.2.3). The persona asks as if what is requested were the fulfilment of a contract between him and the muse: "Yet sith I needs must follow thy behest, / Doe thou my weaker wit with skill inspire" (MC 7.2.1-2). The persona is not a poetic persona from the moment the muse takes him in hand. The persona takes upon himself the task of his self-definition, as he determines not merely that he wants to "tell of heavens King" (MC 7.1.5) but also that he requires a skill to match his subject matter.

In these stanzas, the persona is represented as dependent on the muse for the ability to ascend to heaven; for the skill to write of the events which he witnesses in a manner appropriate to those events; and for the authority to convince or persuade his readers that the story of heaven which he will tell is, in fact, reliable. Through the terms of the muse-persona relationship, Spenser crafts an explanation of how he is able to write about events and characters otherwise inaccessible to the human consciousness. The muse is the source of the vision of heaven; through the muse the poet transcends his finite consciousness and is able to see the proper place of change -- Mutabilitie -- in the hierarchy of the universe. This enhancement of his consciousness allows the poet to resolve the crisis of faith precipitated by Mutabilitie's seemingly unstoppable usurpation of the rule of the creation. Thus Spenser's subjective experience of the solution of the crisis, which he expresses in his poetry, is made to have universal applicability through the fiction of the muse. The stress on the frailty and passivity of the poet effectively emphasizes the divine nature of the
knowledge which resolves the crisis and which can thus serve as guarantor of the validity of the persona’s resolution for the reader.

The two key elements of the invocation are the muse and the poet’s inspired skill. The muse is the source of the persona’s knowledge (and hence of his authority) and of the "sparks" which inspire his poetic skill. The muse is born of a heavenly sire and transports the persona to heaven, and the sparks which the persona requests her to kindle in order that he may write at a level appropriate to the subject matter derive from "... that immortal fire/ Which learned minds inflameth with desire/ Of heavenly things" (MC 7.2.4-6). The desire of these learned minds is implicitly a desire for knowledge of the heavens: this muse is the patroness of astronomers. That fact supports the identification of her as Urania, muse of astronomy. Spenser explores the character and powers of the muses, including Urania, in his early work The Teares of the Muses. This poem is therefore a convenient place from which to take a sighting of his use of the muse in the invocation.

ii. The Teares of the Muses

The Teares of the Muses was written either at the same time as the Shepheardes Calendar (c.1579), or nearer to the date of its publication in 1591. The composition date of The Teares of the Muses is thus in any case earlier than that of the Mutabilitie Cantos.¹

¹The Teares was registered by William Ponsonby in December, 1590, as part of a collection of the author’s youthful works with which the publisher sought to capitalize on the success of The Faerie Queene. The usual dating of The Teares places it near
The comparison of the invocation in Mutabilitie Canto VII with The Teares supports the view that the muse of the invocation, in inspiring the poet with a vision of the heavens, thereby inspires him with a vision of an ordered universe which prompts the persona's renewed faith. Urania in The Teares bemoans the "love of blindnesse and of ignorance" (Teares 485) which has possessed the human race, and which has thus debased the "mindes of men borne heavenlie". She is the patroness of those who, like her, find delight "In contemplation of things heavenlie wrought". Urania details the knowledge and experience which the art of astronomy embraces:

Through knowledge we behold the worlds creation,
How in his cradle first he fostred was;
And judge of Natures cunning operation,
How things she formed of a formelesse mas:
By knowledge wee do learne our selves to knowe,
And what to man, and what to God wee owe.

From hence wee mount aloft unto the skie,

to the start of Spenser's career as a poet, in the late 1570s or early 1580s. One of the arguments for this dating is the similarity in theme and tone of The Teares and the October Eclogue; both mourn the fates of the poet and poetry in a world which lacks appropriate subject matter and an appreciative audience (Heninger 109). Critics have also argued, however, that The Teares was composed much nearer to its date of publication in 1591 (Snare 32).
And looke into the Christall firmament:
There we behold the heavens great Hierarchie,
The Starres pure light, the Spheres swift movement,
The Spirites and Intelligences fayre,
And Angels waighting on th'Almightyes chayre.

And there with humble minde and high insight,
The'eternall Makers majestie wee viewe,
His love, his truth, his glorie, and his might,
And mercie more than mortall men can vew.
O soveraigne Lord, O soveraigne happinesse
To see thee, and thy mercie measurelesse. (Teares 499-516)

Her self-laudatory conclusion encapsulates the relationship between her art and human self-fulfilment: "Such happinesse have they, that doo embrace / The precepts of my heavenlie discipline" (Teares 517-18). Under her auspices, an individual gains knowledge of the heavens, of the self and the self's relationship with God, and of "Th'eternall Makers majestie" (Teares 512). The astronomer's intellectual journey ends with a vision of the Divinity and "His love, his truth, his glorie, and his might, / And mercie" (Teares 513-514). Similarly the poet in MC VII, lifted aloft as he is to heaven, acquires through inspiration the knowledge and the vision of an ordered universe which the astronomer achieves by means of study and contemplation. The
persona need not achieve a vision of God for this comparison to hold, as it is possible that he advances to some point in "heavens great hierarchie" (Teares 507), and thereby comes to know that universal order exists, even in the face of Mutabilitie's challenge of that order.

Spenser's use of the muse as the locus of power and authority in the invocation of MC VII follows the scheme of The Teares. The muse's patronage of the poet is markedly different from her relation to the astronomer. While the astronomer chooses Urania, the poet is chosen by the muse. The fact that the muses in the Teares are bemoaning humanity's rejection of them indicates that the power of choice in this poem lies with the mortal. In contrast, the poet of the Mutabilitie Cantos requests only that the muse inspire his wit with poetic skill. The muse of the invocation of MC VII is the source of both the author's authority and the poet's skill. As patroness of heavenly knowledge in The Teares, Urania has the key element which allows her to act as the poet's source of authority in the invocation of MC VII: her control over the mysteries of the universe, as these are revealed through astronomy. The transformation of Urania from a muse of astronomy and astronomers to a muse who mediates a force of inspiration from heaven to poets writing about heaven and deeds "So farre past memory of man" (MC 7.2.9), requires that a further addition be made to her character as it is sketched in The Teares. This addition is the concept of furor or inspiration, and Spenser makes it a key element of his poetics in the October Eclogue of The Shepheardes Calendar.
iii. The Shepheardes Calendar

The October Eclogue sets out a poetic in two main passages: in the introductory gloss of the work and in the dialogue between Piers and Cuddie, especially lines 79-96. S.K. Heninger takes the view that Piers and Cuddie are embodiments of Spenser's poetic personality: Piers represents Spenser the aesthetician, while Cuddie represents Spenser the practising poet who is faced with the real world problems which are connected with his attempt to make a profession of poetic composition (Heninger 86-87). I adopt this approach in the following discussion of the eclogue. The relationships between the poetic personas of Cuddie and Piers, Spenser, and the reader are similar to the relationships between the author, the poetic persona, and the reader in the invocation of MC VII (see above 1). By contrast with the invocation of MC VII, however, Spenser does not seek in the October Eclogue to blur the borders which separate the reader from the world of the fiction. The dialogue between Piers and Cuddie is fully contained within the poem, as neither of the characters directly addresses the reader, nor does Spenser use the first person voice to construct a poetic persona.

The poetic which Piers and Cuddie sketch between them establishes that poetry is winged, properly resident in heaven and connected with the wit:

Piers.

If nor in Princes pallace thou doe sitt:

(And yet is Princes pallace the most fitt)
Ne brest of baser birth doth thee embrace.
Then make thee winges of thine aspyring wit,
And, whence thou camst, flye backe to heaven apace.

Cuddie.

Ah Percy it is all to weake and wanne,
So high to sore, and make so large a flight:
Her peeced pyneons bene not so in plight,
For Colin fittes such famous flight to scanne:
He, were he not with love so ill bedight,
Would mount as high, and sing as soote as Swanne.

Piers.

Ah fon, for love does teach him climbe so hie,
And lyftes him up out of the loathsome myre:
Such immortall mirrhor, as he doth admire,
Would rayse ones mynd above the starry skiw,
And cause a caytive corage to aspire,
For lofty love doth loath a lowly eye. (Shepheardes Calendar, October 79-96)

The poetic practitioner, Cuddie, finds himself incapable of the ascent which Piers proposes, and concludes that only Colin "fittes such famous flight to scanne" (Shepheardes Calendar, October 87), although he notes that love currently mires Colin
in earthly concerns. Piers the aesthetician corrects Cuddie, arguing that love will lead Colin aloft to heaven. Colin, identified as Spenser in E.K.'s gloss, is, in Cuddie's eyes, the ideal poet who could of his own ability make the flight to heaven. Thus, in the Eclogue, the poet who can fulfil the poetic ideal is split off from the earthbound poet who cannot make the flight to heaven. This contradicts the introductory gloss, however, in which E.K. states that "In Cuddie is set out the perfect paterne of Poete". E.K. provides the following account of the perfect poet:

In Cuddie is set out the perfecte paterne of a Poete, which finding no maintenaunce of his state and studies, complayneth of the comtempte of Poetrie, and the causes thereof: Specially having bene in all ages, and even amongst the most barbarous always of singular account and honor, and being indeed so worthy and commendable an arte: or rather no arte, but a divine gift and heavenly instinct not to bee gotten by laboure and learning, but adorned with both: and poured into the witte by a certaine and celestiall inspiration, as the Author hereof els where at large discourseth, in his booke called the English Poete, which booke being lately come to my hands, I mynde also by Gods grace upon further advisment to publish. (Shepheardes Calendar, October, 88)

The perfect poet is the passive recipient of the skill and ability which "makes" him a poet. The agency which is the source of the inspiration is not identified, although
the fact that the inspiration is a "divine gift", a "heavenly instinct", and (is) "celestial" indicates that the source is in the heavens. Love is the means of Colin's ascent to heaven; Cuddie's is divine inspiration. This is, as noted earlier, a contradiction which Spenser does not resolve in this poem. It may express an unresolved tension between Platonic and Christian poetics and ideas of inspiration. In terms of the relationship between the poetic of the October Eclogue and the invocation of MC VII, this tension is not problematic, since Spenser's use of the concept of inspiration as a rationalization of poetic activity is evident. One of the poetic selves -- Cuddie, the "perfect paterne of a Poete" -- which emerges from the gloss and the October Eclogue is very similar to that of the invocation in MC VII. The poet's self-doubt which focuses attention on his humanity (cf. October Eclogue 44-46 with MC 7.1.3-4), and the essential role of inspiration as a means of accounting for the origin of the poet's skill and for the value of poetry, are common to the poetics of the invocation of MC VII and that of the eclogue. Unlike the invocation, the poetic of the eclogue does not account for the process by which inspiration makes its way from heaven and into the poet. Spenser remedies this omission in the invocation by using a muse as a mediating agent between the poet and heaven, thereby uniting elements present but unconnected in his early poetry. The poetic of divine inspiration mediated by a muse was formally expressed in a contemporary text, Sallust du Bartas's L'Uranie, a work of key importance in the development of the theory of a "Christian Muse".
iv. The Muse of Sallust du Bartas’s *L’Uranie*

The Christian poetic of inspiration is, through certain of its premises, connected with the thought of Florentine Neoplatonism, and it is this tie with Florence which sets Spenser’s poetic in the invocation at odds with those of his English contemporaries such as Philip Sidney and Richard Wills. Thus in order to set the poetic of the invocation in context, it is necessary to examine briefly the development in the 1570s and 1580s of the muse as a mediating agent between heaven and the poet. Du Bartas’s *L’Uranie* provides a convenient point of focus.

In the Renaissance, the muses -- all nine of them -- were, like Urania and her companions in *The Teares*, commonly connected with learning in "composite" works such as Friar Celepine’s *Dictionarium* (1559) (Snare 34). This identification of the muses as patrons of poetry and of other fields of knowledge was already present in Homer, Hesiod, Cicero and Virgil, and in the ancient connection between the schools of Pythagoras and Plato and the cults of the Muses (Curtius 229-230). As Curtius writes:

> [F]rom of old the Muses had been patronesses not only of poetry but also of philosophy and music. . . . [T]he consensus also placed all higher intellectual pursuits under the sign of the Muses. (230)

In Spenser’s time, the *De Musis syntagma* of Lilio Geraldi supplied Pontus de Tyard with his conception of the muses as connected with the nine divisions of knowledge
(Snare 39). According to this scheme, all knowledge could be divided into Philosophy, Rhetoric and Mathematics, and then further subdivided into three divisions for each discipline "corresponding to the nine Muses" (Snare 39). The Muses "represent knowledge as a whole" and are the "means [by] which wisdom passes from heaven into certain men" (Snare 41); thus "it is perfectly reasonable . . . for a ravished poet to perceive truth as a whole while under [the Muses'] influence" (Snare 44).

Du Bartas's *La Muse Chretienne* (1574) contains the poems *La Judith*, a divine epic, and *L'Uranie*, a "poetical plea for and defense of divine poetry" (Campbell 37). *La Judith* was translated into English by Thomas Hudson and published in Edinburgh in 1584, while *L'Uranie*, published in the same year and location, was translated by King James of Scotland. *L'Uranie* was published in 1589 in London in a French and Latin edition executed by Thomas Ashley. Du Bartas's work was known to Spenser and contemporaries such as Harvey and Sidney (Campbell 38-56). Harvey is constant in his praise of du Bartas and writes that

M.Spenser conceives the like pleasure in the fourth day of the first Weeke of Bartas. Which he esteemes as the proper profession of Urania. (Cited in Campbell, 56)

Lily B. Campbell considers it "impossible to dissociate the Urania of Du Bartas and the Urania of *The Teares of the Muses*", and argues for a close relationship between
L’Uranie and the invocation of MC VII (Campbell 56-58).

Urania, in Du Bartas’s work, enunciates a poetics in which

All art is learned by art; this art [poetry] alone
It is a heavenly gift; no flesh nor bone
Can preif the honnie we from Pinde distill,
Except with holy fyre his breest we fill.
From that spring flowes, that men of speciall chose,
Consumde in learning, and perfyte in prose . . . (cited in Campbell, 41)

Thus, when Spenser asks the muse "Doe thou my weaker wit with skill inspire / Fit for this turne" (MC 7.2.2-3) he is asking, according to du Bartas, for the elements necessary for poetic composition under Urania’s aegis. Du Bartas’s Urania also expresses the requirement that the poet be seized by a divine fury:

For, as a humane Furie, makes a man
Lesse then a man: so Devine Furie makes him
More then himselfe; and sacred Phrenzie than
Above the Heav’ns bright-flaming Arches takes him. (cited in Malpezzi 190)
This fury seizes the poet and elevates him above the earth, to the region where Urania, in *The Teares*, promises to take the learned astronomer, and to which she herself retreats in flight from an ungrateful humanity: "So loathing earth, I looke up to the sky, / And being driven hence I thither fly" (*Teares* 527-28). Save for the absence of the muse, E.K. offers the same formula in the gloss of the October Eclogue as does du Bartas: "Poetrie . . . [is] no arte, but a divine gift and heavenly instinct not to bee gotten by laboure and learning, but adorned with both: and poured into the witte by a certaine and celestiall inspiration" (*Shepheardes Calendar*, October, 89).

Frances Malpezzi comments on Du Bartas's "poetic of levitation" in terms which might be applied equally to any or all of Spenser's texts so far discussed:

[It is a poetic] strongly grounded in Renaissance Neoplatonism and in the meditative tradition, both of which seek the common goal -- the unification of the soul with God. For Du Bartas, the poet must be one who has been kindled by the Neoplatonic divine fury, his soul ravished so that it can become one with God, its source. (192)

The sort of Neoplatonism described here is that of Pontus de Tyard in *Le Solitaire Premier* and Marsilio Ficino's commentary on the *Symposium* (Malpezzi 190-192). Poetic furor and Christian faith unite in Urania; the poet can write of the heavenly realm and even about visionary experiences of God, because a muse inspires him with
divine fury. Spenser uses this same idea in the invocation of MC VII. The continental origin of this poetics is Florentine Neoplatonism, and although Malpezzi suggests that the thought of Ficino characterizes this concept of the poet, the actual elaboration of a theory of the inspired poet is made by an elder contemporary of Ficino, Cristoforo Landino (Tigerstedt 475).

Landino's reputation had declined by the mid-sixteenth-century, and in England the value of the concept of the inspired poet followed a similar decline. Poetic theories in England in the period from 1570 to 1600 were based on a conglomerate of ideas drawn from classical and Renaissance, especially Italian, sources. In this period, the concept of the poet as a maker of mimetic fictions emerged as the dominant vision. Exponents of this type of theory typically rejected the concept of the inspired poet, and thus Spenser's decision to adopt the latter concept in the invocation of MC VII places him outside of the mainstream of late sixteenth-century English poetic theory. In England, the concept of the poet as a maker of mimetic fictions was formulated in the theories of Richard Wills and Philip Sidney. In contrast to Landino's theories of poetry, the theories expressed in the De re poetica of Richard Wills and the Defence of Poesy of Philip Sidney use neither the idea of inspiration nor that of the muse as a means of rationalizing poetic activity. Wills is ambivalent about the concepts of the muse and inspiration, and Sidney rejects these ideas in favor of a firmly "secular" poetic.
In the early 1570s, poetic theory in England was in its infancy. The *De re poetica* of Richard Wills was the first attempt to compose a theoretical treatise on the art of poetry. Sidney's *Defence of Poetry*, written between 1580 and 1583 and published in 1595, emerged as the most eloquent and influential of the numerous poetic treatises composed in England in the 1580s and 1590s. The arguments of the two works, notwithstanding the greater sophistication and subtlety of The Defence, have more in common than either does with E.K.'s introductory gloss to the October Eclogue. Spenser's use of the muse and divine inspiration in the invocation of MC VII sets him at odds with the theories of Wills and Sidney. The differences between Spenser's poetic in the invocation of MC VII and the theories of Wills and Sidney will emerge from the following examination of the theories of the latter two poets.

i. Richard Wills's *De re poetica*

In 1572 Richard Wills returned to England from the continent, having left the Jesuit order in the same year. Soon after his return he began the enterprise of publishing the poems which he had composed in his youth. His *Poematum Liber* appeared between November 1573 and March 1574. The *De re poetica* was included with the poems, and Wills's intention was that it should serve as an antidote to the prevailing low reputation of poetry, hoping "that the minds of others might be inspired
by his efforts" (Wills 11). Whatever Wills's intentions were, the De re poetica offers neither a completely coherent nor a consistent theory of poetry. The work brings together three key ideas:

1) The poet is a maker of imitations in verse. The poet imitates in words "not only such things as exist, but also things which do not exist, as if they did; and represents either how they might be, or how they ought to be." (Wills 52)

2) The poet is inspired by a divine frenzy.

3) The poet teaches delightfully. What is taught covers the entire range of the other arts; delight is the soul's response to verse expressive of the divine, and of the creation's underlying harmony.

The tension in this arrangement is not -- or not primarily -- between poetry as imitation and poetry as the product of a divinely inspired poet. Instead, it is the concept of the poet as divinely inspired in a fallen universe which emerges as most problematic.

Wills first attempts to explain poetic activity on the principle that the poet is a maker of imitations in verse:

The poet, then, is the maker [effector] of an "imitation" [imitationis] in metrical form, of a work of this kind; the work itself which he produces is the poem; and poesis, is the method and design [ratio] and form [forma] of the poem. Finally there is poetry, the art [ars] by
which we are taught and trained [docemur et instituimur] in this poetic form which we have called poesis. (55-7)

The poetic enterprise is in this instance an art (ars) which is teachable and, therefore, learnable. The intercession of a divine spirit is not a part of becoming a poet, and the implication is that, given access to earthly instructors, anyone might become a poet.

Wills immediately follows this definition of poetry as a learnable art of imitation with an outline of the development of poetry in the "time when [it] first began to be cultivated" (57). In the course of this discussion, he introduces the terms inspiration and spirit (spiritus) and the idea of the descent of the divine power into the being of the poet.

The rhythmic faculty by which verses are composed appeared simultaneously with human nature itself. . . . After a loftier inspiration [spiritu] had begun to add new themes to the old ones invented long before, those who were beneath such glory, and occupied themselves only with simple narratives in verse, were called versifiers. (57-9)

Wills then widens the scope both of what is invented and of the inventing spirit:

[T] hose . . . who invented as if by a loftier spirit things which to
others remained hidden . . . those Plato calls poets. . . . For this reason some have defined the poet as a man who, inspired with a divine spirit [spiritu divino afflatus], says high things surpassingly magnificent and worthy of admiration.

Next, two kinds of poets were distinguished. The first kind are those on whom that divine power from heaven was believed to descend, either naturally and spontaneously without any conscious effort, or else simply when they made an invocation; among their number Hesiod places himself, and Homer is placed by everyone. (59)

Spenser’s invocation of the muse and E.K.’s introductory gloss of the October Eclogue exploit this tradition in order to validate the poet’s enterprise. Wills, however, distances himself from these ideas by not specifying the subject of the sentence -- "For this reason some have defined" (Wills 59) -- and by presenting the ideas as part of a historical account of the development of poetry. He uses the historicity of these ideas later in the work as the premise for a defensive, Christian rejection of the poetics of inspiration.

The tension between poetry as a learned art and poetry as a product of divine inspiration surfaces in Wills’s first thesis, "That Poetry is Superior to Other Arts" (71). He states that:

Perfection in other fields comes by teaching and study, precepts and art;
but the poet (says Cicero) has his power from nature itself, and is raised up by the energies of his mind. For this reason he says that orators are made, but poets born. And things that come to light by nature, unobscured by any shadow of vice, should be judged far more excellent and beautiful than those which are made by art. (71)

The emphasis placed on the natural origin of the poet in the passage threatens to invert the force of the earlier statement that poetry is an "art by which we are taught and trained in this poetic form which we have called poesis" (Wills 57; emphasis added). The two views are reconcilable on the (Horatian) premise that while the ability to be a poet is innate, one must, in order to fulfil this potential, cultivate natural talent with practice, learning, and discipline. Wills himself, however, does not advance this argument. He makes what seems to be an oblique allusion in this passage to the theory of the inspired poet when he writes that "the poet . . . has his power from nature itself, and is raised up by the energies of his mind" (71). He is, however, expressing an idea similar to Sidney's optimistic theory of the erected wit, within which the Sidneian poet ranges as in a zodiac (Sidney 100), rather than referring to any idea of inspiration.

Wills is most explicit about the idea of inspiration in his argument for "the effective cause" of poetry:

Of all the arts which are comprehended by the power of human genius,
only poetry is thought to proceed from divine "frenzy"; for poets recite matters, worthy of amazement and wonder, by the inspiration of some divine spirit. (73)

This is as close as Wills comes to using the doctrine of inspiration as a means of accounting for the poet's activity. As in the earlier passage in which he maintains a historical distance between himself and the concept of poetic inspiration, he retreats from the idea at this point as well. In the body of the text, the definition of poets as those who "recite matters . . . by the inspiration of some divine spirit" (73) introduces a lengthy account of Plato's discussion of poetic inspiration:

According to Cicero, Democritus denies that there are any great poets without this "frenzy" [furore] and this inspiration [spiritu], since they are true seers [vates] only just so long as they are in a state of "frenzy" [insaniunt]. For this reason Plato calls poetry a divine possession [insaniam divinam]. Now by the terms "divine frenzy" and "possession" [Divini autem furoris insaniaeque], Plato sometimes means detachment of the soul from the body, and a kind of bond, by which the soul is drawn towards Heaven and strives more vehemently. In another place he defines poetic "frenzy" [furorem] as a possession by the Muses, which arouses a chosen and compliant spirit and stirs it with songs; and fosters poetry for the right education of the human race. He says,
moreover, that any man who writes poetry without the "frenzy" of the Muses [Musarum furore] is vain and quite ridiculous, in that poetry is so precious that it cannot be produced without the very favourable will of God. And indeed Socrates (according to Plato) says: "The Muse arouses poets by divine inspiration [divino instinctu], and these poets when they are aroused seize others with frenzy [furore]." Lastly, in Phaedrus that wisest of men affirms that great poems are not the inventions of man, but the gifts of heaven. (73-75)

Fearing that he might be understood as endorsing these ideas as valid in his own time, Wills explains that

Although such things are said by these writers about this "frenzy", or possession, or poetic inspiration [furore, insania, spiritu poetica], we do not wish to be understood -- and we do not cite them with that intention -- as trying to argue that a poet will not be good unless he has clearly been insane [insaniam], even if we understand insanity in the sense in which Plato means it. This was the error and folly of the ancients, whom the Devil deluded at his will. For it is the characteristic of holy prophets, not of poets, to produce poems by divine afflatus and inspiration. But we have made use of these testimonies of the ancients, so that you may see clearly that in their judgement the
genius of poets is divine, and their art most excellent. (75-77)

Wills pulls back from his earlier assertion that "poets write matters . . . by the inspiration of some divine spirit" (73) by proceeding to discuss Plato's use of the idea. He thus shifts poetic inspiration into the pagan past, a manoeuvre which subsequently permits him to dissociate himself from it by means of a Christian condemnation of the "folly of the ancients" (77). Whereas Wills retreats from the concept of the inspired poet, E.K. in his gloss and Spenser in the October Eclogue readily employ this doctrine. Poetry, according to E.K., is "a divine gift and heavenly instinct . . . poured into the witte by a certain and celestiall inspiration" (Shepheardes Calendar, October, 88). And Spenser writes:

Piers.

Then make thee winges of thine aspyring wit,

And, whence thou camst, flye backe to heaven apace.

Cuddie.

Ah Percy it is all to weake and winne,

So high to sore, and make so large a flight:

Her peeced pyneons bene not so in plight,

For Colin fittes such famous flight to scanne (Shepheardes Calendar, October 82-87)
Wills makes one last attempt to salvage the doctrine of the inspired poet in the final pages of the *De re poetica*:

I have it on good authority that there are four kinds of "frenzy" or enthusiasm. . . . The third kind of "frenzy" is said to be that of seers, and the last is seen in poets. Democritus says that poets are so possessed not because they are out of their mind, but because they apply their mind to subjects, and enter into the passions they describe, to such an extent that they almost seem to be excited into a "frenzy", or transported to and fro by a divine inspiration and afflatus. This often happens to us, if we are concentrating on anything seriously: in a sense we do not notice what we are doing. So Aristotle has written that philosophers also are possessed, and Democritus has asserted that no one can become a great poet this side of "frenzy". (126-7)

As with his earlier projection of the doctrine into the past, where he could safely acknowledge it to have a place and yet where he could negate its validity at will with Christian rhetoric, this effort by Wills to save for the poet's benefit the authority derived from furor is a half measure which diminishes the concept as an explanation of the social value of the poet and poetry to the point of uselessness. Wills's text, however, not only attests the awareness in England as early as 1573 of a poetic centred around furor or inspiration, but also makes clear the tension between furor or
divine inspiration and Christian consciousness. It may be that Wills, by historicizing, secularizing and rationalizing furor, demonstrated to writers like Spenser that inspiration could only be useful as an explanation of poetic activity if its divine ontology was retained. For Spenser, the mediation of a muse provides a means of exalting the poet’s art and the poetic enterprise, while retaining -- indeed emphasizing -- the humanity of the poet. The poet does not summon the divine inspiration; it is forced upon him and only after this occurs does the poet request the muse to inspire him with a poetic skill adequate to the task of describing his experiences. This request, however, merely makes explicit what the doctrine of the inspiring muse assumes; that the poet receives his poetic skill from the muse. Hence the divine is neither tainted by its association with a fallen humanity, nor is it made subject to the will of humanity.

Wills’s ambivalence about whether he should accept, rationalize, or reject the idea of poetic inspiration contrasts with Sidney’s unequivocal rejection of the idea. In the Defence of Poetry, Sidney argues for a secular, earthly poetic, in which the poet’s skill is an expression of a God-given erected wit.

ii. Philip Sidney and The Defence of Poetry

Sidney’s Defence of Poetry presents too many intrinsic difficulties for any thorough treatment of it in connection with Spenser’s poetic in the invocation of MC VII. I will consider only two points at which Sidney’s poetic diverges from Spenser’s, as I have sketched the latter in the foregoing sections. In contrast with
Spenser, Sidney rejects the Florentine Neoplatonic model of the soul's ascent in a state of furor to the divine, and he identifies the source of poetic skill as the poet's "erected wit", a God given quality.

Sidney defines poetry as the highest of the arts on the grounds that it teaches and moves to virtuous action better than any of its competitors. Philosophy and history are the other claimants for the title which Sidney grants to poetry. These three disciplines are the only ones directed to "the ethic and politic consideration, with the end of well-doing and not of well-knowing only" (Sidney 104). Sidney's argument that all other sciences but poetry are mere serving sciences in the ultimate project of achieving self-knowledge underlies his rejection of the argument that knowledge can result in the "enjoying of a person's divine essence" (Sidney 104), a feat which the astronomer accomplishes in the lament of Urania in The Teares. Sidney, in rejecting these ideas, parts company with Spenser on the crucial point of the potential of the human being in this world. Sidney's mocking assessment of the astronomer who, while perusing the heavens in his vain attempt to pass beyond the confines of the earth, falls into a ditch, is a rejection of the ideal of Florentine Neoplatonism: namely, the achievement through study of a permanent state of rapt contemplation of the divine. Sidney's idea of the erected wit presents problems in light of his known protestant beliefs, but, however exalted, this wit is never in danger of leaving the confines of this world. The divinely inspired poet is, for Sidney, a phenomenon confined to the Bible, and it is to these poets alone that Sidney applies the name vates. This is not problematic for his theory since he does not propose that
the "right" poet compose such poetry. Religious poetry is, for Sidney, a viable form, but as an expression of the poet's religiosiety and the poet's desire for others to participate in the reverence of God (Sidney 137); Sidney does not argue that such poetry flows from a divine source. The poet is always in firm control, obtaining the "Idea or fore-conceit" of the work by means of his God-given erected wit, a wit within which the poet ranges as in a zodiac creating worlds like Nature and even God (who, Sidney is quick to remind us, created man in his image), but worlds as should be, not as they are (Sidney 100).\footnote{The zodiac, like the calendar form, is a symbol of totality or exhaustive possibility (Heninger 311-312).}

Sidney parts company from the doctrine of inspiration most explicitly in the course of his rehearsal of the well-worn argument that Plato, in the Republic, intends that only bad poets -- abusers of poetry, in Sidney's terms -- rather than all poets, should be banished. Sidney uses for good effect Plato's idea of the inspiration of the poet. He rejects the idea completely, stating that Plato credits poetry with even greater power than he, Sidney:

\[\ldots\] especially since he [Plato] attributeth unto Poesy more than myself do, namely, to be a very inspiring of a divine force, far above man's wit, as in the afore-named dialogue is apparent. (Sidney 130)

Plato, Sidney argues, does not reject poetry. The pagan philosopher is, in fact, an
enthusiastic supporter of poetry, to the point that his enthusiasm leads him into the erroneous belief that poetry is inspired by a divine force. By interpreting Plato's argument about the divine inspiration of poets as evidence for Plato's support of poetry, Sidney effectively neutralizes contemporary arguments against poetry which cite Plato in their support. At the same time, Sidney is still able to reject the doctrine of the inspired poet, on the grounds that Plato's judgement was in this case incorrect.

Sidney secularizes the activity of the poet. The poet's skill lies in the power of his wit, a gift of God, and particularly in the poet's ability to conceptualize patterns of virtuous action which can be figured forth in the speaking picture of poetry (Sidney 101). He makes the value of poetry rest with its power as a tool of persuasive didacticism which aims to make people act in accord with a set of prescribed ideals of behaviour. These ideals, Sidney claims, all people have inscribed within their minds. Therefore people know what is good and what is evil, and they know that it is well to do good (Sidney 113). This is the benefit of having an erected wit. The problem is that people have infected wills, which means that they desire neither to know nor to act on what they know (101 and 113). Poetry is the antidote to the infected will of human beings which, in Sidney's system, is the main obstacle to well doing. The true poet is a man whose wit does not abuse poetry (Sidney 125). The fact that the poet is able to control the presentation of the images in his poetry implies that he is able to do so because he is able to control his own mind, and in particular his imagination (Rossky 69). The poet is thus set apart from other people on the grounds of moral superiority achieved through self-control.
To summarize, the key points of divergence between Sidney and Spenser are Sidney’s rejection of the model of the poet as inspired by a divine agency or from a divine source, and his rejection of the model of the end of learning put forward by Florentine Neoplatonism. In order fully to contextualize Spenser’s poetic, it is necessary to examine the poetic theory of one of the chief representatives of this "school", Cristoforo Landino. Landino’s theories of poetry are based on the ideas which Sidney rejects: inspiration and the end of learning as the contemplation of the divinity. Spenser did not need to know Landino’s writings in order to develop the poetic theory expressed in the invocation of MC VII. It is the case, however, that Landino’s theories express most fully the concept that the poet is an inspired and God-like creator (Tigerstedt 475). A comparison of Spenser’s and Landino’s theories is therefore a convenient means of establishing Spenser’s position relative to those ideas which Sidney rejects in the Defence.
Chapter 4: Spenser's Florentine Precursor: Cristoforo Landino

Cristoforo Landino was a late fifteenth century Italian humanist and member of the (unofficial) Florentine Platonic Academy, the leading member of which was Marsilio Ficino. Landino's originality as a poetic theorist appears primarily in his argument that the poet is a semi-divine creator, an argument which he bases on a combination of Ficino's idea of the divine nature of the human soul and the concept of the divine inspiration of an individual by a muse (Tigerstedt 475). Landino's poetic represents "the fullest development of a neoplatonic aesthetic" (Heninger 178) and it rests, like that of du Bartas and other humanists (including Sidney), on the foundation of an Augustinian aesthetic, which in itself is a fusion of Christian and Platonic ideas (Heninger 195). Developed by Landino in the midst of the "discovery" of the Platonic corpus, his poetic not surprisingly reflects the Platonic more than the Christian aspect of Augustinian aesthetics, the inverse of the position adopted by du Bartas (Heninger 195). Landino's poetic thus contextualizes not only the poetic of du Bartas, but also that of Spenser, and in particular Spenser's use, in the invocation of MC VII, of the inspiring muse. Although Landino uses the muse and the idea of inspiration for a different purpose from that of Spenser, the muse performs the same mediatory role between the divine inspiration and the poet in both writers. Landino's reputation had, by the late sixteenth century, diminished greatly from the 1470s and 1480s when he was a member of the circle of Platonists connected with Ficino, yet he would still have been known in Spenser's time through his edition of the Divine
Comedy to which he prefaced three essays entitled "What is poetry and the poet, and About its Divine and very ancient origin", "The Divine Frenzy" and "That the Origin of Poets is Ancient" (Heninger 179).

Landino argues that the poet is a semi-divine creator, who creates a little world like that created by the divinity. The key distinction of the Christian concept of creation (as opposed to the Platonic, for example) is that God created from nothing, ex nihilo. This fact was a stumbling block to those Florentine neo-platonists who wished to accomplish a complete reconciliation of Platonic doctrine with Christian thought. The Platonic "maker" described in the Timeaus imposes the ideas or forms of things on an already existent matter, whereas the Christian God is believed to have been the one source of will, ideas/forms, and matter. Landino thus cannot describe the poet as a creator equal to the Christian deity; this would be an impossible achievement. At the same time, his desire to exalt the poet above all other human beings, especially those who might also be called "makers" in the Platonic sense, meant that he had to find a way to position the poet between these two concepts of creative activity. He solves this problem by using the concept of inspiration as a means of elevating the poet above the condition of the earthly, human maker:

Man makes out of matter whatever he makes. God creates out of nothing. But the poet, although he does not quite produce something out of nothing, yet, inspired by Divine madness, he does form something in an elegant song, so that he seems, by his fictions, to have
produced great and highly admirable things nearly out of nothing."

(Landini Horatii interpretationes, cited in Tigerstedt 458-9)

Landino's use of the idea of divine madness is problematic relative to traditional Platonic doctrine, insofar as this idea, as it is originally expressed in Plato's Phaedrus and Ion, describes a passive and uncreative process (Ion 533C-535C). Landino modifies this aspect of the doctrine of inspiration by drawing on Ficino's ideas of the soul expressed in the thirteenth book of Ficino's Platonic Theology on the Immortality of the Soul, and thereby accounts for the value of poetry and the semi-divine status of the poet. In simple terms, Landino appropriates Ficino's exaltation of the human soul as the middle term in the universe and restricts the application of this exaltation to the soul of the poet. Ficino argues that the human soul is the centre of the universe, immortal and set over all of creation and that man is "a privileged being, elevated over all the rest of the creation, the master of the world under God" (Tigerstedt 470-471). The semi-divine status of the soul is evidenced by the human capacity to invent different arts (in the classical and medieval sense of skills or techniques) with which human beings govern the natural world and each other (Tigerstedt 471). The best arts are those which, though useless or even harmful to the present temporal life, lead the individual's soul into proximity with the immaterial realm of the divinity: these are the liberal arts, including astronomy and poetry (Tigerstedt 471).

Landino presents his arguments in a series of commentaries on the works of
authors such as Virgil and Dante. In these, he outlines the way in which the philosopher and the poet attain the realm of the divinity, and how the poet communicates his experience. In Landino's commentaries, the philosopher seeks, through meditation and discipline, a condition of being in which he continuously contemplates the divinity. The ascent of both the philosopher's and the poet's soul to the immaterial realm is a "natural" impulse, in that the soul, prior to its birth within the corporeal body, descends from the rapt contemplation of the divinity into the prison of the corporeal body. When this takes place and the soul is born, the soul forgets the perfect knowledge which it possessed while it contemplated the divinity. For its entire existence within the body, the soul desires to return to its state of original perfection by rejoining the divinity. Thus the philosopher spends his life in an attempt to return to this condition of perfection through study and meditation. The poet returns to perfection through the blessing of the divinity; seized by furor, the poet's soul temporarily reascends to the immaterial realm. It is this experience which the poet then attempts to communicate to other people who, not having been blessed as he, still desire to return to their pre-birth condition in order to experience the perfection of the divinity, the remembered sensation of which is always within them.\(^1\)

The poet communicates his experience by means of his poetry. The divinity which the poet's soul contemplates while in the state of perfection is a perfect

\(^1\)For a discussion of Landino's ideas of the soul see the chapter entitled "Cristoforo Landino (1424-98)" in Concetta Greenfield's Humanist and Scholastic Poetics, 1250-1500, especially pages 218-220.
harmony, and the poet endeavours to express this harmony in his poetry. The model of the poet's activity is that of the divinity who, when creating the world, did so according to number, measure, and weight. This model is imitated by the poet in the proportioned arrangement of the words of the poem. The result of the soul's attempts to imitate the divine harmony is that two types of musician are born: the vulgar or unworthy poet and the poet of higher wisdom who, with measured verses "express the inner senses and feelings of their souls" (Greenfield 219). Concetta Greenfield writes:

These "musicians" excited by the Divine Spirit, write weighty and wise verses deemed poetry by Plato. Thus, poetry delights the ear not only through the sweetness of its voice, as does vulgar music, but also through its high and divine meanings and the heavenly harmony it feeds to the mind. One notes here that Landino uses the word philosophi for men of letters, and the word musici for poets, for philosophy, as will be seen, is the hidden dimension of poetry, and music is its language. The central notion remains, however, that the divine frenzy enables the poet to make poetry. (219)

In this process of inspiration and subsequent creative activity, the muse is the mediating agency which transmits the divine inspiration to the poet (Heninger 179-
The poet's inspiration is intermittent, relative to the furor\(^2\) of the philosopher. Yet the poet's experience is nonetheless valid and valuable, and is an honour to the poet rather than a detraction as it is in Plato. Thus Greenfield writes:

> While the centre of previous poetics was the figurative language of poetry and its allegorical power, Landino shifts the emphasis to the divine frenzy of the poet, born out of the soul's desire to return to the contemplation of God. (225)

Landino's and Spenser's use of the muse as a means of accounting for the process of inspiration is identical. The difference between the theories of the two writers lies in the author's role. In Landino's poetic, the process of inspiration and poetic expression serves to confirm the exalted condition of the human soul in general, but in particular it identifies the outstanding quality of the poet's soul. In Spenser, the muse and her inspiration of the poet confer prestige and authority on an author who is otherwise all too feeble and weak to compose poetry. Spenser uses the muse and the doctrine of inspiration to emphasize the human rather than the God-like status of the poet, but in so doing he is able to retain these ideas to support the social importance of the poet's role.

The muse and the doctrine of inspiration are used by Spenser to make

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\(^2\)Furor is the term which is applied to the process by which the soul lifts free of the body.
plausible the persona’s narrative of Mutabilitie’s rebellion and defeat. It thus comes as something of a surprise when Spenser defers in MC VII to Alan’s representation of Nature in the *De Planctu Naturae* as authoritative. In order to understand Spenser’s motives for doing so, it is first necessary to examine the *De Planctu Naturae* and the literary theoretical context in which it was written. The overriding influence of Macrobius’s *In Somnium Scipionis* on twelfth century literary theory and practice then requires that we devote a chapter to Macrobius’s work, in order finally to return to Spenser’s poetic theory and practice in MC VII.
Chapter 5: Spenser’s Auctor: Alan of Lille

Helen Kahin observes that if one compares the representation of Nature in Mutabilitie Canto VII and the De Planctu Naturae of Alan of Lille, then "it may be seen that many aspects of Nature are to be found in sources other than the Complaint" and that "all the items which appear in Alanus and Spenser occur in other writers as well" (Kahin 271). Kahin does not confine her examination to the physical features of Nature, but extends it to aspects of Nature’s character and to her role in the two works. She concludes that "there are general points of similarity between Spenser and Alanus, and there are also certain concrete and tangible elements which are analogous; but both the general atmosphere and concrete points of similarity may be found in other sources as well, sources which were probably more accessible to Spenser than was Alanus and which, in most cases, parallel the accounts in the Faerie Queene more completely and exactly than does De Planctu Naturae" (Kahin 272).

But what if Spenser’s reference is not to the particulars of Alan’s representation but to the methodology of which it is an example? If Spenser, in his referral of the reader to Alan of Lille in MC VII stanza 9, is approving of and adopting Alan’s methodology, then it would be possible for the representation of Nature in the two authors to be different with regard to surface details, while remaining consistent at a more general methodological level. Such a similarity would involve the definition of the author’s role, the definition and purpose of poetic composition, and the delineation of subject matter. This view is supported, I think, by Spenser’s decision to veil
Nature, a detail for which Kahin finds precedent in neither Alan nor other poets of the "School of Alanus" (270). Yet the precedent exists if Spenser found in Alan's poem a definitive example or expression of the Macrobian concept of a veiled narrative.

This hypothesis relies on the figurative sense of the word veil (Latin integumentum, involucrum) and its usage in both twelfth- and sixteenth-century literary theory. The O.E.D. cites the following example of the figurative use of the verb "to veil" meaning "to cover with (or as with) a veil":

So mought thy Redcrosse knight with happy hand
victorious be in that faire Ilands right:
Which thou dost vayle in Type of Fairy Land
Elyzas blessed field, that Albion hight.

The quotation is from a poem entitled "To the Learned Shepherd," signed by Gabriel Harvey with the pseudonym "Hobbynoll," which is found among the commendatory verses of the 1590 edition of The Faerie Queene. The sense of the word "veil" here is clear, I think. Harvey sees the poem, The Faerie Queene, and the place of which it tells as a verbal "vayle" of contemporary Elizabethan England. The poet can thus create a verbal veil which obscures something and, at the same time, reveals it. This idea, although available as a critical concept and tool from at least the time of Macrobius writing in the fifth century A.D, was first self-consciously used as a basis
for poetic composition by twelfth-century writers like Alan of Lille. Literary theorists
of the twelfth-century modified Macrobius's ideas as he expressed them in the In
Somnium Scipionis. They thereby transformed those ideas into a poetic which a
contemporary, twelfth century poet like Alan could use to rationalize and explain his
own poetic activity: In turn, Macrobius's ideas, when read through the practice of
Alan of Lille, yield a methodology which Spenser adopts (and adapts) in the
Mutabilitie Cantos.

In order to clarify Alan's poetic and its connections with the poetic of
Macrobius, it will be necessary to examine the broader context of twelfth-century
literary theory as this is revealed by two twelfth-century commentaries on Latin
writers, attributed to Bernardus Silvestris: the commentary on Martianus Capella's De
Nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii (Marriage of Philology and Mercury) and the
Commentum Bernardi Silvestri super sex libros Eneidos Virgilii (Commentary on the
First Six Books of Virgil's Aeneid).¹ In this chapter, I will begin with Alan of
Lille's poetic, before proceeding to outline twelfth-century concepts of literary theory
which were modelled on the poetic of the In Somnium Scipionis. I will complete
this examination of the ultimate sources of Spenser's poetic methodology in chapter
six, in which I consider Macrobius's In Somnium Scipionis and the ideas of the late
Latin theorists Fulgentius and Proclus.

¹Such historical connections would have been unnecessary for Spenser, however, as
Alan's poem and Macrobius's theoretical work, the In Somnium Scipionis, would have
been associated with one another through Chaucer's Parliament of Foules.
Alan of Lille employed the language of Macrobian theory both in his own interpretative work and in his poetry. In his Liber in distinctionibus dictionum theologicalium (A Work on Various Meanings of Theological Terms) he uses a three-part method of exegesis to define the literal, allegorical, and moral connotations of words, a reduced version of the more "usual" four divisions of exegesis (which included the anagogic level). Alan sets out in the introduction to his poem Anticlaudianus an interpretative scheme, in which he argues that his poem may be approached on any one of three levels, as "A Tale of Adventure, A Tale with a Moral, or An Allegory" (Sheridan 29). Sheridan calls into question the degree to which Alan conceived of his own poetry in terms of theories of allegorical interpretation:

Alan made extensive use of allegory in his interpretation of Scripture, even going so far as to maintain that a literal interpretation of Scripture would involve one in contradictions. This would lead one to expect allegory in his non-scriptural writings. Perhaps Alan was a true and genuine reformer and thought that the dream-motif and the personifications of nature, the virtues and vices which he introduced were enough to satisfy contemporary expectations of allegory in such a work. Against this, however, is the fact that he himself states that in a fabula the entire narrative is false in verbo et non in facto. (Sheridan 49).
Alan may have been a "reformer" seeking to minimize allegory in his own poetry, yet in *De Planctu Naturae* he continues to use the idea of the verbal veil as the basis for interpretation and, presumably, for the definition of his poetry and his role as poet. In response to an inquiry by the dreamer about the "aberration" of the gods recorded in the works of poets, Nature provides the following answer:

> Are you in your interrogations clothing with the garment of inquiry a question which is not worthy to lay claim to the appearance of a doubt? Are you trying to give credence to the poet's shadowy figments which the efforts of the poetic art have painted? Do not a reappraisal from more profound discernment and a more advanced treatment by philosophy erase what has been learned in the childhood cradles of poetic teaching? Do you not know how the poets present falsehood, naked and without protection of a covering, to their audiences so that, by a certain sweetness of honeyed pleasure, they may, so to speak, intoxicate the bewitched ears of their hearers? . . . Or how the poetic lyre gives a false note on the outer bark of the composition but within tells the listeners a secret of deeper significance so that when the outer shell of falsehood has been discarded the reader finds the sweeter kernel of truth hidden within?

However, at times poets combine accounts of historical events and
entertaining fables in a kind of elegant overlay so that, from an effective combination of diverse elements in their narrative, a more elegant picture may emerge. (Alan 139-140; emphasis added)

In this passage, Nature implies that poets who present "falsehood naked and without protection of a covering" do so as a means of more easily deceiving their audience. Nature argues earlier in the poem that the false tales of poets (and the false beliefs of the pagans) are, in part, responsible for the perversions of human sexuality (130-138). Yet Nature also suggests that poets can fulfil a more positive role, if they compose material in which the "outer bark of the composition" conceals a "sweet kernel of truth". The truth which such poems conceal is not defined, but Nature's earlier statement that the individual should subject the tales of poets to the "more advanced treatment by philosophy" suggests that the "sweet kernel" is a type of philosophical truth. Nature's last remark in the above passage defines a further role for the poet, one in which the poet may weave together historical and fictional narrative. Sheridan suggests that Nature may be referring "to such works as the De bello civili of Lucan" (140). The second model of poetry defined by Nature, in which truth is concealed beneath an outer shell, is the standard model which guided twelfth-century interpretation of pagan authors, as Nature herself suggests:

Because then, many men, as we know from the testimony of the poets, have misused, by a literal interpretation, the terms applied to Venus, this
account of theirs [pagan philosophers and poets] which falsely states that there is a plurality of gods or that these gods have wantoned in the playgrounds of Venus, comes to the evening and the sunset that await extreme falsehood. (141)

Nature’s emphasis on the fact that literal interpretation of pagan writers results in men’s misuse of those writings indicates the acceptance of the mode of allegorical interpretation as essential to the effort of correctly understanding a text. In more general terms, Nature is alluding to the type of literary theory current in twelfth century commentaries on Martianus Capella’s De Nuptiis and Virgil’s Aeneid. It remains to examine these commentaries, in order to establish more generally the twelfth-century definitions of authorship and poetry.

In his book Myth and Science in the Twelfth Century, Brian Stock reviews the state of twelfth-century literary theory. In the twelfth-century, commentary on non-Scriptural, primarily classical, texts was carried out on the basis of a methodology developed by theologians for the exegesis of Scripture. These commentaries on secular works distinguish between two levels of meaning: the literal and the allegorical. The literal level corresponds to the grammatical sense, while the allegorical level includes both the moral-philosophic meanings of a text and the rational or naturalistic meanings of the text. The interest of commentators in the naturalistic meanings of texts increased as newly recovered Aristotelian and Arabic scientific texts sparked and then fuelled interest in science (Stock 31-48). The twelfth-century commentary on
Martianus Capella's *De Nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii* (Marriage of Philology and Mercury), attributed to Bernardus Silvestris, is an example of the use of this sort of theory. It is possible to extract from this work a number of key literary terms:

1) A **figure** is a literary discourse which is normally called a mythical covering. There are two types: **allegoria** (theological allegory) and **integumentum** (philosophical myth).

2) Theological allegory -- **allegoria** -- is "a literary work in the form of an historical narrative, enveloping an understanding true and different from external appearance, like the struggle of Jacob." (Commentary on Capella, cited in Stock 39)

3) Philosophical myth -- **integumentum** -- is "a literary work which encloses its true significance in the form of a fictitious narrative, as in Orpheus" (Commentary on Capella cited in Stock 39; emphasis added). Philosophical myth should not be used to discuss the divinity, but one may use it to treat the soul, the heavens, or the celestial forms.

The Commentary on *De Nuptiis* thus delineates two modes of composition. **Allegoria** and **integumentum** are similar in that they both use a narrative to "envelope" or to "enclose" a second level of meaning, but they differ with regard to the topics which they treat and to their relationship with reality. **Allegoria** uses a historical covering, while **integumentum** uses a fictitious or mythical covering. This theory also maintains the separation of sacred and secular texts and of the definition of authorship connected with each:
Allegoria, says Bernardus [in the commentary on De Nuptiis], exists only in writings which express historical truth (that is, the truth of sacred history as revealed in Scripture), while integumenta are proper to the deliberate fictions of poets and philosophers. Both fable and history, integumentum and allegoria have a special function -- as Bernardus says, their "ministerium occultum" -- but they lead to truth by separate paths.

(Wetherbee 113; emphasis added)

The exact status of "truth" in Bernardus's commentary is uncertain, as Winthrop Wetherbee observes:

Bernardus does not imply any limitation in the scope of integumentum as compared with allegoria, only that its subject matter is of a different kind. . . . it is hard to detect any clear exclusiveness in Bernardus' formula. His own discussion of the World Soul seems to admit its equation with the Holy Spirit . . . . (113)

Thus, although the poet may only use a fictional narrative, or an "outer shell of falsehood" in the words of Nature in the De Planctu Naturae, he may conceal truths similar to those of a Scriptural text within that fable. The poet is conceived of in the commentary on De Nuptiis as "philosopher, prophet, and viaticum to occult
knowledge", and it is in these roles that he has access to the same hidden doctrine as does the natural philosopher (Stock 41-2). Most important, with reference to Spenser's practice in MC VII, is the fact that the poet may use a fable to treat the soul, the heavens and the celestial forms. This definition of the scope of poetic composition may be traced to Macrobius's *In Somnium Scipionis*: it is a constant element in both twelfth and sixteenth-century poetic theory and practice, which exploits the Macrobian idea of the veiled narrative.

The commentary on the first six books of the *Aeneid*, attributed to Bernardus Silvestris, employs a critical vocabulary like that of the commentary on *De Nuptiis*:

To the extent that he writes about the nature of human life, Virgil is a philosopher. His procedure is to describe allegorically by means of an integument what the human spirit does and endures while temporarily placed in the human body. Virgil uses natural order when writing about this, and thus he observes the double order of narration -- as poet, the artificial order; as philosopher, the natural order.

The integument is a type of exposition which wraps the apprehension of truth in a fictional narrative, and thus it is also called an involucrum, a cover. (Bernardus 5)

The commentary is somewhat reductive: the meaning of the *Aeneid* is set out as in an equation, as literal elements are given their allegorical values. The view that
Virgil was a philosopher who expressed truth by means of an integument -- an "outer shell of falsehood" -- encapsulates the key elements of twelfth century literary theory expressed in Alan's poetry and in the commentary on De Nuptiis: namely that the poet is also a philosopher and that the poem conceals philosophic truths beneath the literal level of meaning. These ideas are transformations of Macrobius's arguments in the In Somnium Scipionis, in which he defends the philosopher's and not the poet's use of fictional narratives to conceal philosophic truths.

Macrobius' In Somnium Scipionis is the foundation upon which the discussions of poetry in the twelfth century commentaries on De Nuptiis and the Aeneid are built. In turn, the poetic theory which these commentaries elaborate was used by writers like Alan of Lille to define their own poetic practice. In the In Somnium Scipionis, Macrobius is concerned to defend the philosopher's use of fables as a means of expressing philosophical truths. Although the twelfth century commentaries on the Aeneid and the De Nuptiis apply Macrobius's concept of the integument to the analysis of poetic texts, they still regard the truth which those texts conceal as a philosophical truth.
Chapter 6: Spenser's Veiled Source: Macrobius’s *In Somnium Scipionis*

Spenser certainly knew of Macrobius’s *In Somnium Scipionis*, since Chaucer’s *Parliament of Fowles* includes a "summary" of it. It is likely that Spenser had access to a text of the *In Somnium Scipionis*, though I know of no evidence which confirms that this was actually the case. The work was popular amongst literary theorists and commentators in the Renaissance such as Boccaccio and Landino.

Macrobius’s defense of philosophers' use of "stories" (fabulae) such as Plato’s *Myth of Er* or the Dream of Scipio is based on the analysis of the types of "stories" which philosophers may and may not use to discuss philosophical principles (truth). Two types of fabula exist: those which gratify the ear, and those which draw the reader’s attention to a certain kind of virtue. Macrobius judges the former category to be unsuitable for the philosopher’s use, and subdivides the latter group into two. The first subdivision, exemplified by the fables of Aesop, is characterized by fictitious setting and plot, and is inappropriate for use in a philosophical treatise. Macrobius defines the second group of useful stories as those which rest on a foundation of truth which is treated in fictitious style. These he calls fabulous narratives, or narrationes fabulosae (Macrobius 1.2.9). The narrationes fabulosae are of two types: those whose plots involve matters that are base and unworthy of divinities, a "type which

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1Thirty-one printed editions of the *In Somnium Scipionis* were published by the year 1585, most in Italy, France or Germany, while no edition was published during this period in England. See Stahl 61-63.
philosophers prefer to disregard altogether" (1.2.11); and those in which a decent, dignified conception of holy truths, with respectable events and characters is presented with a "modest veil of allegory" (1.2.11). This latter type is the only kind of fiction of which Macrobius approves for use by the philosopher for the handling of sacred truths. The narratio fabulosa may never be used to discuss the Good or the first cause, nor the mind or intellect, but is permitted for the discussion of the Soul, the spirits of the upper and lower air, and the gods in general (1.2.14). This is the type of poetic form which one may use when writing about Nature. In section 1.2.17-18 of the In Somnium Scipionis, Macrobius explains why such fictions are necessary and who should use them:

But concerning the rest of the gods, as I said, and the soul, philosophers turn to the mythical, not without purpose or to divert themselves, but because they know that a free, unclothed display of herself is unacceptable to Nature. For, just as she has withdrawn her meaning from the understanding of common men through the varied covering and concealment of her essential qualities, so she has decided that her secrets are to be discussed by experienced men through myth [quae sicut vulgaribus hominum sensibus intellectum sui vario rerum tegmine operimentoque subtraxit, ita a prudentibus arcana sua voluit per fabulosa tractari]. These very mysteries are hidden by the devices of allegory [figurarum cuniculis], in order that she, being Nature, may not
Macrobius argues that philosophers use the *narratio fabulosa* when speaking of Nature because they know that she finds an "unclothed" or "open" exposition of her secrets intolerable. Vision is made into a type of knowledge, as the philosopher's conceptual or spiritual vision acquired through Nature's favours is compared to the visual violation of the personified Nature by the "understanding of common men". The verbal fiction clothes Nature and protects her from the sight of the mind, just as the variegated garments clothe her nakedness from common men's view. Thus both the veil, the *varium tegmen*, and the *narratio fabulosa*, consisting of *figurarum cunicula*, are types of clothing which obscure the sight of Nature's nakedness and prevent the unmediated knowledge of Nature by either the common man or the philosopher.

Macrobius conceives of a philosopher using such fictive, verbal veils, not a poet. It is possible that Spenser simply applied to himself, as poet, all that Macrobius says of the philosopher's right and duty to deploy verbal veils when discussing Nature, and then used the muse and the modified concept of Platonic inspiration as the means of accounting for his knowledge of the mysteries of Nature. Alternatively, Spenser, on the basis of Chaucer's references to both Alan of Lille and Macrobius in the *Parliament of Fowles*, may have linked Alan's practice with Macrobius's theory. In historical terms, the way was prepared for Alan's and Spenser's use of the Macrobian *fabula* not only by the literary theory of twelfth century commentators on secular texts, but also by the thinking of such late antique
writers as Proclus and Fulgentius.

Unlike Macrobius, both Proclus and Fulgentius deal with a figure whom they regarded as a poet: Virgil. Proclus expounds the principles of late Latin Neoplatonic critical theory. In composing, the poet draws on a mental faculty which goes beyond reason. This intuitive faculty responds directly to inspiration and it is by this means that the poet's writings provide a higher vision of truth than is available through contemplation of the visible world. The truths of poetry are transcendent, having the quality of revelation, and the beauty of poetry -- its imagery and language -- is the objectified form of the beauty which accompanies revelation. The types of truths which are expressed in poetry relate to the divine, the realm of science, and ethics (Hardison 277). Proclus makes the following affirmations:

1. The poet is an inspired seer
2. Poetry is an expression of a type of revelation
3. The poetic faculty is supra-rational
4. The allegorical mode is an accommodating veil which makes it possible for the poet to communicate an expression of the experience to another person. (Hardison 277-8)

In contrast with Proclus, Fulgentius was a Christian and a commentator on Virgil, whose ideas, like those of Proclus and especially Macrobius, had an afterlife throughout the Middle Ages to the twelfth century (notably in the Commentary on the Aeneid, Books I-VI attributed to Bernardus Silvestris, see above 49-53) and even into the Renaissance (Hardison 324). Fulgentius assumes the following:
1) Poetry is a form of esoteric wisdom, which the poet conceals beneath the veil of fable.

2) The poet is an inspired, prophet-like figure, a view shared by Macrobius in the *Saturnalia* (an idea not mentioned in 1.2 of the *In Somnium Scipionis*) and by Proclus. Fulgentius calls Virgil "vates," a prophet who sees to the heart of every mystery except for the Christian mystery of the incarnation.

3) Poetic truth is revelation. This is suggested by the five instances in which the pagan Virgil's insights in the *Aeneid* parallel those of Scripture. Fulgentius's assumption echoes the views of pagan literature in Origen, Philo and Clement and is similar to Renaissance rereadings (particularly allegorical ones) of pagan texts. (Hardison 327-9)

In the writings of Proclus and Fulgentius, the poet and philosopher are united in one person, a figure who has access to the truth of Nature just as the pure philosopher has in Macrobius's *In Somnium Scipionis*. All three writers -- Macrobius, Fulgentius and Proclus -- insist that these truths are concealed in the poetry of the inspired writer, that is, concealed beneath a veil of fiction. Thus, Spenser could have found in the writings of Proclus and Fulgentius a theory of poetic practice which not only permitted the use of a veiling fiction for the representation of Nature, but which made it possible for the poet to claim an authority of vision comparable with that of
Macrobius's philosopher and initiate.²

²The addition of Proclus and Fulgentius would have enabled Spenser to adopt Macrobius' double sense of the "veil" of Nature, while still maintaining his identity as a poet (rather than a philosopher) with a legitimate claim for the authority of his vision.
In the preceding chapters it has been shown that Spenser's poetic is composed of two parts. Spenser retrieves the ideas of the muse and inspiration from his earlier poetry and uses them as a means of validating the social value of the poet and the poem. The second part of Spenser's poetic, the fictional methodology ultimately derived from Macrobius, provides him with the basis for the particular structure and shape which he gives to the Mutabilitie Cantos. Spenser's use of a Macrobian poetic is especially apparent in MC VII, and in the second half of this chapter I will consider the relationship in MC VII between methodology and practice. I will first consider Spenser's use of the muse and inspiration.

Spenser uses the muse and inspiration to validate and authorize his resolution of the problem which the finite human consciousness presents: namely, the difficulty of believing in an ordered universe when all the evidence of an individual's experience of daily life suggests the opposite conclusion. Spenser uses the poetic persona in MC VI to express how both history and the universe are understood by an individual who believes change -- Mutabilitie -- to be the ruling force in them. The narrator's voice -- the poetic persona's voice -- opens and closes the Mutabilitie Cantos, and through it Mutabilitie is represented to the reader. The persona's changing attitude towards Mutabilitie is recorded in the development of the narrative in MC VI-VIII. In MC 6.1-6, the poetic persona describes Mutabilitie:
What man that sees the ever-whirling wheele

Of Change, the which all mortall things doth sway,

but that therby doth find and plainly feele

How Mutability in them doth play

Her cruell sports, to many men's decay?

Which that to all may better yet appeare,

I will rehearse that whylome I heard say,

How she at first her selfe began to reare

Gainst all the gods, and th'empire sought from them to beare.

... first on earth she sought it [rule and dominion] to obtaine,

Where she such proode and sad examples shewed

Of her great power, to many one's great paine,

That not men onely (whom she soone subdewed)

But eke all other creatures her bad dooings rewed.

For she the face of earthly things so changed

That all which Nature had establisht first

In good estate, and in meet order ranged,

She did pervert, and all their statutes burst.

And all the world's faire frame (which none yet durst

Of gods or men to alter or misguide)
She alter'd quite, and made them all accurst
That God had blest and did at first provide
In that still happy state for ever to abide.

Ne shee [Mutabilitie] the lawes of Nature onely brake,
But eke of justice and of policie,
And wrong of right, and bad of good did make,
And death for life exchanged foolishlie;
Since which, all living wights have learn'd to die,
And all this world is waxen daily worse.
O pitiously worke of Mutabilitie!
By which we all are subject to that curse,
And death in stead of life have sucked from our nurse. (MC 6.1-6)

In these stanzas, the narrator attributes responsibility to Mutabilitie for all the evils in the world, including the Fall. In stanza 7, the narrator shifts to the present tense and relates how

... when all the earth thus she had brought
To her behest, and thralled to her might,
She gan to cast in her ambitious thought
T'attempt th'empire of the heavens' hight,
Mutabilitie, by rebelling against Jove, continues her assault upon the principle of order in the universe. Yet Spenser's representation of Mutabilitie as responsible for the Fall, death, the seeming chaos of everyday life, and the disorder of the heavens is a deliberate misrepresentation of the meaning of change. As S.P. Zitner observes, "It was the Fall of Man that set off mutability by bringing 'Death into the world and all our woe', not Mutabilitie who caused the Fall" (Zitner 18).

Nature makes this same point in her judgement against Mutabilitie in MC VII:

I well consider all that ye have sayd,
And find that all things stedfastnes doe hate,
And changed be. Yet, being rightly wayd,
They are not changed from their first estate,
But by their change their being doe dilate,
And turning to themselves at length againe,
Doe worke their owne perfection so by fate.
Then over them Change doth not rule and raigne;
But they raigne over Change, and doe their states maintaine. (MC 7.58)

In contrast with the opening stanzas of MC VI, Nature attributes responsibility for change to the creatures of the world: "... all things stedfastnes doe hate" (MC
7.58.2). Nature makes it clear that the correct assessment of the meaning of change depends upon the individual’s ability to perceive and judge correctly the observed phenomenon of daily life: "Yet, being rightly wayd, / They are not changed from their first estate" (MC 7.58.3-4; emphasis added). It logically follows that, if through such change all creatures "Doe worke their owne perfection" (MC 6.58.7), then ". . . over them Change doth not rule and raigne; / But they raigne over Change, and doe their states maintaine." (MC 6.58.8-9). In the first (and only) two stanzas of MC VIII, the narrator’s perception of the role of Mutabilitie in his own life and in the universe as a whole has changed from the opening stanzas of MC VI:

When I bethinke me on that speech whyleare
Of Mutability, and well it way,
Me seemes that though she all unworthy were
Of the heav’n’s rule, yet very sooth to say,
In all things else she beares the greatest sway.
Which makes me loath this state of life so tickle,
And love of things so vaine to cast away;
Whose flowring pride, so fading and so fickle,
Short time shall soon cut down with his consuming sickle.

Then gin I thinke on that which Nature sayd,
Of that same time when no more change shall be,
But stedfast rest of all things firmly stayd
Upon the pillars of eternity,
That is contrary to mutabilitie.
For all that moveth doth in change delight;
But thence-forth all shall rest eternally
With Him that is the God of Sabaoth hight.

O that great Sabaoth God, graunt me that Sabaoth's sight. (MC 8.1-2)

In accord with the judgement of Nature in MC 7.58, the narrator acknowledges that Mutabilitie's role within the universe is limited to the regions beneath the heavens. The narrator understands that, if correctly interpreted, change supports faith in an unchanging realm.

If the representation of Mutabilitie in MC VI and VII is read through Nature's judgement in MC 7.58, then the depiction of Mutabilitie as a destructive and rebellious force emerges as the consequence of an individual's misinterpretation of the meaning of change. The narrator's altered attitude towards Mutabilitie in MC VIII and Nature's insistence that individual judgement determines the role of Mutabilitie in the universe both emphasize the fact that Mutabilitie's rebellion and subjugation by Nature are the poetic expression of a subject's changing perspectives towards Mutabilitie. Hence MC VI represents the subject's consciousness trapped by its own limited and false perspective of the role of change within the creation, and MC VII the gradual liberation of the subject through the experience of the perspective of a
unified principle of creation: namely, Nature.

The poetic persona achieves a perspective of the universe like to that of Nature through the inspiration of the muse. The muse enables the poetic persona to transcend his finite consciousness. The fact that she is Urania, muse of astronomy, means that she is able to inspire the poet with a vision of the creation like to that of the astronomer. Spenser describes the vision of the astronomer, it will be remembered, in the *Teares*:

From hence [earth] wee [astronomer and Urania] mount aloft unto the skie,

And looke into the Christall firmament:

There we behold the heavens great *Hierarchie*,

The Starres pure light, the Spheres swift movement,

The Spirites and Intelligences fayre,

And Angels waighting on th’Almighties chayre.

And there with humble minde and high insight,

The’eternall Makers majestie wee viewe,

His love, his truth, his glorie, and his might,

And mercie more than mortall men can vew.

O soveraigne Lord, O soveraigne happinesse

To see thee, and thy mercie measurelesse (*Teares* 499-516)
Thus the persona implicitly achieves a vision of an ordered universe when he is inspired by the muse, a vision which replaces his previous perception of the universe as disordered, or ruled by Mutabilitie. Spenser combines the muse Urania from the Teares with the concept of inspiration expressed in the October Eclogue to account for the poetic persona's ability to transcend his finite consciousness. Landino uses the same concept of inspiration and the muse to account for the ascent of the poet to the immaterial realm. The poem of the inspired poet initiates within the reader an experience similar to that of the poet, whose soul returns temporarily to the immaterial realm. Thus in Landino's poetic, poetry enables the reader's soul to satisfy partially its desire to return to the immaterial realm from which it descended at the time of birth (see above 36-42). In contrast, Spenser's poet offers his poetry as a credible antidote to the doubt which arises from the individual's inability to perceive the order and the ultimate permanence of the universe. The pagan concepts of inspiration and the muse enable the Christian poet to validate his response to the challenge to faith which arises when the finite human consciousness attempts to understand the role of change in the universe.

The other element of Spenser's poetic is a fictional methodology ultimately derived from the In Somnium Scipionis. In order to convince the reader that he possesses the solution of the problem of human uncertainty, the author must modulate the expression of his vision to create within the reader a sense of the sanctity of his vision and at the same time to initiate the reader in the knowledge which has confirmed his (the author's) faith. Spenser achieves these ends by constructing a
narrative fiction -- a fable -- which simulates for and within the reader, through the experience of reading the text, the poet's successive experiences of crisis, knowledge (through "inspiration") and reaffirmation. The use of personifications of concepts -- Mutabilitie, Nature -- enables Spenser to combine the roles of poet and philosopher, as well as bridge the gap between his subjective experience and the recitation of that experience in a manner that will enable the public to participate in it. The action of the poem may thus be viewed as the externalization of an internal debate within Spenser's own mind, in which Mutabilitie is an expression of the poet's anxiety over the possibility that the universe is unordered. The poet's increasing sense of anxiety is reflected in the growing scale of Mutabilitie's rebellion in MC VI. Mutabilitie's fall commences as the poet ascends in MC VII to heaven and achieves a state of consciousness in which he is able to see the order of the universe. Spenser signals Mutabilitie's decline in MC 7.27, in which the pageant that Mutabilitie intends to serve as a proof of her argument is ushered in by Nature's sergeant, Order. The presence of Order in Mutabilitie's vision of the universe undermines her claim to rule the universe. Hence it is not unexpected when Spenser resolves the crisis of Mutabilitie's rebellion with Nature's judgement in MC 7.58-59. The persuasive force of Nature's words, however, is established only in the context of the reader's interpretation of the preceding text -- that is to say, in the context of the reader's experience and understanding of the author's vision. Isolated from the narrative, the judgement of Nature is but a philosophical abstraction with no greater claim on the reader's assent than the argument that change rules the universe. In the context of
the Mutabilitie Cantos, however, Nature's judgement is the distilled essence of the
author's experience of first lost and then renewed faith in order, permanence, and
God.

An examination of a single element of MC VII may help to demonstrate the
connection between the fictional methodology which Spenser links with the canto and
his practice therein. At the start of the canto, Nature's face is obscured by a veil:

Then forth issewed -- great goddesse -- great Dame Nature

    With goodly port and gracious Majesty,

    Being far greater and more tall of stature

    Then any of the gods or powers on hie.

    Yet certes by her face and physnomy,

    Whether she man or woman inly were,

    That could not any creature well descry;

    For with a veile that wimpled every where,

Her head and face was hid, that mote to none appeare.

That, some doe say, was so by skill devized

    To hide the terror of her uncouth hew

    From mortall eyes, that should be sore agrized,

    For that her face did like a lion shew,

    That eye of wight could not indure to view.
But others tell that it so beautious was,
And round about such beames of splendour threw,
That it the sunne a thousand times did pass,
Ne could be scene but like an image in a glass. (MC 7.5-6)

The veil prevents the persona from judging whether Nature is an agent of hope or of despair for humanity. After Mutabilitie concludes her plea for the rule of change over the universe, she asks Nature to judge whether her arguments are valid. In the following stanza, Nature pauses before delivering her verdict:

‘Now judge then, O thou greatest goddesse trew,
According as thy selfe doest see and heare,
And unto me addoom that is my dew;
That is the rule of all, all being rul’d by you.’(MC 7.56.6-9)

So having ended, silence long ensewed;
Ne Nature to or fro spake for a space,
But with firme eyes affixt, the ground still viewed.
Meane while all creatures, looking in her face,
Expecting th’end of this so doubtfull case,
Did hang in long suspence what would ensew,
To whether side should fall the souveraigne place.
At length, she looking up with chearefull view,

The silence brake, and gave her doome in speeches few. (MC 7.57.1-9)

The appearance of Nature's face and the judgement of Mutabilitie's case are linked. When the poet first looks at Nature, he speculates that either she is too terrible or too beautiful for mortal eyes. The judgement of Mutabilitie's case presents the same dichotomy: if Nature determines that Mutabilitie rules the universe, then all life ends in decay (see MC 6.6) and the "face" of the universe -- creation, Nature -- is too terrible to contemplate. If Mutabilitie is subjugated and ultimate order is upheld, then the universe is a benign environment in which human beings may live with the hope of salvation and life everlasting. That Nature's face is unveiled immediately prior to the delivery of her judgement; that her face is described as "cheareful"; and that her judgement confirms the ultimate order of the universe; these elements and their coincidence suggest that the ambiguity of Nature's appearance and the ambiguity of the constitution of the universe are expressions of one and the same idea. The persona thus gains a vision of Nature's face as the necessary adjunct of his knowledge that the universe is ordered. The "knowledge" of Nature's naked appearance and the knowledge of the true make-up of the universe are one and the same.

Spenser constructs MC VII around the literal and figurative meanings of veil, and the concept that vision is a form of knowledge and knowledge a form of sight. The persona gains a vision of Nature's face and then, almost immediately thereafter, gains the knowledge of the universe which stands at the crux of the Mutabilitie
Cantos. Nature reconciles the experience of change -- Mutabilitie -- with the concept of an ordered universe: Mutabilitie, as defined by Nature, brings about the full "dilation" of the creation within time. This relationship between unity and order and change is expressed in the poem through the relationship between Mutabilitie and Nature. Nature, when she enters the canto, is described as the ruler of all, the unity which contains all opposites:

This great grandmother of all creatures bred,

Great Nature, ever young yet full of eld,

Still mooving, yet unmoved from her sted;

Unseen of any, yet of all beheld (MC 7.13.1-4)

Mutabilitie's plea, which she commences immediately after the preceding description of Nature, is an exhaustive concordance of all creation, a point which Mutabilitie herself makes in the conclusion of her argument:

Then since within this wide, great universe

Nothing doth firme and permanent appeare,

But all things tost and turned by transverse,

What then should let but I aloft should reare

My trophee, and from all the triumph beare? (MC 7.56.1-5; emphasis added)
The symbolic exhaustiveness of the permutations of creation "dilated" within time is expressed in the calendar form of the pageant in stanzas 28-46. The twelve discrete parts of the calendar form a whole within which nothing may take place which is not accounted for by some element of the system.¹ Mutabilitie's plea unveils Nature and is the poetic expression of the principle of change reconciled with order which Nature articulates in her judgement. Thus Mutabilitie's plea, the appearance of Nature's face, and the judgement of Nature are brought together in the poem as complementary expressions of the author's "vision" of the secrets of Nature.

The author's use of Mutabilitie and her plea to unveil Nature fulfils the requirements of the Macrobian poetic. In order for Nature to be represented

¹S.K. Heninger explores the implications of the calendar form in Sidney and Spenser: The Poet as Maker:

A well-known visual motif laid out the twelve months in a continuous circle, each distinguished by a particular human activity appropriate to it, and the whole calendar was coordinated with the twelve signs of the zodiac similarly arranged in a circle. The calendar is a system composed of discrete parts, each carefully different; but yet these parts are so interrelated that they fit together to make a seamless whole. Furthermore, because these parts exhaust all possibilities within the system -- nothing can occur within the system which is not accounted for by the characteristics of one part or another part -- the whole is greater than the mere sum of the parts. The whole itself is an absolute, a wholeness, and not simply a congeries of individual items. It is a perfection, enjoying a higher level of existence than that inhabited by the parts. The whole is an infinitude, even though within boundaries -- the metaphor for infinity within the confines of that closed system. (311-312)
appropriately, the writer must cover her in the obscuring veils of a fable. Spenser introduces Nature with a veil, and then signals the figurative -- the textual -- nature of that veil through the reference to Alan of Lille. The reader must interpret the fiction in order to acquire the abstract knowledge of Nature which the writer conceals beneath the narrative. Even though Nature's veil is absent at the conclusion of the canto, and her secrets have been revealed through the plea of Mutabilitie, she is still veiled: the poem now clothes and, in the same moment, reveals her. The vision which the poet experiences while inspired by the muse is locked away in time, and can only be simulated, not reproduced, by means of a fable. The interpretation of the poem can only take the reader so far along the way to an experience similar to that of the poet -- beyond a certain point, only a muse suffices.

Thus Spenser formulates a poetic on the basis of the ideas of the muse and inspiration which accounts for the poet's uniqueness in Christian society. Although Wills and Sidney had abandoned the muse and inspiration by 1580, Spenser retrieves these ideas from his earlier work for use in what was probably his last composition. Spenser's use of the first person narrator in the Mutabilitie Cantos makes it seem as if the poet is present, relating his tale to us; but, like Nature, Spenser disappears into his fiction "whither no man whist".
Works Cited


