A STUDY OF THE POPULARITY
OF EDMUND SPENSER AS REVEALED BY ALLUSION
AND CRITICISM BETWEEN THE YEARS 1600 AND
1850, WITH AN APPENDIX ADDED TO SHOW THE
EXTENT OF SPENSER STUDY AND SCHOLARSHIP
IN LEADING NORTH AMERICAN UNIVERSITIES
AND COLLEGES TODAY

by

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...ABSTRACT...

This thesis is a study of the popularity of Edmund Spenser as revealed by allusion and criticism between the years 1600 to 1850. An appendix has been added showing the extent of Spenser study and scholarship in leading North American universities today.

I have shown that Spenser was highly regarded by the Elizabethan and Jacobean writers; was attacked by the neoclassicists; was praised without qualification by the romantics and with qualification by the later romantics; and was severely attacked by the early Victorians. Spenser's popularity, I believe, has declined not among writers but among readers, reaching its lowest point at the time of the romantics, and not regaining strength since.

The appendix contains the results of a questionnaire, sent to leading universities, concerning Spenser study and scholarship. In these institutions Spenser receives only a small fraction of the attention that is paid to Chaucer, Shakespeare and Milton. In my opinion, the results reveal the fact that, mainly because of student apathy towards him, universities are not fostering a study of Spenser.

On the whole, I think I have shown that the works of Edmund Spenser have become the property of writers and of a small group of interested scholars.
...INTRODUCTION...

No attempt has been made in this thesis to present a definitive study of Spenserian allusions and criticism. The intention has simply been to reveal the undulations of Spenser's popularity over a period of some two hundred and fifty years, with the hope that the reasons why Spenser's works are not being read to the same extent, or with the same thoroughness, as those of Shakespeare, Milton, and Chaucer, might be found. I am certain that some of these reasons, if not all, are manifest in the criticisms quoted in this essay, but, wishing to remain objective towards Spenser's art, I am forced to allow the reader to draw his own conclusions concerning this problem.

The thesis covers the years between 1600 and 1850. At the beginning I had hoped to present my data without benefit of such labels as neo-classical, pre-romantic, and romantic. But it was found impossible to do so as certain writers, distinguished by similar critical intentions, fell easily into groups, and the efficacy and convenience of labelling such groups could not be overlooked.

The reasons for concluding the thesis at the year 1850 was threefold. In the first place, if later material
was to be presented adequately the length of the thesis would have had to be doubled or, more probably, tripled. Secondly, a vast amount of later Spenser scholarship, in many cases the study of details, would have had to be taken into consideration even through such scholarship is not criticism of the type relevant to the demands of this thesis. In the third place, and most important, the trend I had been most eager to discover had already, by 1850, been firmly established. To corroborate this final point I prepared a questionnaire to determine the extent of Spenser study and scholarship today and sent it to all the leading universities and colleges of English-speaking North America. A study of this questionnaire, which is presented in an appendix at the end of the thesis, shows that the waning of Spenser's popularity is still unchecked, even though his importance is still recognized.

Heeding Spenser's advice that

Him ill beseemes, another's fault to name,
That may vnwares be blotted with the same;
(FQ, II, ix, 38)

I shall let the critics speak for themselves.
ELIZABETHAN AND JACOBEAN WRITERS: PROSE

-Literary criticism as we know it today, a separate activity akin to and aiding artistic creation, was virtually non-existent in the Elizabethan Period. However, in the random jottings of writers and in the fragmentary eulogies of poets can be seen the embryonic beginnings of criticism as an activity. There were exceptions to this but they were rare as can be seen by studying Puttenham, Ascham, Sidney, Carew, Webbe, Campion, Harvey, Nashe, and Daniel—all of whom produced comparatively brief works. Sidney, of course, in his Apologie for Poetrie, written about 1580, is the greatest critic of his age. Drayton in his verse letter to his friend Sir Henry Reynolds, "Of poets and poesy," reveals judgments about his contemporaries that are wise and sound, and one can only regret that he spent so much time on his Poly-Olbion, or in changing his Mortimeriodos into the Baron's Wars, instead of spending more time in developing his critical faculty. Many of the tracts which were "critical" dealt with that peculiar embroilment regarding quantitative and accentual metres which arose when it was
discovered that English could be a literary language - an argument interesting now only for its implications of how our verse developed.

To overlook this period in a survey of Spenser criticism, however, would be grave folly. Although there is no tract, even minor, which studies Spenser or his works as such, the brief references to him in the prose of the time and the allusions in the poetry, give us the necessary materials by which to gauge the breadth and depth of his impact upon the period. We shall find no trends. We shall find praise or censure but with few reasons given for either. It would be impossible to give every allusion and comment made about Spenser or his works. Enough should be given, however, to illustrate the importance he had among his contemporaries.

In all scholarship that is desultory certain stories and legends are interpolated that years later are disproved or held in doubt. Like Surrey and Marlowe, Spenser was not to escape the telling of tales. From John Manningham's Diary of 1602-3 we learn that

When hir Majestie had giuen order that Spenser should have a reward for his poems, but Spenser could have nothing, he presented hir with these verses:

It pleased your Grace upon a tyme
To graunt me reason for my ryme,
But from that tyme vntill this season
I heard of neither ryme nor reason.

(Touse)¹

¹ Westminster, Camden Society, J.B. Nichols, 1868, p. 43.
The story is a common one but it cannot be substantiated. That Queen Elizabeth had ordered a sum to be given to Spenser, and that he had not received it because of the intervention of one of her ministers we may accept as facts. That Spenser sent her such a piece of doggerel as protest can be doubted.

Likewise in the Jonson conversations recorded by William Drummond we are told:

That the Irish having rob'd Spenser's goods, and burnt his house and a little child new born, he and his wyfe escaped; and after he died for lake of bread in King Street, and refused 20 pieces sent to him by my Lord of Essex, and said, He was sorrie he had no time to spend them. That in that paper S. W. Raughly had of the Allegories of his Fayrie Queen, by the Blating Beast the Puritans were understood, by the false Duessa the Q. of Scots.²

The quotation remains controversial. There is no proof that there was a 'litle child', in fact it is highly doubtful. Either the paper 'Raughly had' is lost or Jonson is referring to the letter to Ralegh which was published with the first three books of the Fairie Queene. If it is the Ralegh letter it must be noted that no mention is made of either the Puritans or the Queen of Scots.³ It must be remembered that Jonson was not always accurate;


³ The Spenser-Ralegh letter itself poses interesting problems. If it was written after the first three books why is the plan in it in error? If it was written prior to these books why was the plan not changed to conform with the books when published?
once he says that Surrey was disfigured by small-pox scars when actually it was Surrey's mother who was disfigured.

Biographers have been by no means as short of materials with which to draw a picture of Spenser's life as they have been in the case of Shakespeare. But we must ask whether or not they have examined their findings closely enough to inter-relate the works of the author with his life. There are no biographies written by his contemporaries: indeed, an interest in biographical writing did not arise until the seventeenth century.

The extent of Spenser's importance as a writer of various forms of composition is well illustrated by William Lisle in his Preface to Eclogues of Virgil, (1628), when he writes that

Only Master Spenser long since translated the Gnat...giving the world peradventure to conceive that he would at one time or other have gone through the rest of this poet's works; and it is not improbable that this very cause was it that made every man else so very nice to meddle with any part of the building which he had begun, for fear to come short with disgrace of the pattern which he had set before them....

Even as late as 1628 Spenser was held to be a master translator.

Another method of gauging a poet's importance is to observe how many quotations from Spenser, verbal, or almost so, that other poets embed in their own writings. One

example will be sufficient to illustrate; as it is not a matter of import to our thesis. The following lines from the *Faerie Queene*,

Like to an Almond tree ymounted hye  
On top of greene Selinis all alone,  
With blossomes braue bedecked daintily;  
Whose tender locks do tremble every one  
At every little breath, that vnder heauen is blowne.

(I, vii, 32)

appear as follows in Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine the Great*,

Upon the lofty and celestial mount  
Of ever-green Selinus quaintly decked  
With blooms more white than Erycina's brows,  
Whose tender blossoms tremble every one,  
At every little breath through heaven is blown.

(IV, iii, 120-125)

A study of the number of times he was quoted by his contemporaries would be most valuable as it would reveal how widely and completely he was read.

The year 1579 brought the landmark publication of the *Shepheardes Calender* whose handling, experimentation and diversity of versification brought its author, Immerito, immediate fame. By 1586 when William Webbe, in his *Discourse of English Poetry*, discusses the "...many sortes of verses as may be devised differences of numbers...." he says that "To auoyde therefore tediousnesse and confusion, I wyll repeate onely the different sortes of verses out of the *Sheepheardes Calender*, which may well serve to beare authoritie in thys matter."  

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5 This may prove that Marrowe saw the manuscript of the *Faerie Queene* prior to its publication.

6 Westminster, Constable, 1895, p. 59.
The importance of the Shepheardes Calender to Spenser's age and to the development of English literature cannot be overestimated. After Spenser's death the venerable Drayton writes that "Master Edmund Spenser had done enough for the immortality of his name, had he only given us his Shepherd's Calendar, a master-piece, if any....Spenser is the prime pastoralist of England." In many ways Drayton, whose judgment is sound, is correct. It is with the Calender that Spenser's fame was assured. George Puttenham records in his Arte of English Poesie, if indeed it be his, that "For Eglogue and pastorall Poesie, Sir Philip Sydney and Maister Challenner, and that other Gentleman who wrate the late shepheardes Callender."3

To Francis Meres, Spenser was "...our famous English Poet...."9 and to Giles Fletcher he was "...our (I know no other name more glorious then his own) Mr. Edmund Spenser...."10 Jonson, in one of his interminable notes to the Masque of Queens, speaks of "...the grave and

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Although contemporary remarks concerning the output of writers or the popularity of their works are rare, we find Gabriel Harvey in his *Marginalia* reporting that "...the Countesse of Pembrokes Arcadia, & the Faerie Queene are now freshest in request: & Astrophil, & Amyntas are none of the idlest pastimes of sum fine humanists."\(^{12}\) However, as we shall see later, Harvey did not approve of the *Faerie Queene*.

Meres, whose chief fame rests in the fact that he made a listing of Shakespeare's plays, wrote in 1598, "...I say of Spenser's *Fairy Queene*, I knowe not what more excellent or exquisite Poem may be written." and, he continues, "...Spenser's *Eliza, the Fairy Queene*, hath the aduantage of all the Queenes in the worlde, to be eternized by so diuine a Poet."\(^{13}\) This is high praise indeed and it comes some eight years after the publication of Spenser's first three books of the *Faerie Queene*.

During the last years of the sixteenth century the growing pride in the English language was paralleled by a fear of the influences of foreign travel and foreign literatures. The Italianate Englishman was an object to be scorned. In 1589 Thomas Nashe writes, in his Introduction

\(^{11}\) Jonson, *op. cit.*, p. 58 n.


\(^{13}\) Meres, *op. cit.*, p. 316.
to Greene's Menaphon, that

...should the challenge of deepe conceite be intruded by any forrainer, to bring our Eng­lish wits to the touchstone of Art, I would preferre divin Master Spencer, the miracle of wit, to bandie line by line for my life, in the honour of England, against Spaine, Fraunce, Italy, and all the world.14

A list of the "...most pregnant wits of these our times, whom succeeding ages may justly admire" is made by William Camden. He writes,


Richard Carew makes a comparative listing of the leading poets and one which is interesting because of his choice of classical counterparts:


A more limited listing of poets is made in 1621 by Peter Heylyn in his Mikrokoemos, A Little Description of the Great World.

The chiefe in matter of Poesie haue bin
1 Gower, 2 Chaucer, of whom Sir Philip Sid­ney...maruailed how that man in those mistie times could see so clearely, and how we in these cleare times goe so stumblingly after


him, 3 Edmund Spencer, 4 Drayton... 17

Harvey's list in his Marginalia is limited also:

Tria viuidissima Britannorum ingenia, Chaucerus, Morus, Juellus: Quibus addo tres florentissimas in doles, Heliodum, Sidneium, Spencerum. Qui quaerit illustrioria Anglorum ingenia, inuenit obscuriora. Perpaucos excipio; eorumque primos, Smithum, Aschamum, Wilsonum; Diggesium, Blundeullum, Hacliutum, mea Corcula. 18

Later we find Harvey lamenting, using an almost new slate of writers, that there were

Not manie Chawcers, or Lidgates, Gowers or Occleues, Surries, or Heywoods, in those dayes; & how few Aschams, or Phaers, Sidneys, or Spensers, Warners or Daniels, Siluesters, or Chapmans, in this pregnant age. 19

To Spenser, Meres is one of the kindest critics:

As Theocritus is famoused for his Idyllia in Greeke, and Virgill for his Eclogys in Latine: so Spenser their imitator in his Shepheardes Calender is renowned for the like argument, and honoured for fine Poeticall inuention and most exquisit wit. 20

Meres also lists Spenser among the best of the lyric, elegiac, and pastoral poets.

Nashe in his Foure Letters Confuted also turns to classical examples but adds a note of censure -

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18 Harvey, Marginalia, p. 122.
19 Ibid., p. 231.
20 Meres, op. cit., p. 398
Homer and Virgil, two valorous Authors, yet were they neuer knighted; they wrote in Hexameter verses: Ergo, Chaucer, and Spenser, the Homer and Virgil of England, were tarre overseene that they wrote not all their Poems in Hexameter verses also.21

In Haue with yov to Saffron-Walden, however, Nashe has, with one of his characteristic twists of idea, written only the highest praise:

...Master Spencer, whom I do not thrust in the lowest place because I make the lowest valuation of, but as wee vse to set the Summ'tot' always underneath or at the bottome, he being the Sum'mtot' of whatsoever can be said of sharpe inuention and scholership.22

In 1622 George Wither warned his readers not to "...looke for Spencers or Daniels well-composed numbers; or the deepe conceits of now-flourishing Johnson"23 in his work.

Ben Jonson uses Spenser as one side of an argument against the 'common-reader.' He writes,

...if it were put to the question of the Water-rhymer's /John Taylor/ works, against Spenser's, I doubt not but they would find more suffrage; because the most favour common vices, out of a prerogative the Vulgar have to lose their judgments and like that which is naught.24

Before turning to the verse praise of Spenser we must look at the prose censure which, although slight in bulk, is generally sound in judgment.

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21 Nashe, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 299.
22 Ibid., p. 108.
24 Jonson, op. cit., p. 298.
Sir Philip Sidney touches upon Spenser's use of language, briefly and to the point, in his *Apologie for Poetrie*. He writes,

"The Shepherd's Kalender, hath much Poetrie in his Eglogues:indeede worthy the reading if I be not deceived. That same framing of his stile, to an old rustick language, I dare not alowe, sithe neyther Theocritus in Greeke, Virgill in Latine, nor Sanazar, in Italian, did affect it."  

Jonson is a little harsher when he remarks that "Spenser, in affecting the ancients, writ no language...."  

"Stronger still is Bolton's censure:"

"In verse there are Ed. Spencer's Hymns. I cannot advise the allowance of other his Poems, as for practick English, no more than I can do Jeff. Chaucer, Lydgate, Peirce Ploughman, or Laureat Skelton."  

At least Spenser has been put in good company. We can question, however, the validity of Bolton's judgment of poetry when he adds,

"My judgment is nothing at all in Poems or Poesie, and therefore I dare not go far, but will simply deliver my Mind concerning those Authours among us, whose English hath in my Conceit most propriety, and is nearest to the Phrase of Court, and to the Speech used among the noble and among the better sort in London, the two sovereign Seats and, as it were, Parliament tribunals to try the question in."  

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28 *Loc. cit.*
By 1650, the end of the period we have been using for the substance of this chapter, we find that criticism is slowly developing and maturing and acting as herald for the critical ages to come. In his "Preface" to Gondibert, Sir William Davenant writes, and we quote a long passage because of its importance to Spenser criticism, that

Spenser may stand here as the last of this short file of heroic poets; men, whose intellectuals were of so great a making, (though some have thought them liable to those few censures we have mentioned) as perhaps they will, in worthy memory, outlast, even makers of laws, and founders of empires, and all but such as must therefore live equally with them, because they have recorded their names. And since we have dared to remember those exceptions, which the curious have against them, it will not be expected I should forget what is objected against Spenser: whose obsolete language we are constrained to mention, though it be grown the most vulgar accusation that is laid to his charge.

Language (which is the only creature of man's creation) hath, like a plant, seasons of flourishing and decay; like plants, is removed from one soil to another, and by being so transplanted, doth often gather vigour and increase. But as it is false husbandry to graft old branches upon young stocks; so we may wonder that our language (not long before his time, created out of confusion of others, and then beginning to flourish like a new plant) should (as helps to its increase) receive from his hand new grafts of old withered words. But this vulgar exception shall only have the vulgar excuse; which is, that the unlucky choice of his stanza, hath, by repetition of a rhyme, brought him to the necessity of many exploded words.

If we proceed from his language to his argument, we must observe with others, that his noble and most artful hands deserved to be employed upon matter of a more natural and therefore of a more useful kind. His allegorical story (by many held defective in this
connexion). resembling (methinks) a Continuance of extraordinary dreams; such as excellent poets, and painters, by being over-studious may have in the beginning of fevers: And those moral visions are just of so much use to human application, as painted history, when with the cousenage of lights it is represented in scenes, by which we are much less informed then by actions on the stage.29

According to Drummond, it must be admitted, Jonson was more succinct when he said that "Spenser's stanzas pleased him not, nor his matter...."30 There is more in Davenant's criticism, however, than is apparent on a casual reading. His words should be kept in mind while surveying later critics. His view of language as being evolutionary is particularly acute and well phrased. We cannot, however, subscribe to his attempt to justify Spenser's use of archaic words because of the necessity of stanza and rime. In the third paragraph of the quotation Davenant may well be touching upon a matter of great importance: he may well be feeling for the reason why the Faerie Queene is little read; he may well have discovered (but not consciously) one of the sections of the chasm that separates Spenser and the reader - and in particular, for our purposes here, the modern reader. According to Davenant the value of the Faerie Queene has been lessened by the fact that it is made up of a series of vivid pictures or tableaux rather than of actions. This, however, may have been Spenser's

29 Chalmer's Poets, vol. 6, pp. 250-251.
30 Jonson, op. cit., p. 470.
intention, and, if so, its achievement is artistic.

The unknown "H.R." (if he be not Henry Reynolds) is not so harsh when he writes in this Mythomystes:

...I must approue the learned Spencer, in the rest of his Poems no lesse then his Fairy Queene, an exact body of the Ethicke doctrine; though some good iugments haue wisht, and perhaps not without cause, that he had therein beene a little freer of his fiction, and not so close rivetted to his Morall...who, in other lesse laboured things, may haue indeed more happily (howeuer, always cheerely and smoothly) written. 31

In the light of some of these statements we cannot censure the pedantic Harvey too strongly when he writes to Spenser about the portion of the Faerie Queene manuscript he had read -

In good faith I had once again nigh forgotten your FAERIE QUEENE: howbeit, by good chaunce, I haue nowe sent hir home at the laste, neithir in better nor worse case than I founde hir. And must you of necessitie haue my judgement of hir in deede: To be plaine, I am voyde of all judgement...If...the FAERY QUEENE be fairer in your eye than the NINE MUSES And HOBOBLIN runne away with the Garland from Apollo, Marke what I saye, and yet I will not say that I thought; but there an End for this once, and fare you well, till God or some good Aungell putte you in a better minde. 32

At least we must not censure Harvey in the same way as did Thomas Nashe when he wrote,

Immortall Spencer, no frailltie hath thy fame, but the Imputation of this Idiots friendship: vpon an vnspotted Pegasus should

thy gorgeous attired *Fayrie Queene* ride triumphant through all reports dominions, but that this mud-born bubble, this bile on the browe of the University, this bladder of pride newe blowne, challengeth some interest in her prosperity.33

Although his works are filled with many allusions to Spenser, Milton makes only one important reference to our poet when he congratulates "...our sage and serious Poet *Spenser*...a better teacher then [sic.] Scotus or Aquinas"34 for his description of Temperance in the *Faerie Queene*.

The success of Spenser was, as we have seen, immediate and whole-hearted. There had not been since Chaucer any poet of such stature. He burst upon the English literary scene at a most favourable time - at a time when the English language was trying to find its place as an literary medium. He was an innovator in metrics; he gave new impetus to the pastoral form; he revealed the latent musical powers of English; and he presented allegory in such a way that it attained the height of great art. It is no wonder that his contemporaries praised him highly, for he led the way to their greatness also. Spenser heralded, and was a part of, that great phenomenon, the Elizabethan Age.

There is, however, in Spenser's sudden popularity a certain incongruity. In the Arts immediate fame often presages disaster. Often an artist who gains his zenith at once is writing too much for his own time and, with

33 Nashe, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 282.

passing years and changing customs and morals, is no longer speaking to later readers in words, in ideas that are of importance to them. The writer who speaks less for his own time and more for all time is the one whose fame, though not necessarily immediate, endures and, indeed, increases. In the small amount of prose criticism of Spenser's period we find that Spenser is, on the whole, highly praised. He is praised as a translator although translation was not one of his major literary occupations. The metres of the Shapheardes Calender are used as the basis for an Elizabethan study of English metrics. Many quotations from his works are used by other contemporary writers in their works. These things reveal his popularity.

Not all the critical praise of Spenser, however, remained untinged by censure. It is extremely difficult to evaluate praise - you can acknowledge its existence and its amount, but unless you have some adverse criticism to balance against it you are at a loss for what to do with it: you may think either that the praise is justified or that it is not, but, in either case, you are basing your judgments upon your own critical analysis of the original work. On the other hand, if there is some adverse criticism to set against the praise, you can observe trends that were occurring at a certain period without calling upon your own personal critical powers to such an extent that you injure the validity of your final judgment.

The main critical attack made by Spenser's contemporaries
was against his use of language. Sidney censured Spenser for his rustic style; Jonson said he "writ no language;" and both Bolton and Davenant found his use of language to be reprehensible. Compared to most Elizabethan critics (so called) these four are of no small importance. Spenser, through the pen of the mysterious E.K., gave his reasons for his use of archaic and rustic language. These reasons may be considered to abolish any grounds for censure on the subject. But do they? Sidney, Jonson, and even Davenant were not critics who would deny a poet's right to achieve his artistic ends by any means he thinks fit - as long as those ends are achieved. Yet they dared to find fault on the very ground that Spenser had attempted to make inviolate. The use here of the trite phrase "where there's smoke, there's fire" is peculiarly fitting. These four men are saying, in effect, that Spenser's use of language hinders full and immediate appreciation of his work. Spenser says his language is necessary: they say it is bothersome. I do not wish in any way to pass judgment on this problem. I wish only that the problem be kept in mind throughout this thesis for it will occur again and again. When all the arguments are brought together the reader may be able to form his own opinion.

A second cause for censure was based on Spenser's choice of subject matter and his handling of it. To Davenant the subject matter was neither natural nor useful. He considered allegory to be the dream that arises from a
fever, and he considered moral visions to lack action. H.R. made a similar criticism. Spenser's fiction, he said, was so closely attached to his moral that it lost its freedom. Whereas one may censure Spenser's use of language on the grounds shown above even though Spenser attempted to justify its use, one had best exert great care in attacking, in the manner of Davenant and H.R., Spenser's subject matter and his handling of it. Spenser was intensely interested in his allegories and in the morals he could draw from them; his fictions were little more than outward clothing. As in the case of language, the problem of subject matter will be examined by later critics.

A third point of attack is touched upon by Davenant and has to do with the choice of the Faerie Queene stanza form. As this point will be laboured by later critics we had best wait and observe what they have to say before we set forth our findings.

These three problems, language, subject matter, and stanza form, were all raised by Spenser's contemporaries, and were problems that puzzled many later writers. Let us keep them in mind and watch how they were handled by the neo-classicists, the pre-romantics, and the romantics.

On the whole Spenser was greatly favoured by his contemporaries. In order to give a more comprehensive picture of the height of his fame and the scope of his influence it is necessary to devote a chapter to a quick survey of what was said about him in contemporary verse.
ELIZABETHAN AND JACOBEAN WRITERS: VERSE

Allusions to Spenser and his works in the poetry of his contemporaries are many: some are obscure - impossible to substantiate; some are definite - long and filled with the highest praise. In general they fall into four main classes: I, praising of Spenser; II, mourning his death; III, using his name to flatter or praise other poets; IV, calling upon him for aid or permission to write. Many of the poets who have alluded to Spenser are known to us now by name only while their works rest untouched by most readers upon library shelves or have become the personal intellectual property of scholars of the period. Some of this poetry is exceptionally bad - not poetry at all but rather poor verse. However, a quick glance at it will reveal, as did our brief survey of the prose, how widespread was Spenser's fame. In the flyleaf of his Diary John Manningham made the following jotting -

In Spenserum.

Famous alive, and dead, here is the odds,
Then God of Poets, nowe Poet of the Gods. 1

1 [1602-37], Westminster, Camden Society, J.B. Nichols, 1868, p. 2.
a sentiment which echoes the general idea of what we shall survey.

One of the earliest references in verse to Spenser is to be found in the Prologue to George Peele's *The Honour of the Garter* in which he refers to "Great Hobbinol," meaning, according to the editor, A.H. Bullen, Spenser and not Harvey.2

There is a great similarity among the allusions in class one, the praising of Spenser, but yet the individuality shown in the handling of them by various writers is interesting. In 1597 Joseph Hall makes two references to Spenser in his satires, *Virgidemiarmum*; once in direct praise;

> But let no rebell Satyre dare traduce
> Th' eternal Legends of thy Faery Muse,
> Renowned Spencer; whome no earthly wight
> Dares once to emulate, much lesse dares despight.3

and once his use of the marriage of the rivers is a distinct development of the style of Spenser's *Prothalamion*;

> They /The muses/ haunt the tyded Thames and salt Medway,
> Ere since the fame of their late Bridall day.4

The controversy about Spenser's use of rustic and archaic language is used by Everard Guilpin as a basis for impersonal praise:

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4 Ibid., p. 12, ll. 29-30.
Some blame deep Spencer for his grandam words,
Others protest that, in them he records
His maister-peece of cunning giuing praise,
And grauity to his profound-prickt layes.

The date, 1598, makes the Guilpin quotation particularly valuable: it was written only two years after the publication of the first three books of the Faerie Queene. Sidney's censure of Spenser was published one year prior to the Faerie Queene and was based entirely upon his knowledge of the Shepheardes Calender. Guilpin's lines would suggest that the controversy was widespread. Whether it was carried on by word of mouth or not we do not know: we certainly have no great number of written records of it. Therefore we may presume that the arguments were oral; that the debates were part of the tavern discussions. We may presume, however, that Spenser's works were well enough known to become matter for debate.

Richard Barnfield was no great poet but his ability to write praises of his contemporaries has brought his name and his works down to us, whereas his poetizing might otherwise have been forgotten. About the year 1598 two praises of Spenser appeared from his pen. In "If music and sweet poetry agree" he writes,

[Verse]

Spenser to me, whose deep conceit is such
As, passing all conceit, needs no defence.
Thou lov'st to hear the sweet melodious sound
That Phoebus' lute (the queen of music) makes;
And I in deep delight am chiefly drowned

Whenas himself to singing he betakes. It is possible that he "needs no defence" refers to the argument that Spenser's subject matter (in the case of the Faerie Queene) was incomprehensible.

Barnfield uses the theme of "deep conceit" again in "A remembrance of some English poets" when he says:

Live, Spenser, ever in thy Fairy Queen,
Whose like, for deep conceit, was never seen.
Crowned mayst thou be, unto they more renown,
As king of poets, with a laurel crown.

Two interesting references to Spenser appear in the two parts of The Return from Parnassus which were produced at Cambridge about the year 1600 and whose authorship is doubtfully attributed to a J. Day. In Part One Gullio says,

Not in a vaine veine (prettie, i'faith!): make mee them in two or three divers vayns, in Chaucer's, Gower's and Speenser's and Mr. Shake­speare's. Marry...0 sweet Mr. Shakespeare! I'lle have his picture in my study at the courte.

In Part Two a long section of the play is devoted to the discussion of various poets. Of Spenser, Judicio remarks,

A sweeter Swan then euersong in Poe,
A shriller Nightengale then euers blest
The prouder groves of selfe admiring Rome.
Blith was each vally, and each sneapeard proud,
While he did chaunt his rurall minstralsie.
Attentiue was full many a dainty care.
Nay, hearers hong vpon his melting tong,
While sweetly of his Faiery Queene he song,

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7 Ibid., p. 240.

While to the waters fall he tun'd [her] fame
And in each barke engrau'd Elizaes name,
And yet for all this, vnregarding soile
Vnlac't the liue of his desired life,
Denying mayntenance for his deare releife.
Carelesse [ere] to prevent his exequy,
Scarce deigning to shut vp his dying eye.

The amount of space alloted to Spenser is second to that
given John Marston who is not praised but defamed with
ribald censure. The other poets discussed are Constable,
Daniel, Lodge, Watson, Drayton, John Davis, Lok, Hudson,
Marlowe, Jonson ("The wittiest fellow of a Bricklayer in
England," p. 87), Shakespeare, Churchyard, and Nashe.

Previously Ralegh had written his famous sonnet "Me-
thought I saw the grave where Laura Lay" in which he wrote:

All suddenly I saw the Fairy Queen,
At whose approach the soul of Petrarch wept;
And from thence forth those graces were not seen,
For they this Queen attended; in whose stead
Oblivion laid him down on Laura's hearse.
Hereat the hardest stones were seen to bleed,
And groans of buried ghosts the heavens did
pierce:
Where homer's spright did tremble all for grief,
And cursed the access of that celestial thief.10

From Francis Thynne's amazing hodge-podge of personal
advice and Elizabethan ribaldry, Emplemes and Epigrames,
comes a short epigram entitled "Spenser's Fayrie Queene."

Revowmed Spenser, whose heavenlie sprite
eclipseth the sonne of former poetrie,
in whom the muses harbor with delight,
gracinge thy verse with Immortalitie,
Crowning thy fairie Queene with deitie,

9 The Pilgrimage, Pt. 2, II, ii, p. 84.

10 The Poems of Sir Walter Raleigh collected and authen-
ticated with those of Sir Henry Wotton and other courtly poets
from 1540-1650, J. Hannah, ed., London, George Bell, 1910,
p. 8.
the famous Chaucer yealds his Lawrell crowne unto thy sugred penn, for thy renowne.

Noe cankred envie cann thy fame deface, nor catinge tyme consume thy sacred vayne; noe carpinge zollus cann thy verse disgrace, nor scoffinge Momus taunt the with disdain, since thy rare worke eternall praise doth gayne; then live thou still, for still thy verse shall live to vnborne poets, which light and life will give.11

One of the most fanciful allusions to Spenser is made by Ben Jonson in his masque The Golden Age Restored [1615] where, after the following verbal fanfare -

You far-famed spirits of this happy isle, That for your sacred songs have gained the style Of Phoebus' sons, whose notes the air aspire Of th' old Egyptian or the Tracian lyre, That CHAUCER, GOWER, LIDGATE, SPENSER, hight, Put on you better flames and larger light, To wait upon the Age that shall your names new nourish, Since Virtue pressed shall grow, and buried Arts shall flourish.12

the four poets appear and take part in the entertainment and are told "To write your names in some new flower, That you may live for ever."13 at which point the masque abruptly ends, unfinished.

The poet most prolific in the praise of Spenser was William Browne who spoke of "Divinest Spenser, heav'n-bred Happy Muse!"14 and tried to follow his master faithfully in style if not in genius. His allusions are too many to be

11 [1607], London, Early English Text Society, 1876, p. 71.
13 Ibid., p. 104.
recorded here.

High praise for Spenser came from the pen of Drayton in his critical letter of 1627 to his friend Sir Henry Reynolds:

Grave morall Spenser after these came on
Then whom I am persuaded there was none
Since the blind Bard his Iliads upp'd did make
Fitter a task as like that to undertake,
To set downe boldly, bravely to invent,
In all high knowledge, surely excellent.15

A rare linking together of the names of Spenser and Shakespeare was made in 1630 by John Taylor in his "The Praise of Hemp-seed" when he remarks, in passing, that "Spenser, and Shakespeare did in Art excell."16

The last verse praise of Spenser that I shall mention here comes from Nathaniel Whiting, who wrote, in his Il Insonio Insonnadado, that

Ir'n-sinewed Talus with his steely flail
Long since 'tis right of justice did prevail
Under the sceptre of the Fairy Queen;
Yet Spenser's lofty measures makes it green.17

A peculiar poem written on the death of Sir Philip Sidney by A. W. reveals the close connection that existed between Sidney and Spenser and also retells the story of Spenser's poverty in later life. The poem "An Eclogue: Made Long Since Upon the Death of Sir Philip Sidney," is

dated 1599 and appeared in Francis Davison's *Poetical Rhapsody* of 1602. It goes, in part, as follows:

Thenot.

Ah! where is Colin, and his passing skill?
For him it fits our sorrow to fulfil.

Perin.

Tway sore extremes our Colin press so near;
Alas that such extremes should press him so!
The want of wealth, and loss of love so dear:
Scarce can he breathe from under heaps of woe;
He that bears heaven, bears no such weight, I trow.

Thenot.

Hath he such skill in making all above,
And hath no skill to get, or wealth, or love?

Perin.

Praise is the greatest prize that Poets gain,
A simple gain that feeds them ne'er a wait.
The wanton lass for whom he bare such pain,
Like running water loves to change and flit.

Ye shepherd's boys that lead your flocks afield
The whilst your sheep feed safely round about,
Break me your pipes that pleasant sound did yield;
Sing now no more the songs of Colin Clout.

Later Thenot sings:

Alack and well-a-day! may shepherds cry,
Our Willy dead, our Colin killed with care!
Who shall not loathe to live, and long to die?

Since this poem was written on the eve of Spenser's death, more or less, it brings us nicely to class two—poems written in mourning for him.

How true the story is that when Spenser was buried all the leading poets of the day wrote elegies upon his death.

19 Ibid., p. 71.
and tossed them and the pens with which they had been written into the open grave we shall never know. If the story be true then the loss to English literature is great. Besides these elegies we can presume that a large body of poetry was written about Spenser's death - a large part of which has been lost or, perhaps, not yet discovered.

One of the earliest references probably was made by John Chalkhill in his *Thealma and Clearchus*. He wrote:

Close by the river was a thick-leav'd grove,
Where swains of old sang stories of their love;
But unfrequented now since Colin died,
Colin, that king of shepherds and the pride
Of all Arcadia....

Sometime between 1603 and 1606 the aging John Lyly wrote "A true subjectts sorowe, for the loose [sic.] of his late Soueraigne," in which he mentions Spenser's death.

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20 In *Minor Poets of the Caroline Period*, vol. 2, p. 374, ll. 31-35. In a footnote Mr. Saintsbury remarks that he is not certain that the reference is to Spenser. If it is, he says, it would postdate *Thealma and Clearchus* to the beginning of the seventeenth century. I do not feel that Mr. Saintsbury's reticence is justified. There is, it must be admitted, some controversy over whether or not Chalkhill was the writer but editors favor the view that he was. He was a friend of Spenser and, as a poet, flourished around the year 1600. There seems, therefore, to be no adequate reason for needing to postdate the poem. However, the mystery around the writer remains. His other works (one or two occasional songs) were published first in Izaak Walton's *Complete Angler* in 1653, and the *Thealma* was first published in 1683 by Walton who says, in his preface, "...I have also this truth to say of the author, that he was in his time a man generally known, and as well beloved: for he was humble, and obliging in his behaviour, a gentleman, a scholar, very innocent and prudent: and indeed his whole life was useful, quiet, and virtuous." (p. 373). The fact that Chalkhill died before the completion of the *Thealma* is of no help as his death date (like his birth date) is unknown.

It is safe, however, I feel, with only one reservation, to accept the quotation as referring to Spenser - that the
Wher's Collin Clout, or Rowland now become,
That wont to leade our Shepheards in a ring?
(Ah me) the first, pale death hath strooken dombe,
The latter, none encourageth to sing.21

Probably the most famous bit of verse is the
epitaph written by William Camden:

Upon Master Edmund Spencer, the famous Poet:

At Delphos shrine one did a doubt propound,
Which by the Oracle must be released,
Whether of Poets were the best renown'd,
Those that survive, or those that be deceased.
The God made answer by divine suggestion,
While Spencer is alive it is no question.22

It was inevitable that William Browne should elegize
Spenser's death and he did so in the first book of his
Britannia's Pastorals.

Had Colin Clout yet liv'd (but he is gone),
That best on earth could tune a lover's moan,
Whose sadder tones enforc'd the rocks to weep,
And laid the greatest griefs in quiet sleep:

reference may be to the death of Colin in the Calender and not
to Spenser at all. But even so it would be far-fetched as the
names Colin and Spenser were, long before this, being inter-
changed by writers.

vol. 1, p. 516.

22 Remains Concerning Britain, edited 16747, London,
Who when he sung (as I would do to mine)
His truest loves to his fair Rosaline,
Entic'd each shepherd's ear to hear him play,
And rapt with wonder, thus admiring say:
Thrice happy plains (if plains thrice happy may be)
Where such a shepherd pipes to such a lady.
Who made the lasses long to sit down near him;
And woo'd the rivers from their springs to hear him.
Heaven rest thy soul (if so a swain may pray)
And as thy works live here, live there for aye.

In 1638 Dru. Cooper in his commendatory verses to James Shirley wrote,

When Spenser reign'd sole Prince of Poets here,
As by his Fairy Queen doth well appear,
There was not one so blind, so bold a bard,
So ignorantly proud or foolish-hard
To encounter his sweet Muse, for Phoebus vow'd
A sharp revenge on him should be so proud...

It was characteristic of the criticism of the period for comparisons to be made between a contemporary poet and a classical one. It was also characteristic that if one poet wished to flatter or praise another he compared him to a third poet or said that he had surpassed the other. This latter theme can be seen in the following poem "To Samuel Daniel" written by Francis Davison.

So, learned Daniel, when as thou didst see,
That Spenser erst so far had spread his fame,
That he was monarch deemed of Poesy,
Thou didst, I guess, even burn with jealousy,
Lest laurel were not left enough to frame
A nest sufficient for thine endless name.

... so hath thy Muse surpassed
Spenser, and all that do with hot desire
To the thunder-scorning laurel-crown aspire.

Two commendatory verses written to William Browne illustrate this comparative method. Edward Heyward, equating Browne to Spenser, writes:

Him did Nature from his birth
And the Muses single out,
For a second Colin Clout. 26

On the other hand E. Johnson in his verses prefixed to Browne's *The Shepherd's Pipe* give Browne preference to Spenser:

A poet's born, not made: no wonder then
Though Spenser, Sidney (miracles of men,
Sole English makers, whose ev'n names so high
Express by implication poesy)
Were long unparallel'd; for Nature, bold
In their creation, spent that precious mould,
That nobly better earth, that purer spirit
Which poets, as their birthrights, claim t' inherit:
And in their great production prodigal,
Careless of futures, well-nigh spent her all.
Viewing her work, conscious sh' had suffer'd wrack,
Hath caus'd our country men e'er since to lack
That better earth and form; long thrifty grown,
Who truly might bear poets; brought forth none:
Till now of late, seeing her stocks new full
(By time and thrift) of matter beautiful,
And quintessence of form, what several
Our elder poets graces had, those all
She now determin'd to unite in one,
So to surpass herself, and call'd him Browne. 27

Another characteristic of the period is a poet's desire of the aid or patronage of another. In his *Orchestra* Sir John Davies writes,

O that I could old Gefferie's Muse awake
Or borrow Colin's fayre heroike stile,
Or smooth my rimes with Delia's servants file. 28

26 Browne, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 12.
27 Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 81-82.
It can be seen again in William Smith's *Chloris* of 1596 -

Colin, my dear and most entire beloved,

My muse audacious stoops her pitch to thee;

Desiring that thy patience be not moved

By these rude lines, written here you see;²⁹

Similarly John Marston writes, "But first he must invoke good

Colin Clout."³⁰ and Browne: "And if my Muse to Spenser's
glory come, No king shall own my verses for his crown."³¹

We have, by no means, attempted to present all the
allusions to Spenser that are to be found in the verse of
his period or of the years immediately following his death.
Our endeavour, however, has been to present a number suf­
ficient to reveal his popularity and to show in what form
these allusions were presented. They fall, as stated pre­
viously, into four classes: those praising Spenser; those
mourning his death; those using his name to flatter or praise
other poets; and those asking his permission to write, as if
he were a Muse of Poetry.

Two of the three main points upon which Spenser was
critically attacked, as revealed in the last chapter, are
mentioned in these verses: John Guilpin reveals the extent
of the controversy over Spenser's use of language, and
Richard Barnfield shows, when he defends Spenser's "deep
conceit," that some controversy had arisen over the

²⁹ In *Poetry of the English Renaissance*, p. 222.
comprehensibility of Spenser's subject matter. These, however, are isolated examples, and it is not until later that verse becomes a vehicle for more serious critical analyses of Spenser's works.

Looking backward from the year 1650, we can see Spenser as a poet of immense popularity with, and immense influence upon, his fellow poets. Looking forward, however, we find a tempering of the praise and a greater amount of adverse criticism of his work. Men of letters, as they become further removed from Spenser, attempt to shuffle him into a permanent position in the ever lengthening list of English writers - but each shuffle is performed according to the literary conventions of the period in which it takes place.
CHAPTER THREE

THE NEO-CLASSICISTS

As we move into the period following 1650 many changes can be noted in the critical outlook of a new group of writers. Spenser has been dead for fifty years when the period begins; the direct influence he exerted over writers who immediately followed him (the post-Spenserians) is not as strong on the new writers; a noticeable tempering, a mellowing is taking place; Spenser is becoming a part of a great background known as the Elizabethan Age. These are, it must be admitted, general statements, but, even so, when one is viewing a large and often unwieldy topic the terms must, perforce, be general and specific terms must be used to make them comprehensible. The frequently used image that literature is like a river is often valuable. As the years slide past we can see the narrow dancing Spenserian brook widening and becoming more sluggish until it empties into the great river of literature itself - not, however, to be lost but to be noted by swirls and eddies and sometimes by a patch of rapids which gives off sparkling reflections of what once was and never can be again.
The notes of mellowing, the looking backward, can be detected as early as the year 1651 when R.C., in his remarks "To the Reader" of William Bosworth's Arcadus and Sepha, says,

His making the end of one verse to be the frequent beginning of the other, (besides the art of the trope) was the labour and delight of Mr. Edmund Spencer, whom Sir Walt Raleigh and Sir Kenelin Digby were used to call the English Virgil, and indeed Virgil himself did often use it....

Three years later Edmund Gayton in his Pleasant Notes upon Don Quixot lists the Faerie Queene as being among the romances that would be of eternal fame. Others he mentions are the Arcadia, Randolph, Gondibert, unspecified ones by Drayton, Beaumont and Fletcher, Shakespeare, and "Johnson" [Jonson]. The English romances, according to Gayton, contrary to what one might expect from the title of his book, are "...as well worthy the reading, as any in the world." Gayton's brief list would be further cut down today - perhaps to a point where only Don Quijote, Shakespeare's romances, and, possibly, the Faerie Queene would remain as part of a literature that is adequately read.

The inimitably jolly churchman Thomas Fuller, who in 1662 was to publish his History of the Worthies of England, wrote, in 1655, that Chaucer

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3 Loc. cit.
lies buried in the South-Isle of St. Peters, Westminster, and since hath got the company of
Spencer and Drayton (a pair-royal of Poets),

enough (almost) to make passengers feet to move
metrically, who go over the place, where so much Poetical dust is interred.4

James Howell also commented on the burial places in his

Londoniopolis (1657). He mentions that Spenser is next in

poetry and in grave to that "Prince of English Poets"

- Chaucer.5

In a lighter vein is "On the Time Poets," by an unknown

writer, which appeared in Choyce Drollery of 1656.

Of these sad Poets this way ran the stream,
And Decker followed after in a dream;
Rounce, Robble, Hobble, he that writ so
high big /
Basse for a Ballad, John Shank for a Jig;
Sent by Ben Jonson, as some Authors say,
Broom went before and kindly swept the way;
Old Chaucer welcomes them into the Green,
And Spenser brings them to the fairy Queen.6

Lighter still, and, perhaps, as the editors note, a hoax,
is,"To his ingenious Friend, the Author, on his incomparable

Poems. Carmen Jocoserium, SW. W.C.C. Oxon." which appeared
two years later in Samuel Austin's Naps upon Parnassus.

To thee compar'd, our English Poets all stop,
And vail their Bonnets, even Shakespeare's Falstop.
Chaucer the first of all wasn't worth a farthing,
Lidgate, and Huntingdon, with Gaffer Harding.
Non-sente the Faery Queen, and Michael Drayton,
Like Babel's Balm; or Rhymes of Edward Paiton,
Waller, and Turlingham, and brave George Sandys;
Beaumont, and Fletcher, Donne, Jeremy Candish,

4 "Church History," quoted in Caroline Spurgeon, Five
Hundred Years of Chaucer Criticism and Allusion, Ser. 2,
No. 48, Pt. 1, p. 231.


6 Quoted in Spurgeon, op. cit., Pt. 1, p. 234.
Herbert, and Cleeveland, and all the train noble
Are Saints-bells unto thee, and thou great Bowbell. 7

This bandying about of names and this use of ribaldry, as we shall see below, may be taken as a sign that Spenser is now thought of as being of the past but not yet far enough removed for him to be given some universally accepted position. It is a common fear among writers that things of the immediate past will overshadow things of the present and thus they must make some kind of attack on the near past in order to show their superiority over it.

Thomas Fuller was one of the first English biographers, and although he is exceptionally inaccurate (it might be argued that accuracy was not always possible at the time) his work is, nevertheless, exceedingly valuable. In his short biographical sketch of Spenser in this History of the Worthies of England (1662), he writes that Spenser

...became an excellent scholar; but especially most happy in English poetry, as his works do declare; in which the many Chaucerisms used (for I will not say affected by him) are thought by the ignorant to be blemishes known by the learned to be beauties, to his book; which notwithstanding had been more saleable, if more conformed to our modern language. 8

Here, once again, we are forced to view Spenser's language barrier, but, however, with the intimation that because of it the book did not sell well. That which was the barrier to Fuller should be a double barrier to us. Yet one cannot help

wondering whether the absence of the barrier would have increased the sales. Any answer to this, of course, would be mere speculation.

Repeating the story told by John Manningham, concerning the piece of daggerral sent by Spenser to Queen Elizabeth when he failed to receive her monetary reward, Fuller says that it was "commonly told and believed."\(^9\) He ends the biographical sketch with an only partially true account of Spenser's funeral and monument -

Nor must we forget, that the expense of his funeral and monument was defrayed at the sole charge of Robert, first of that name, earl of Essex.\(^{10}\)

The monument which was promised by Queen Elizabeth was not erected until 1620 and was paid for, not by Essex, but by the Countess of Dorset.

A shift of weight in the critical balances is made by Sir John Denham when he writes,

Old mother Wit, and Nature, gave
Shakespeare and Fletcher all they have;
In Spenser, and in Jonson, Art
Of slower Nature got the start;\(^{11}\)

The balance is one that we would more readily accept today - except, perhaps, in the case of Fletcher.

The still important influence of the _Faery Queene_ is revealed in Thomas Sprat's _Account of the Life of Cowley_.

He reports, of Cowley, that

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\(^9\) Fuller, _op. cit._, p. 379

\(^{10}\) Ibid., p. 380.

The occasion of his first inclination to Poetry was his casual lighting on Spenser's Fairy Queen, when he was but just able to read. That indeed is a Poem fitter for the examination of men than the consideration of a Child. But in him it met with a Fancy whose strength was not to be judged by the number of his years.\(^{12}\)

Later, in the same work, Sprat says that

...whoever would do...\(^{7}\) right should not only equal him to the Principal Ancient Writers of our own Nation \(^{7}\) Chaucer and Spenser, but should also rank his name amongst the Authors of the true Antiquity, the best of the Greeks and Romans.\(^{13}\)

An interesting bit of verse appears in a 1609 copy of the Faerie Queene; it was probably written about 1670 by the book's owner, John Hacket -

Spenser, our glorie tis' thy golden pen
Admits thee third before all other men.
Sage Homer, Virgil, Spenser Laureat
Make a poetical triumvirate.\(^{14}\)

No mention, it must be noted, is made of any other English poets.

About the same year (it is often difficult and at times impossible to date individual poems) Andrew Marvell's Satire "Tom May's Death" appeared. It included the following lines:

If that can be thy home where SPENSER lies,
And reverend CHAUCER; but their dust does rise
Against thee, and expels thee from their side,
As the eagle's plumes from other birds divide;\(^{15}\)

In 1671 Sir Thomas Culpepper gave his reasons for not

\(^{13}\) Ibid., p. 145.
using outmoded language. In his Essayes he writes,

Some have thought to honour Antiquity by using such [words] as were obsolete, as hath been done by our famous Spencer and others, though the times past are no more respected by an unnecessary continuing of their words then if wee wore constantly the same trimming to our Gleanths as they did, for it is not Speech, but things which render antiquity venerable, besides the danger of expressing no Language, if as Spencer made use of Chaucers, we should likewise introduce his...

It is disappointing that the two major critics of the period, Thomas Rymer and John Dryden, especially the latter had little to say concerning Spenser. Nevertheless, in the little they wrote, we are introduced to the critical approach of neo-classicism.

In his "Preface to the Translation of Rapin's Reflections of Aristotle's Treatise of Poesie," published in 1674, Rymer writes,

Spenser, I think, may be reckon'd the first of our Heroick Poets; he had a large spirit, a sharp judgment, and a Genius for Heroick Poesie, perhaps above any that ever writ since Virgil. But our misfortune is, he wanted a true Idea, and lost himself by following an unfaithful guide. Though besides Homer and Virgil he had read Tasso, yet he rather suffered himself to be misled by Ariosto; with whom blindly rambling on marvellous Adventures, he makes no Conscience of Probability. All is fanciful and chimerical, without any uniformity, without any foundation in truth; his Poem is perfect Fairy-land.

He then continues:

We must blame the Italians for debauching great Spencer's judgment; and they cast him

16 In Spurgeon, op. cit., pp. 247-248.
17 In Spingarm, op. cit., pp. 167-168
on the unlucky choice of the stanza, which in no wise is proper for our Language.\textsuperscript{18}

That Spenser's poem is "perfect Fairly-land" is in truth the highest praise, although not meant by Rymer to be such. The blaming of the Italians for the stanza form is to be repeated later by other critics including Dr. Johnson.

It is best at this point to depart from the chronological method of presentation being used in this chapter and to turn directly to Dryden who was, by his own admission, influenced by Rymer (but not without reservations and refutations).

In his "Dedication" to the Spanish Friar (1681), Dryden, when speaking of the "puffy style" that "looks like greatness" says, "I remember, when I was a boy, I thought inimitable Spenser a mean poet, in comparison of Sylvester's Dubartas...."\textsuperscript{19} Twelve years later in "A Discourse Concerning the Original and Progress of Satire" he makes a fuller study of Spenser. He writes,

...there is no uniformity in the design of Spenser; he aims at the accomplishment of no one action; he raises up a hero for every one of his adventures; and endows each of them with some particular moral virtue, which renders them all equal, without subordination, or preference.\textsuperscript{20}

To the modern reader this criticism is not particularly damning when it is realized that it is only a manifestation

\textsuperscript{18} Spingarn, op. cit., p. 168
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., vol. 2, p. 28.
of the prejudices of a period that was interested in such conventions as the unities and decorum. Dryden, however, continues,

...for the rest, his obsolete language, and the ill choice of his stanza, are faults but of the second magnitude; for, notwithstanding the first, he is still intelligible, at least after a little practice; and for the last, he is more to be admired, that labouring under such a difficulty, his verses are so numerous, so various, and so harmonious...21

Can these "faults" be considered difficulties for Spenser to labour under?

Dryden, in his "Dedication" to the Aeneis, returns to the question of action, and states that "Spenser has a better plea for his Fairy Queen, had his action been finished, or had been one."22 And in the "Preface" to the Sylvae he touches once more on language when he speaks about using the dialect of Theocritus - "Spenser has endeavoured it in his Shepherd's Calendar; but neither will it succeed in English; for which reason I forbore to attempt it."23

As if wishing to end any further discussion about the matter of the "rules" Dryden writes, again in the "Dedication" to Aeneis, that "Spenser wanted only to have read the rules of Bossu; for no man was ever born with a greater genius or had more knowledge to support it."24

Dryden's study of Spenser and Milton is most interesting. In the "Progress of Satire" he writes,

21 Dryden, op. cit., vol. 2 pp. 28-29
22 Ibid., p. 65
23 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 266
I found in.../Milton/ a true sublimity, lofty thoughts, which were clothed with admirable Grecisms, and ancient works, which he had been digging from the mines of Chaucer and Spenser... Spenser had studied Virgil to as much advantage as Milton had done Homer...25

A few years later in the Aeneis "Dedication" he reports that Spenser and Milton are the nearest, in English, to Virgil and Horace in the Latin; and I have endeavoured to form my style by imitating their masters.26

And ultimately in his last work in 1699, the "Preface to the Fables," he states, "Milton has acknowledged to me, that Spenser was his original..."27

It is difficult to say whether or not the criticism of this period, based on the "rules," is a sign of the widening chasm between Spenser and the reader. What the "rules" tore down has been, it must be admitted, built up again. It is difficult indeed to make any definite discovery as to whether this type of criticism had any lasting effects, or made the chasm deeper. It is doubtful whether in the end it did. We may assume that it did not.

Passing over Samuel Speed's trite praise in verse of Spenser28 we come to the interesting Soame-Dryden translation of Boileau's Art of Poetry in which Spenser is given credit by the "rules" -

Spenser did next in pastorals excel,
And taught the noble art of writing well,
To stricter rules the stanza did restrain,

25 Dryden, op. cit., vol. 2, p./ 109
26 Ibid., p. 223.
27 Ibid., p. 247
And found for poetry a richer vein.  

About the year 1680 John Aubrey wrote his brief biography of Spenser, filled (as one might expect) with hearsay evidence. He tells us that Spenser

...was an acquaintance and frequenter of Sir Erasmus Dreyden. His mistris, Rosalind, was a kinswoman of Sir Erasmus' lady's. The chamber there at Sir Erasmus' is still called Mr. Spencer's chamber. Lately, at the College taking-downe the wainscot of his chamber, they found an abundance of cards, with stanzas of the 'Faerie Queen' written on them.-- from John Dreyden, esq., Poet Laureate.  

The identity of Rosalind still remains a mystery.

Of Spenser's appearance Aubrey reports that "Mr. Beeston sayes he was a little man, wore short haire, little band and little cuffs." This is a more credible statement.

Aubrey relates a story concerning Spenser which is interesting in light of Sir William Davenant's criticism (see Chapter One). He says:

Sir John Denham told me, that archbishop Usher, Lord Primate of Armagh, was acquainted with him, by this token: when Sir William Davenant's Gondibert came forth, Sir John askt the Lord Primate if he had seen it. Said the Primate, 'Out upon him, with his vaunting preface, he speaks against my old friend, Edmund Spenser.'

The most intriguing of Aubrey's tales appears in his life of Sir Philip Sidney. The story goes as follows:

31 Ibid., p. 233.
32 Loc. cit.
Among others Mr. Edmund Spencer made his address to him, and brought his *Faery Queen*. Sir Philip was busy at his study, and his servant delivered Mr. Spencer's books to his master, who layd it by, thinking it might be such stuffe as he was frequently troubled with. Mr. Spencer stayd so long that his patience was wearied, and went his way discontented, and never intended to come again. When Sir Philip perused it, he was so exceedingly delighted with it, that he was extremely sorry he was gone, and where to send for him he knew not. After much enquiry he learned his lodging and sent for him, mightily caressed him, and ordered his servant to give him...pounds in gold. His servant sayd that that was too much; 'No,' said Sir Philip, 'he is...', and ordered an addition. From this time there was a great friendship between them, to his dying day.35

There can be no doubt that the story is false. In the first place the part about the money is similar to stories told concerning Queen Elizabeth and Spenser. In the second place if the story were true it would upset much of the dating of events in Spenser's life that has become generally accepted. It is understood that Gabriel Harvey obtained a place for Spenser in the household of Leicester in the year 1578, and during that year Spenser became acquainted with Sidney, Dyer, Greville and others and the "Aeropagus" was formed. The following year, 1579, saw the publication of the *Shepheardes Calender* and most probably the beginning of the *Faerie Queene*. It is highly doubtful whether this latter work was begun earlier, and, even if it were, whether there was enough written to make a presentation of it to Sidney at a time when Spenser was still unknown to him.

35 Aubrey, op. cit., p. 248.
In his Essay on Poetry John Sheffield (Duke of Buckinghamshire) advises the rising poet that

...he must be beyond what I can say;
Must above Tasso's lofty flights prevail,
Succeed where Spenser, and ev'n Milton fail. 34

The matter of language is revived again by Francis
Atterbury in his "Preface to the second part of Mr. Waller's
Poems, printed in 1690," when he writes,

...it is a surprising reflection, that between
what Spenser wrote last, and Waller first, there
could not be much above twenty years' distance;
and yet the one's language, like the money of
that time, is as current now as ever; whilst the
other's words are like old coins, we must go to
an antiquary to understand their true meaning
and value. 35

This appears to be an overstatement.

Sir William Temple's Essay: of Poetry, published in
1685, is an attack on Spenser's handling of subject matter
of a religious kind. He says,

The religion of the Gentiles had been woven
into the contexture of all the ancient poetry,
with a very agreeable mixture, which made the
moderns affect to give that of Christianity a
place in their poems. But the true religion
was not found to become fiction so well as a
false had done, and all their attempts of this
kind seemed rather to debase religion, than
to heighten poetry. Spencer endeavoured to
supply this with morality, and to make in-
struction, instead of story, the subject of an
Epic poem. His execution was excellent, and
his flights of fancy very noble and high,
but his design was poor, and his moral lay so
bare, that it lost the effect; 'tis true, the

34 [1682], in Chalmer's Poets, vol. 10, p. 94.

35 In The Poems of Edmund Waller, G. Thorne Drury, ed.,
pill was gilded, but so thin that the colour and the taste were too easily discovered.36

What Sir William reports is mostly true. He has, however, over-simplified the matter of the moral. He has viewed the *Faerie Queene*, it appears, as being only a religious poem and has forgotten the other implications which were set forth by Spenser himself: that it was an allegory of religion, politics, and morals. The moral of these allegories does not by any means "lay bare," nor, one fears, will it ever do so. His main point is, nevertheless, well taken, and although Spenser did not debase religion to heighten poetry, he did succeed in raising some sort of barrier (or, not to change our image in widening and deepening the chasm), by means of his dark conceits, between himself and his reader.

In 1691 someone asked *The Athenian Mercury* the question "Which is the best Poem that ever was made, and who in your Opinion, deserves the Title of the best Poet that ever was?" and an unknown writer answered as follows:

Plautus wrote wittily, Terence neatly - and Seneca has very fine thoughts. - But since we can't go through all the world, let's look home a little. Grandisire Chaucer, in spite of the Age, was a Man of as much wit, sense and honesty as any that have writ after him. Father Ben was excellent at Humour, Shakespeare deserves the Name of sweetest which Milton gave him. - Spencer was a noble poet, his Fairy-Queen as excellent piece of Morality, Policy, History. Davenant had a great genius. - Too much can't be said of Mr. Coley. Milton's *Paradise Lost* and some other Poems

of his will never be equal'd. Waller is the most correct Poet we have.37

In his "Preface to Price Arthur, An Heroick Poem," Sir Richard Blackmore attacks Spenser's use of allegory. He writes,

...Ariosto and Spencer, however great wits, not observing.../the/ judicious Conduct of Virgil, nor attending to any sober Rules, are hurried on with a boundless, impetuous Fancy over Hill and Dale, till they are both lost in a Wood of Allegories, - Allegories so wild, unnatural, and extravagant, as greatly displease the Reader.38

If one is to write allegories that conform to the "rules," Sir Richard continues, he must introduce the vices as Furies and the virtues as Goddesses or other divine persons. In this way the reader will immediately know that an allegory is intended.39

Sir Richard goes on to say, echoing but not following Aristotle, that

Probability must be in the Action, the Conduct, the Manners; and when humane /sic:/ means cannot, Machines are introduc'd to support it. Nothing is more necessary then Probability, no Rule more chastly to be observ'd.40

At least he cannot accuse Spenser of not using the technique of the Machine. Blackmore has accepted the fallacy that an allegorical romance can be fitted into a neo-classical mould. This is far from being possible as the romance is not malleable and will either itself break or cause the

37 July 11, 1691, quoted in Spurgeon, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 263.
39 Loc. cit.
40 Loc. cit.
neo-classical tools to break while they are being used to make it conform.

A somewhat large proportion of the verse of the later seventeenth century can be noted not so much for its light-hearted ribaldry as for its downright crudity and, in the case of satires, vituperation. The attacks on individual writers and on social conditions and thought are reminiscent of the Elizabethan pamphleteers. Other verse, written by writers such as Denham and Oldham, appeared obviously for the sake of its obscenity. It would seem that there were readers for this type of literature and it is conceivable that poets who would otherwise have been rejected completely as 'poets', if they had written on more conventional subjects, were popular because they versified obscenity.

One such poet, just mentioned, who practised versified vulgarity was John Oldham, who is, however, more to be remembered for his vitriolic satires. His vulgarity, although at times astonishing, is mostly redeemed by his clever presentation. One of his satires with the exceptionally long title - "A Satyr. The Person of Spenser is brought in Dissuading the Author from the Study of Poetry, and shewing how little it is esteem'd and encourag'd in this present Age" - is important enough to warrant a rather detailed study. Although the poem is not a critique, it does reveal two things of importance: in the first place, Oldham's irreverent handling of Spenser; and in the second
place, his use of Spenser as a means to present his own views about the condition of poetry of his own age.

The poem opens with a description of Spenser's ghost:

In came a ghastly Shape, all pale and thin,
As some poor Sinner, who by Priest had been
Under a long Lent's Penance, starv'd and whip'd,
Or parboil'd Lecher, late from Hot-house crept:
Famish'd his Looks appear'd, his Eyes sunk in,
Like Morning-Gown about him hung his Skin,
A Wreath of Lawrel on his Head he wore,
A Book, inscrib'd the Fairy Queen, he bore.41

Spenser is disillusioned by the treatment he has had at the hands of Poetry and exclaims,

Had I the choice of Flesh and Blood again,
To act once more in Life's tumultuous Scene;
I'd be a Porter, or a Scavenger,
A Groom, or any thing, but Poet here:

The reason for this bitterness, he continues, is that

So many now, and bad the Scribblers be,
'Tis scandal to be of the Company:
The foul Disease is so prevailing grown,
So much the Fashion of the Court and Town,
That scarce a man well-bred in either's deemed;
But who has kill'd, been often clapt, and oft has rhim'd:43

Grimly Spenser tells Oldham to

...go, have thy posted Name
Fix'd up with Bills of Quack, and publick Sham;
To be the stop of gaping Prentises,
And read by reeling Drunkards, when they piss;
Or else to be expos'd on trading Stall,
While the bulk'd Owner hires Gazzets to tell,
'Mongst Spaniells lost, that Author does not sell.44

and warns him that

42 Ibid.
43 Ibid.
44 Ibid.
...grant thy Poetry should find success, And
(which is rare) the squeamish Criticks please;
Admit, it read, and prais'd, and courted be
By this nice Age, and all Posterity;
If thou expectest ought but empty Fame;
Condemn thy Hopes, and Labours to the Flame:45

The system of patronage is also censured by Spenser's
ghost. He speaks of

...a gay wealthy Sot, who would not bail
For bare five Pounds the Author out of Jail,
Should he starve there, and rot; who if a Brief
Came out the needy Poets to relieve,
To the whole tribe would scarce a Tester give.
But fifty Guinneas for a Whore and Clap!
The peer's well us'd, and comes off wond'rous cheap:
A Poet would be dear, and out o' th' way....46

Finally, Spenser warns, "Be all but Poet, and there's
way to live."47 But seeing that Oldham is not inclined to
take his advice he bitterly remarks - "Then slighted by the
very Nursery,|May'st thou at last be forced to starve, like me."48

This brutal and vividly vulgar attack on the state of
poetry makes Oldham's attributing of the attack to Spenser
all the more remarkable, especially in light of the fact
that Spenser is usually considered to have been mild tempered
(even when his Irish views are seen to reflect a facet of
his character).

Alexander Pope, also, showed a youthful disrespect for
Spenser by using the Faerie Queene stanza form in The Alley,†

45 Oldham, op. cit.  47 Ibid.
46 Ibid.  48 Ibid.
† Joseph Warton [Essay on the Genius and Writings of
Pope, London, Dodsley, 1782, pp. 92-100] deprecates this
imitation of Spenser whose "pencil...is as powerful as that
of Rubens."
a poem which tells about the obscenities that are to be found in the low alleys of an average city.\textsuperscript{49}

Both for its confused imagery and its thought, the following passage from Samuel Cobb's \textit{Poetae Britannici} is interesting.

\begin{quote}
Sunk in the Sea of Ignorance we lay,
Till Chaucer rose, and pointed out the Day,
A joking Bard, whose Antiquated Muse
In mouldy Words could solid Sense Produce.
Our English Ennius He, who claim'd his part
In wealthy Nature, tho' unskil'd in Art.
The sparkling Diamond on his Dung-hill shines,
And Golden Fragments glitter in his Lines.
Which \textit{Spencer} gather'd for his Learning known,
And by successful Gleanings made his own.
So careful Bees on a fair Summer's Day,
Hum o'er the Flowers, and suck the sweets away.
Of \textit{Gloriana}, and her Knights he sung,
Of Beasts, which from his pregnant Fancy sprung.
O had thy Poet, \textit{Britany}, rely'd
On native Strength, and Foreign Aid deny'd!
But Chaucer's steps Religiously pursu'd.
He call'd and pick'd, and thought it greater praise
T'adore his Master, than improve his Phrase.
Twas counted Sin to deviate from his Page;
So sacred was th' Authority of Age.
The Coyn must sure for currant Sterling pass
Stamp'd with old Chaucer's Venerable Face.
But Johnson found it of a gross Alloy,
Melted it down and flung the Scum away.
He dug pure Silver from a \textit{Roman} Mine
And prest his Sacred Image on the Coyn.\textsuperscript{50}
\end{quote}

In his "Discourse on Pastorall," published in 1704, Pope makes a blazing attack on what he felt was \textit{Spenser}'s misuse of this form. The eclogues, he finds, are too long, too allegorical, and contain too much which treats of religion.

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{50} \textit{C.17007}, in Spurgeon, \textit{op. cit.}, vol. 1, pp. 271-2.
\end{flushright}
The lyric measure adopted by Spenser is not, according to Pope, in the pastoral tradition. Conciseness, he says, was forsaken by Spenser when he chose his stanza forms: Spenser would have been wiser had he chosen the couplet. 51

On the other hand, Pope declares that in manners, thoughts and characters, Spenser approaches Theocritus in excellence. But in dialect, Spenser is the inferior of the two: "... the old English and country phrases of Spenser," Pope writes,

were either entirely obsolete, or spoken only by people of the lowest condition. As there is a difference betwixt simplicity and rusticity, so the expression of simple thoughts should be plain, but not clownish. 52

Finally, Pope says that Spenser's use of calendar months is brilliant, with the reservation that months do not afford sufficient changes to make successive descriptions interesting and that Spenser was forced, therefore, to repeat his descriptions or, at times, to omit them altogether.

In the year 1709 Ambrose Philips writes that the "true nature" of pastoral poetry was hit upon by Theocritus, Virgil, and Spenser. Virgil and Spenser, however, "...made use of it as a prelude to epic poetry; but, I fear, the innocency of the subject makes it so little inviting." 53

Matthew Prior, in the same year, makes a comparison between Horace and Spenser using terms of highest praise,

51 Pope, op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 262-263.
52 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 263.
He writes,

My two great examples, Horace and Spenser, in many things resemble each other; both have a height of imagination, and a majesty of expression in describing the sublime; and both know to temper those talents, and sweeten the description, so as to make it lovely as well as pompous: both have equally that agreeable manner of mixing morality with their story, and that curiosa felicitas in the choice of their diction, which every writer aims at, and so very few have reached: both are particularly fine in their images, and knowing in their numbers. Leaving, therefore, our two masters to the consideration and study of those who design to excel in poetry....54

In The Tatler of July 6, 1710, Sir Richard Steele "Transprosed," to modify a term he borrowed from Bayes, the Tenth Canto of Book IV of the Faerie Queen for the "...benefit of many English Lovers, who have, by frequent letters, desired me to lay down some rules for the conduct of their virtuous amours."55 At the end of the "transprosed" version Steele writes,

This allegory is so natural, that it explains itself. The persons in it are very artfully described, and disposed in proper places. The posts assigned to Doubt, Delay, and Danger, are admirable. The gate of Good Desert has something noble and instructive in it. But above all I am most pleased with the beautiful group of figures in the corner of the temple. Among these, Womanhood is drawn like what the philosophers call an Universal Nature, and is attended with beautiful representatives of all those virtues that are the ornaments of the female sex, considered in its natural perfection and innocence.56


56 Ibid., p. 142.
No sign of the neo-classical reliance upon the "rules" can be detected in these words of Steele. Indeed, they show signs of the romanticism that was already becoming evident in the literature of England.

Two years later Steele again used the Faerie Queene as the subject for an article, this time in the Spectator. He says that by using fairy-land the knights-errant are given a full scope which they could not have in the real world without becoming incredible.\(^{57}\)

Of Spenser's style, Steele reports that it is "...very poetical; no puns, affectations of wit, forced antithesis, or any of that low tribe."\(^{58}\) And he upholds Spenser's use of archaic language -

His old words are all true English, and numbers, exquisite; and since of words there is the multa renascentur, since they are all proper, such a poem should not (any more than Milton's) subsist all of it of common ordinary words.\(^{59}\)

Steele is undoubtedly the forerunner of a new critical approach to Spenser.\(^{59a}\) Yet there was still one great neo-classical critic to be heard from - Samuel Johnson, But before we turn to him, and thus bring this chapter to a close, we should, in passing, mention John Gay.

In 1714, Gay, in "The Proeme to the Courteous Reader" which prefaced his Shepherd's Week, stated that he was the first English poet to write eclogues in the style of


\(^{58}\) Ibid., p. 266.

\(^{59}\) Loc. cit.

\(^{59a}\) Except for a few passing references, Steele's colleague, Addison did not treat of Spenser in the Spectator.
Theocritus notwithstanding the fact that in some ways he used Spenser as a model. Of Spenser's work he says,

"Yet hath his shepherd's boy at some times raised his rustic need to rhymes more rumbling than rural. Diverse grave points also hath he handled of churchly matter, and doubts in religion daily arising, to great clerks only appertaining. What liketh me best are his names, indeed right simple and meet for the country, such as Lobbin, Cuddy, Hobbinol, Diggen, and others, some of which I have made bold to borrow. Moreover, as he called his eclogues, the Shepherd's Calendar, and divided the same into twelve months, I have chosen (peradventure not over-rashly) to name mine by the days of the week, omitting Sunday or the Sabbath, ours being supposed to be Christian shepherds, and to be then at church-worship. Yet further of many of maister Spenser's eclogues it may be observed; though months they be called, of the said months therein nothing is specified; wherein I have also esteemed him worthy mine imitation."

This last statement should be compared with that of Pope:

Dr. Johnson, sometimes referred to as the last of the neo-classicists, barely touched upon Spenser, and yet what he has said, and has said emphatically, we can consider as a peroration to Spenser criticism in the age we have had under study. In his article "The Dangers of Imitation" which appeared in The Rambler in 1751, he wrote,

"To imitate the fictions and sentiments of Spenser can incur no reproach, for allegory is perhaps one the most pleasing vehicles of instruction. But I am very far from extending the same respect to his diction or his stanza. His style was in his own time allowed to be vicious...darkened with old words and peculiarities of phrase, and...remote from common use.... His stanza is at once difficult and unpleasing; tiresome to the ear by its uniformity, and to the attention by its length. It was at first formed

60 In Chalmer's Poets, vol. 10, p. 444.
in imitation of the Italian poets, without due regard to the genius of our language. The Italians have little variety of termination, and were forced to contrive such a stanza as might admit the greatest number of similar rhymes; but our words end with no such diversity, that it is seldom convenient for us to bring more than two of the same sound together. If it be justly observed by Milton, that a rhyme obliges the poets to express their thoughts in improper terms, these improprieties must always be multiplied, as the difficulty of rhyme is increased by long concatenations. 61

He then continued,

Perhaps, however, the style of Spencer might by long labour be justly copied; but life is surely given us for higher purposes than to gather what our ancestors have wisely thrown away and to learn what is of no value, but because it has been forgotten. 62

The hundred years surveyed in this chapter have revealed many critical differences. At the beginning of the period we can note the change-over from the Elizabethan spontaneity - which survived in the Restoration - to the rationalism of the neo-classical period; and at the end we have Steele heralding the praise of the pre-romantics. During this hundred years, also, we find a certain lightness creeping into the verse allusions to Spenser, and, soon afterwards, a note of obscenity replacing the lightness. In this period, a greater interest in biography which, although the details presented are often far from factual, illustrates the interest in poets as men as well as artists.

In the years immediately following 1650 there is a

62 Ibid., p. 97.
distinct trend of looking backwards at the great age that had gone before and of attempting to put the mass of Elizabethan writers into some order. Writers at this early stage, however, do not reach definite conclusions; they rather reveal a fear that they are not yet far enough removed from their subject to deal properly with it. There is a tendency in some of these writers to laugh off the great age as if, by their laughing, they are showing their superiority over their illustrious predecessors. Others like to corroborate their statements with illustrations of similar things said by their predecessors. Criticism is as yet in its infancy and will not show signs of maturity until the advent of Rymer and, more especially, of Dryden.

Biography is in its infancy also. It is not biography as we know it today. It consists, usually, of brief jottings concerning a writer; a few dates; birth and death places; one or two anecdotes of a fictional rather than factual nature; and, sometimes, a thinly critical note about the writer's works. As a class, these works are rather interesting, because of their revelation of what readers wanted to know, than important. Notwithstanding their inaccuracies, they illustrate the temper of the time in which they were written.

When we come to Rymer and Dryden we at once realize that we have found men who approach criticism as more than a secondary occupation. We also realize that we have met the rising tide of neo-classicism with its emphasis upon
the rules and other conventions and demands.

During this hundred-year period there are ever-increasing attacks made on Spenser's use of language, his subject matter, and his stanza form. A fourth reason for censure is raised by Pope, Philips and Gay: Spenser's use of the pastoral.

First, in the attack on Spenser's use of language, Fuller remarks that the Faerie Queene would have been more saleable had it conformed to modern English. Culpepper's view is that language, like dress, is always changing and that a writer should keep up to date. Spenser's language, according to Dryden, is only a minor fault because it does not make his writings unintelligible. The opinion of Atterbury is quite the opposite to that of Dryden. Atterbury says that before a reader can understand Spenser's true meaning he has to consult an antiquary. The last of these critics to censure Spenser's language is Dr. Johnson who finds it "remote from common use."

A different group of critics - which includes Dryden, however - finds fault with Spenser's choice and handling of subject matter. Rymer states forcefully that Spenser did not have "a true idea." Dryden studied the matter at greater length and found that there was no uniformity of design, no single action, and no obedience to the rules in the Faerie Queene. Temple claimed that Christianity was not as suitable to poetry as pagan religion, and as a result of Spenser's using it the Faerie Queene had a poor design and a "bare" moral. Backmore attacked Spenser's
allegory because it did not follow the "sober" rules. Gay found the religious matter in the Shepheardes Calender to be reprehensible. Johnson, contrary to what one might expect, thought that Spenser's fictions, sentiments, and allegory were worthy of imitation.

The third set of complaints were leveled against Spenser's stanza forms, particularly against the Spenserian stanza. Both Rymer and Johnson attacked the Spenserian stanza because it had been adapted from the Italian and was therefore unsuitable to English. (In truth, the Spenserian stanza was more probably developed from Chaucer). Dryden judged Spenser's ill choice of stanza to be, like his choice of language, only a minor fault. In the Soame-Dryden translation of Boileau's Art of Poetry, however, Spenser is given credit for making his stanza form conform to the rules.

The attack on Spenser's use of the pastoral was made by Pope, Gay, and less strongly by Philips. Pope found very little to praise in Spenser's handling of the form. He censured the eclogues of Spenser for their length, content, lyricism, and stanza forms. He advised the use of the couplet. Gay, after imitating Spenser's Shapheardes Calender in his The Shepherd's Week, stated unabashedly in his "Proem" that he himself was the first English writer to write pastorals in the style of Theocritus.

In general it can be seen, then, that Spenser's popularity was at a low-ebb during the neo-classical period, a period in which his works were measured by the rules.
With Steele, however, came a foretaste of the unqualified praise which the pre-romantics and the romantics were to lavish on Spenser. We turn, therefore, with some anticipation to those early pre-romantics, Warton and Hurd.

Yet it was Addison who, in his verse letter to Henry Sacheverell, spoke for all the neo-classicists—

Old Spenser next, warmed with poetic rage,
In ancient tales amused a barbarous age;
An age that yet uncultivate and rude,
where'er the poets' fancy led, pursued
Through pathless fields, and unfrequented floods,
To dens of dragons and enchanted woods.
But now the mystic tale, that pleased no more;
The long-spun allegories fulsome grow,
While the dull moral lies too plain below.
We view well-pleased at distance all the sights
Of arms and palfreys, battles, fields, and fights,
And damsels in distress, and courteous knights;
But when we look too near, the shades decay.
And all the pleasing landscape fades away.  

CHAPTER FOUR

THE PRE-ROMANTICS

With the publication of Thomas Warton's Observations on the Fairy Queen of Spenser in 1754 and Richard Hurd's Letters on Chivalry and Romance in 1762 a new approach to Spenser and a new trend in criticism was given to the world. Their work is of extreme importance and, whether or not we agree with everything they have to say, we must acknowledge its great value not only to Spenserian criticism but also to criticism in general. Coming at a time when the supremacy of neo-classical rules was first being questioned, they are the greatest of the pre-romantic critics - for none that came after them, until the romantics themselves, added more to the new critical impulse.

It is with Warton that we can best see this critical change-over from neo-classicism to romanticism for he is, at one and the same time, a neo-classicist and a pre-romantic. Hurd, on the other hand, is purely pre-romantic - with, perhaps, a touch of something that makes him more modern still. He was, however, not adverse, while slashing away at the criticism by the rules and demanding that the Faerie Queene be studied for what it was, from setting up another
critical method that to some extent was based on new rules.

The loquacious and digression-loving Warton surveyed the development of literature and was surprised to find that when the works of Homer and Aristotle were restored to study in Italy and when poetry was released from the toils of Gothic (meaning medieval) ignorance and barbarity, instead of a new taste in writing developing, the romantic manner of writing became established. Warton found that the restoration of ancient learning did not even show any results by improving criticism. Warton, here, is speaking as a neo-classicist. Spenser's Faerie Queene sprang from this soil and, to Warton, it was an unfortunate growth. He says that Spenser's great error was in following Ariosto and not Tasso who had more "conduct and decorum" - which sounds another neo-classical note.

There is still more to be seen of Warton as a neo-classicist. He finds in the Faerie Queene unity of hero (Prince Arthur) and unity of design but cannot find any unity of action. Thus, he reasons, the various adventures which constitute the various books do not make up one legitimate poem.

As the heroic poem is required to be one whole, compounded of many various parts, relative and dependent, it is expedient that not one of those parts should be so regularly contrived, and so completely finished, as to become a whole of itself. For the mind once satisfied in arriving at the consummation of an orderly series of events, acquiesces in that satisfaction.  


2 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 12.
It would have been better, he believes, if Spenser had made each book a separate poem of twelve cantos instead of trying to correlate them. "The poet might," he writes, "either have established twelve Knights without an Arthur, or an Arthur without twelve Knights."\(^3\) As it is, Arthur's position, according to Warton, is not a very captivating one because his activity of only assisting in the various adventures does not justify his reward of gaining Gloriana in the end.

So far we have seen only one side of Warton: the one which demands taste, decorum, unity and other neo-classical criteria. But there is the other side which he reveals to us suddenly and without warning, and is the most important side of his critical approach. He writes,

But it is absurd to think of judging either Ariosto or Spenser by precepts which they did not attend to. We who live in the days of writing by rule, are apt to try every composition by those laws which we have been taught to think the sole criterion of excellence. Critical taste is universally diffused, and we require the same order and design which every modern performance is expected to have, in poems where they never were required or intended. Spenser, and the same may be said of Ariosto, did not live in an age of planning. His poetry is the careless exuberance of a warm imagination and a strong sensibility. It was his business to engage the fancy, and to interest the attention by bold, and striking images, in the formation, and the disposition of which, little labour or art was applied. The various and the marvellous were the chief sources of delight. Hence we find one author ransacking alike the regions of reality and

\(^3\) Warton, \textit{op. cit.}, vol. 1, p. 14.
romance, of truth and fiction, to find the proper decorations and furniture for his fairy Structure. Born in such an age, Spenser wrote rapidly from his own feelings, which at the same time were naturally noble.²

This is indeed, a new approach when viewed in light of previous neo-classical criticism. We need not agree with all Warton says, for example, when he speaks of "little labour or art" being applied, but we must admit that he is doing more than inserting the thin edge of a pre-romantic wedge into neo-classical criticism - in fact, the passage detonates with a far-reaching explosion.

If the reader of Warton was surprised, after reading the introductory pages of the Observations, by that passage, he was more surprised still when he read -

If the Fairy Queen be destitute of that arrangement and economy which epic severity required, yet we scarcely regret the loss of these, while their place is so amply supplied by something which more powerfully attracts us: something which engages the affections, the feelings of the heart, rather than the cold approbation of the head. If there be any poem whose graces please, because they are situated beyond the reach of art, and where the force and faculties of creative imagination delight, because they are unassisted and unrestrained by those of deliberate judgment, it is this. In reading Spenser, if the critic is not satisfied, yet the reader is transported.⁵

This, then, is Warton's approach; try to criticize the poem for what it is. He is not throwing away his belief in the rules of neo-classicism but is, rather, putting it aside in

⁴ Warton, op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 21-22.
⁵ Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 23-24
order to approach a poem that was not written under the influence of the rules.

The remainder of the Observations, for the most part, is a textual study and a detailed analysis of such topics as Spenser's imitations of Chaucer and of Ariosto, the like with many digressions to study scarcely allied subjects connected with, for example, Chaucer, Milton, mythology and chivalry. A number of his scattered observations, however, are important enough for further study.

According to Warton, Spenser's development of the Spenserian stanza was not based on Chaucer's ottava rima but rather on the eight-line stanza form used by both Ariosto and Tasso. His conjecture on this problem seems to arise from the fact, he says, that Spenser attempted to follow the Italians in their rime scheme. Warton finds that this new stanza form leads to three main difficulties: it forces Spenser to dilate his thought by means of many circumlocutions; it leads to redundancy and repetition of words; and it encourages the use, at times, of "words and images that are slightly improper" to fill out the lines. Despite these imperfections, Warton discovers that the stanza has the honour of being responsible, because of its prolixity, for Spenser's magnificent descriptions.6

The strigency of the rime pattern also forces Spenser to use certain innovations in spelling such as the

6 Warton, loc. cit., vol. 1, pp. 157-158.
use of *deny* for *denay*. But not all these changes, Warton points out, were made because of the rime. Spenser appears, at times, and the point is interesting, to have altered the spelling of certain words for eye appeal only. Thus it is that Spenser in order to rime *bite* with *delight* spelled it *bight*. We should, however, exercise some care before we accept Warton's thesis for, it must be remembered, spelling at Spenser's time had not yet jelled into the set forms we have today, and, indeed, these variations which Warton cites were commonly used in Spenser's time. Warton expresses surprise that a poem so restricted by stanza and rime should reveal so much "spirit and ease."\(^7\) Spenser's style, Warton goes so far as to say, "...has great perspicuity and facility."\(^3\)

One of the main reasons why Spenser made use of obsolete language, Warton says, was to counteract the practice of his contemporaries who were adulterating English with borrowings from Spanish, French, Latin and Italian. But even with this idea in mind, Spenser was forced because of his rime to use some foreign words. For the same reason Spenser coined new rime words such as *damnify'd*, *unruliment*, and *hazardrie*. Notwithstanding the obsolete diction Warton finds that "For many stanzas

\(^7\) Warton, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 169.

together we may frequently read him with as much facility as we can the same number of lines in Shakespeare."^9

Spenser, exclaims Warton, was a rapid writer, easily carried away by an impetuous imagination, and, as a result, he was careless in his construction and failed to revise what he wrote. His work, therefore, is filled with contradictions, inconsistencies and repetitions.

...he not only fails in the connexion of single words, but of circumstances; not only violates the rules of grammar but of probability, truth, and propriety.10

The four main faults that Warton lists are ellipsis, confused construction, tautology, and contradiction.

When speaking of Spenser's imitations of Chaucer and Ariosto, Warton writes,

Spenser is universally acknowledged to have been an attentive reader, and a professed admirer of both these poets. His imitations from.../Chaucer/ are most commonly literal, couched in the expressions of the original. What he has drawn from Ariosto are artificial fictions, which consisting of unnatural combinations, could not, on account of their singularity, be fallen upon both poets accidentally, as natural appearances might be, which lie exposed and obvious to all, at all times.11

Yet, when Warton compares Spenser and Ariosto he finds that Spenser's representations are beautiful and sublime, even with their absurdities, while Ariosto's "strokes of true poetry bear no proportion to his sallies of merely romantic

9 Warton, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 185.
10 Ibid., vol. 1, p. 312.
11 Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 188-189.
imagination."^{12}

Before we pass on to a study of Hurd we must glance briefly at Warton's examination of Spenser's allegory. Warton says that there are two Spensers - one is the romantic poet and the other is the allegorist. He remarks that Spenser, in copying the manners of chivalry, is just as much making an imitation of real life as is Homer when he gives us plain descriptions, for both are only copying the manners existing during their times.

The reason why Spenser's personages are so distinct and animated may be that they actually existed in the life about him; they were derived rather from Elizabethan courtly spectacles than from the Orlando Furioso.

Warton is not certain that Spenser's allegory might not be dangerous to religious thought. He writes that

...Spenser has mingled divine mystery with human allegory. Such a practice as this tends not only to confound sacred and profane subjects, but to place the licentious sallies of imagination upon a level with the dictates of divine inspiration; to debase the truth and dignity of heavenly things by making Christian allegory subservient to the purposes of Romantic fiction.\(^{13}\)

For all this, Warton still finds great richness in Spenser's allegorical descriptions and says that Sackville's Induction is the only other allegorical poem in English to approach

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^{12} Warton, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 305.

the *Faerie Queene* on this count.

In many ways Hurd's thesis is a development of Warton's. In place of the neo-classical leanings of Warton, however, Hurd reveals himself as a romantic who is trying to reconcile, in some form, the tenets of the classic or heroic with the Gothic. Thus he is a pre-romantic: he is romantic in temperament, but is too early in time not to be influenced by what has gone before. There is, he repeats throughout his *Letters on Chivalry and Romance*, a great resemblance between the heroic and the Gothic. Hurd is attempting to make whole cloth out of two pieces of different material and different colour. It is here that he fails. You cannot say, in one breath, that heroic and Gothic are alike because they arose in societies whose social structures are similar, and, in the next breath, urge that Gothic literature can be studied only in light of its own requirements and not by those of heroic literature. Hurd built his theories into a false facade of general criticism and then when he turned to a specific study of the *Faerie Queene* he unconsciously tore the facing off and revealed the structural faults of his critical method. When, after spending more than half his time proving how much alike the heroic and the Gothic are, Hurd writes -

*Judge of the Faery Queen* by the classic models, and you are shocked with its disorder; consider it with an eye to
it's sic. and elsewhere Gothic original, and you find it regular. The unity and simplicity of the former are more complete, but the latter has that sort of unity and simplicity, which results from it's nature.\textsuperscript{14}

The reader can only be astounded for he has suddenly been pushed off the path down which Hurd had been leading him. Having pointed the reader in a new direction Hurd continues to jolt him. The unity of the poem, he writes,

\ldots consists in the relation of it's several adventures to one common original, the appointment of the Faery Queen; and to one common end, the completion of the Faery Queen's injunctions.\textsuperscript{15}

Which is to say, he continues, that \ldots it is an unity of design, and not of action.\textsuperscript{16}

There is another shock in store for the reader, since, according to Hurd, the adventure of Prince Arthur was an after-thought, forced upon Spenser by classical prejudice, and used as a blind to conceal the poem's Gothic disorder.\textsuperscript{17} In this way Spenser created a poem that was both allegorical and narrative, and, Hurd says,

\ldots as an allegorical poem, the method of the Faery Queen is governed by the justness of the moral; As a narrative poem, it is conducted on the ideas and usages of chivalry. In either view, if taken by itself, the plan is defensible, But from the union of the two designs there arises a perplexity and confusion, which is the proper, and only considerable, defect of this extraordinary poem.\textsuperscript{18}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[15] Ibid., p. 121.
\item[16] Ibid., p. 122.
\item[17] Ibid., p. 124.
\item[18] Ibid., pp. 126-127.
\end{footnotes}
This statement is a far cry from Hurd's admonition that we should study the *Faerie Queene* for what it is—poetry. Hurd suddenly demands that it fulfil only the Gothic requirements, and he finds fault with its classical conventions. For one set of rules he is substituting another on the ground, as he says, that the Gothic is better adapted to the ends of poetry than is the classic.¹⁹

The reason, Hurd says, why the *Faerie Queene* has fallen into general neglect is that the generality of readers, knowing so little about the age of chivalry, cannot be made to believe that such manners, as the poem portrays, ever existed.²⁰

The similarities between the works of Warton and Hurd are obvious. They both saw the need of approaching the *Faerie Queene* unencumbered critically by the neo-classical rules. In this Warton, more neo-classical than Hurd, was more successful for, unlike Hurd, he did not attempt to set up any romantic or Gothic rules to justify what he was doing. Hurd, in searching for some form of ideal romanticism, found that to combat the neo-classical system of criticism he had to set up a similar system under the term Gothic which, in the end, was equally restrictive to the free criticism of poetry as poetry.

Before we proceed further in the eighteenth century

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¹⁹ Hurd, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

we must retrace our steps and look briefly at one or two
minor critics who wrote prior to, or contemporary with,
Warton and Hurd.

In a letter dated December 24, 1741, William Shen-
stone, an early romantic poet and Spenserian imitator,
wrote to a friend, Richard Graves, that Spenser's

...subject is certainly bad, and his action
inexpressibly confused; but there are some
particulars in him that charm one. Those
which afford the greatest scope for a lud-
erious imitation are his simplicity and
obsolete phrase; and yet these are what give
one a very singular pleasure in the perusal.
The burlesque which they occasion is of a
quite different kind to that of Philip's
Shilling, Cotton's Travestie, Hudibras, or
Swift's works....21

In another letter, dated January 19, 1741-2 [27], written to
the same friend, Shenstone repeats the same idea -

The true burlesque of Spenser (whose
characteristic is simplicity) seems to con-
sist in a simple representation of such things
as one laughs to see or to observe one's self,
rather than in any monstrous contrast betwixt
the thoughts and words.22

The matter of Spenserian imitation was attacked in
verse by Robert Lloyd, a member of the Nonsense Club,
which had as members William Cowper, George Colman and Bon-
nell Thornton, and which published the unsuccessful Con-
naisseur. Lloyd, in 1755, wrote:

Others, who aim at fancy, choose
To woo the gentle Spenser's Muse.
This poet fixes for his theme

21 The Letters of William Shenstone, Minneapolis, Univer-
22 Ibid., p. 32.
On allegory, or a dream;
Fiction and Truth together joins
Through a long waste of flimsy lines;
Fondly believes his fancy glows,
And image upon image grows;
Thinks his strong muse takes wondrous flights,
Whene'er she sings of peerless wights,
Of dens, of palfreys, spells, and knights;
Till allegory, Spenser's veil
T' instruct and please in moral tale,
With him's no veil the truth to shroud,
But one impenetrable cloud.23

Criticism such as this was not destined, however, to stop the number of Spenser imitations that were flowing from the pens of various poets.

In the "Preface" to his "Hymn to May," William Thompson writes that "As Spenser is the most descriptive and florid of all our English writers, I attempted to imitate his manner in the following poem."24 Thompson, however, does not betray any effort to imitate Spenser's diction.

Thompson continues, in the "Preface" -

Shakespeare is the poet of Nature, in adapting the affectations and passions to his characters; and Spenser in describing her delightful scenes and rural beauties. His lines are most musically sweet; and his descriptions most delicately abundant, even to a wantonness of painting; but still it is the music and painting of Nature. We find no ambitious ornaments, or epigrammatical turns, in his writings, but a beautiful simplicity; which pleases far above the glitter of pointed wit.25

The Critical Review of 1759 carried Oliver Goldsmith's review of the Church edition of Spenser's works. Goldsmith's

24 [1757], in Chalmers Poets, 1810, vol. 15, p. 32.
25 Loc. cit.
tribute is no less florid than that of Thompson. He writes,

There is a pleasing tranquility of mind which ever attends the reading of this ancient poet. We leave the ways of the present world, and all the ages of prim­­eval innocence and happiness rise to our view. Virgil, and even Homer, seem to be modern, upon the comparison. The imagination of his reader leaves reason behind, pursues the tale, without considering the allegory, and upon the whole, is charmed without in­­struction.26

The last statement is interesting in light of the "teach and delight" theory of poetry, and Goldsmith attempts to justify this statement when he writes,

...the pleasure we receive from...[allegory], though never so finely balanced between truth and fiction, is but of a subordinate nature, as we have always two passions op­posing each other; a love of reality which represses the flights of fancy, and a passion for the marvellous, which would leave re­­flection behind.27

Goldsmith, it would appear, makes a complete separation between poetry's power to delight and its power to teach. He stresses that the power to delight is the more important and the stronger. When one considers that the bulk of Spenser's work is allegorical, it is difficult to see how full appreciation can be gained when one reads "without considering the allegory." True, it is possible to read the Faerie Queene for its story alone. But can a reader do so comfortably when he knows that Spenser meant it for


27 Loc. cit.
so much more? Indeed, would it be possible to read the poem without gaining some instruction from the moral allegory (the most obvious allegory of the three)?

In the review Goldsmith also gives a word of warning concerning imitation. He says that

...the verses of Spenser may, perhaps, one day be considered the standard of English poetry. It were happy indeed, if his beauties were the only objects of modern imitation; but many of his words, justly fallen into disuse among his successors, have been of late revived, and a language, already too copious, has been augmented by an unnecessary reinforcement. ²⁸

Our critic seems to have forgotten that these words he speaks of had been revived by Spenser, had not been used to any great extent by the poet's successors, and were, in fact, one of the main arguments raised against his work.

Of Spenser's biography, Goldsmith remarks that "...the history of one poet might serve with...little variation for that of any other."²⁹ This is a statement that, in view of our modern conception of criticism as an activity which includes, besides the study of the aesthetic, the study of history, biography, psychology, sociology, and biology, gives one reason to pause and think.

Returning to the language of Spenser we find Francis Fawkes, in his "Preface" to the Idylliums of Theocritus, writing that the translation of Theocritus should be done

²⁸ Goldsmith, op. cit., p. 203.
²⁹ Ibid., p. 204.
in Spenser's language because it was proper for Theocratus' "Doric idiom."\(^{30}\)

One of the most peculiar imitators of Spenser is Dr. Johnn Armstrong, who wrote most of his poems on medical matters or disease. His most famous work is *The Art of Preserving Health*. His imitation of Spenser deals also with the ills of the flesh and was written at the request of James Thomson to be inserted in the latter's Spenserian *Castle of Indolence*.\(^{31}\)

Another Spenser imitator was James Beattie who, in *The Minstrel*, imitated not only the measure, but also the "harmony, simplicity, and variety"\(^{32}\) of Spenser's composition.

Beattie also defends the Spenserian stanza from its detractors. He writes, and somewhat astutely, that

> It allows the sententiousness of the couplet, as well as the more complex modulation of blank verse. What some critics have remarked, of its uniformity growing at last tiresome to the ear, will be found to hold true, only when the poetry is faulty in other respects.\(^{33}\)

We said that his statement is somewhat astute only because it can be applied to most of the imitations. It does not, however, answer the charge, generally pointed out, that the *Faerie Queene* stanza tends to become soporific in a

\(^{30}\) Chalmer's Poets, vol. 20, p. 156.

\(^{31}\) Chalmer's Poets, vol. 16, p. 543.


\(^{33}\) Ibid., p. 4.
long poem because it permits very little change of speed. But Spenser, however, may not have desired speed.

In his History of English Poetry (1778-1781), Thomas Warton, whose Observations have been reviewed above, points out that many passages of the Faerie Queene were suggested to Spenser by Sackville's Induction. 34

Warton, in a later section of his weighty tome, takes Spenser to task for his dedicatory verses to the Faerie Queene. He sourly, but correctly, writes that

...Spenser in compliance with a disgraceful custom, or rather in obedience to the established tyranny of patronage, prefixed to the FAIRY QUEENE fifteen of these adulatory pieces, which in every respect are to be numbered among the meanest of his compositions. 35

Warton's attempt to justify Spenser's defects by saying, in his Observations, that they were the result of his following Ariosto is repudiated by George Ellis in his Specimens of the Early English Poets. Ellis writes that

...the "Orlando Furioso," though absurd and extravagant, is uniformly amusing. We are enabled to travel to the conclusion of our journey without fatigue, though often bewildered by the windings of the road, and surprised by the abrupt change of our travelling companions; whereas it is scarcely possible to accompany Spenser's allegorical heroes to the end of their excursions. They want flesh and blood; a want for which nothing can compensate. ...Personification protracted into allegory affects a modern reader almost as disagreeably as inspiration continued to madness. 36

35 Ibid., p. 914.
These defects, according to Ellis, were caused by the age, and Spenser, therefore, for all his genius, could have done no more than what he did. In fact, says Ellis, "His glowing fancy, his unbounded command of language, and his astonishing facility and sweetness of versification, have placed him in the very first rank of English poets."37 And this is in spite of the fact that it is "scarcely possible to accompany Spenser's allegorical heroes to the end of their excursions."

In this chapter dealing with pre-romantic critics we should note two interesting trends: the decisive breaking away from the rules of neo-classicism; and the lessening of the amount of adverse criticism directed against Spenser. In Warton, of course, we can find that some neo-classical tenets still remain: Hurd, we can see, is, in the end, endeavouring to set up a series of new rules to take the place of those of the neo-classicists. But we cannot condemn either of these writers because of these things - they are writing at a time when they can do no more than foreshadow the future, and, we must admit, they achieve their ends much better than we might expect. Warton, although he believed that the development of romanticism was unfortunate, can be said to be, in the final analysis, a pre-romantic: he thought that Spenser wrote not for the head, but for the heart. Hurd, on the other hand, after trying unsuccessfully to

37 Ellis, op. cit., p. 235.
reconcile the tenets of the classical and heroic with the Gothic, tries to analyze the *Faerie Queene* with freedom and succeeds in setting up a new set of rules. Hurd, like Warton, when finally judged, is a pre-romantic, but one who is unable to shed completely the neo-classicists' demand for order.

The term "pre-romantic" is well chosen when literature is being surveyed as a whole. When, however, a survey is being made of the critics of one writer the term loses a great deal of its force. At best it designates a group of writers who preceded the romantics. It does not indicate to what extent these writers are romantic. The critics surveyed in this chapter, in their opinions of Spenser, do not reveal any marked development of romanticism. Thompson, Goldsmith, Fawkes and Beattie, are more romantic, by reason of their praise, than are others like Warton, Hurd and Shenstone who have some adverse criticism to offer. There is no constant, widening flow of romanticism to be found in the criticism of the period.

In previous chapters I have concluded with a review of adverse criticism under the headings: Spenser's use of language; his subject matter (including his allegory) and his handling of it; his stanza forms; his use of pastoral. To this list we must now add a fifth problem - his construction. The pre-romantics have attacked Spenser under the first three of these heads and on the last; they have omitted any study of his use of pastoral.
On the problem of Spenser's use of language Goldsmith remarks in passing that Spenser's language has "justly fallen into disuse." It is doubtful whether or not we should even consider this remark to be adverse criticism.

Spenser's subject matter and his handling of it comes in for various critical attacks. Warton, although he finds unity of design and of hero in the *Faerie Queene*, finds no unity of action and therefore, he says, the various books do not make up a legitimate poem. He also stipulates that the blending of sacred and profane subjects is dangerous because it will "debase the truth and dignity of heavenly things by making Christian allegory subservient to the purposes of Romantic fiction". Hurd, in his turn, does not find the lack of unity of action important because the poem has unity of design. He does, nevertheless, point out that Prince Arthur was incorporated into the poem as an afterthought for the purpose of concealing the *Faerie Queene*'s Gothic disorder. He also says that Spenser's union of allegory and narrative, the first governed by the moral, the second by chivalry, is the only "considerable" defect in the poem. Shenstone writes, without giving reasons, that Spenser's subject is bad and that his action is confused. And lastly, Ellis states that the *Orlando Furioso* is more easily followed than the *Faerie Queene* because Spenser's characters lack "flesh and blood."

Warton is the only one of these critics to find fault with Spenser's stanza form. Like so many others he
attributes the Spenserian stanza to an Italian model. This stanza, he complains, leads to many dilated circumlocutions, to redundancy and repetition of words, and to the use of "words and images that are slightly improper." The form does, however, he concedes, lend itself to magnificent descriptions.

Warton also takes Spenser to task because his careless construction fills his work with contrarieties, inconsistencies, and repetitions. Warton finds four main structural faults: ellipsis, confusion, tautology, and contradiction.

On the whole, it may be said that the pre-romantics show neither the same amount of adverse criticism as the neo-classicists nor the same amount of genuine praise as the Elizabethan-Jacobean writers. Indeed, except in the case of Warton and Hurd, there is less written about Spenser at this period than in the two periods following Spenser. The view, however, of these two writers, that the Faerie Queene should be studied for what it is - free from the restrictions of post-Spenserian literary conventions - is of great importance not only to Spenserian criticism but also to criticism as a whole.
Many allusions to Spenser and to characters in the *Faerie Queene* are to be found in the poetry of the unfortunate Robert Southey, the first true romantic to study Spenser. Southey had been introduced to the *Faerie Queene* as a young man, and he carefully recorded his experience as follows:

No young lady of the present generation falls to a new novel of Sir Walter Scott's with keener relish than I did... to the *Faery Queen*. If I had been asked wherefore it gave me so much more pleasure than ever Ariosto had done, I could not have answered the question. I now know that it was very much owing to the magic of its verse; the contrast between the flat couplets of a rhymster like Hoole, and the fullest and finest of all stanzas written by one who was perfect master of his art. But this was not all, Ariosto too often plays with his subject; Spenser is always in earnest. The delicious landscapes which he luxuriates in describing, brought everything before my eyes. I could fancy such scenes as his lakes and forests, gardens and fountains presented; and I felt though I did not understand, the truth and purity of his feelings, and that love of the beautiful and the good which prevades his poetry.¹

Southey's acceptance of Spenser was wholehearted -

unmarried by any difficulties arising from either the language or the versification. He writes,

...I, who had learned all I then knew of the history of England from Shakespeare, and who had moreover read Beaumont and Fletcher, found no difficulty in Spenser's English, and felt in the beauty of his versification a charm in poetry of which I had never been fully sensible before. From that time I took Spenser for my master.²

Strange as it may seem, Southey did not rank his "master" as the greatest English poet. In a letter to Walter Savage Landor dated January 11, 1811, Southey reveals, succinctly, his preferences of the poets and his opinion of the state of English poetry at his time. It is, indeed, a shrewd critical evaluation.

Your abhorrence of Spenser [he writes] is a strange heresy. I admit that he is inferior to Chaucer (who for variety of power has no competitor except Shakespeare), but he is the great master of English versification, incomparably the greatest master in our language....Chaucer is as much a poet as it was possible for him to be when the language was in so rude a state. There seems to be this material point of difference between us, - you think we have little poetry which was good for anything before Milton; I, that we have little since, except in our own immediate days. I do not say there was much before, but what there was, was sterling verse in sterling English. It had thought and feeling in it. At present, the surest way to become popular is to have as little of either ingredient as possible.³

Years later in his amazing catch-all, The Doctor,

³ Life and Correspondence, vol. 3, p. 295.
Southey castigates editors who hold the idea that they should prune the *Faerie Queene* down until it is fit for the ears of young maidens. He does not believe that the spelling could be modernized without ruining the metre. As for the language, he forcefully states that he does not think anyone ever had trouble reading the *Faerie Queene*.4

Another poet whose works contain many allusions to Spenser and his works is William Wordsworth. In his "Preface" to the 1815 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth writes,

The grand store-houses of enthusiastic and meditative Imagination, of poetical, as contradistinguished from human and dramatic Imagination, are the prophetic and lyrical parts of the Holy Scriptures, and the works of Milton, to which I cannot forbear to add those of Spenser.5

In the supplementary essay to the "Preface" Wordsworth turns a questioning glance at Spenser's literary position and finds it none too secure. Outside England, he remarks, Spenser is scarcely known at all, and if his rank were to be determined by the attention even the English paid to him it would have to be considered very small. "But," he concludes, "he was a great power; and bears a high name; the laurel has been awarded to him."6

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6 Ibid., p. 338.
It is appropriate before approaching the greater criticism of Hazlitt and Coleridge, to look at some absolute (but scarcely critical) praise of the Faerie Queene written by S. Gilman for the North American Review of 1817.7

"The plan of the 'Faery Queene'," Gilman writes, "is the grandest and most noble that ever entered into the constitution of a poem."8 How hard it is to condone this statement when one thinks of Homer's epics or of Milton's Paradise Lost.

According to Gilman, readers forego Spenser not because of length, obsolete diction, or the "antique simplicity of the style" but because they do not like allegory.9

Comparing Spenser with Shakespeare, Gilman writes,

In some respects Spenser is superior to Shakespeare. He wields the rod of enchantment with a more soothing and insinuating effect - and he throws on the colourings of his description a higher flood of light, as well as a softer body of shade. It is true he has a smaller number of brilliant passages; but then he redeems this comparative defect by a much less abundance of trash. He wrote at leisure and deliberately waited for inspiration; Shakespeare scribbled against time - chased the muse - won gloriously indeed - but sometimes abused her!10

The essay concludes with a highly poetical, but rather meaningless, flight of fanciful criticism.

The Faery Queene is a repository of all

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8 Ibid., pp. 302-303.
9 Ibid., p. 303.
10 Ibid., pp. 307-308.
the minor beauties of poetry. - Unbounded variety in its descriptions - exact fidelity in its copies of nature - inimitable playfulness in its sallies of fancy - irresistible severity in its satire - a ravishing transport in its flights of passion - an unsparking copiousness, fertility, and richness of imagery - in short, there is not a flower of Parnassus, which is not to be gathered there.11

Yes, all this may be true - if we sort it out and weigh each word in the lexical balance. For example, what does the writer mean by "exact fidelity in its copies of nature"? There are no "copies" to be found. Spenser created a new, delightful, phantasmal world wherein his characters might roam with freedom. And what is intended by "inimitable playfulness"? Spenser is seldom, if ever, playful in the Faerie Queene. What is "irresistible severity"? Irresistible satire, perhaps, but severity, no. And how can we accept a "ravishing transport in its flights of passion"? To have passions we must have human characters, and these the Faerie Queene does not have. It has personifications of the various virtues, of good and evil in various shapes and forms, but the very fact that they are personifications snuffs out the spark that would have fired them into life, human life. The Redcross Knight does not forsake Una and league with Fidessa because of a flaw in his character. He does so because of Archimago's spells. As we know, even God cannot overrule the spells cast by the devil although he can attempt to prevent them or later repair the damage

11 Gilman, op. cit., p. 309.
they have done.

All this is not meant to condemn critical praise such as that of Gilman but rather to point out its dangers. As we have seen previously, the neo-classical critics condemned or belaboured Spenser with arguments based on the 'rules'. We pointed out at that time that such criticism, although temporarily damaging, was not of great importance as it did not have lasting effects. When the criticism of the rules collapsed all that it had evaluated needed revaluation. That this reevaluating had to be done by the pre-romantics and the romantics was somewhat unfortunate. Their criticism varied basically from that of the neo-classicists and, therefore, a large amount of sound adverse criticism by the latter group was wiped away and replaced generally by indiscriminate praise. The romantics discovered in Spenser that same freedom they themselves cherished after the fall of the rules. They also found all the elements of romantisme that gave them their name.

The work of Hurd and Warton, although of great value, led to this approach. The early romantics realized that in Spenser they had a kindred spirit and thus were biased in his favour. This is not to say that they resurrected Spenser and engendered a general interest in his works. That would be far from true. As Wordsworth pointed out, Spenser was hardly known outside England and little known even in England. But the poets read him and found in him a voice of the "new poetry" - their new poetry. And besides this,
the poets, on the whole, were the critics, and in their prefaces, their letters, and their essays, they built up a body of high and, on the whole, unqualified praise of the "master" — as Southey affectionately called Spenser.

For all this, the early romantics failed, except for Wordsworth, to realize that Spenser was not being read, and that, if he were as great as they said, it was time that they attempted to find the fault that must necessarily lie with the reader. If the fault lay not with the reader then their most lavish praise could not cover the flaw or flaws inherent in Spenser's work.

With the advent of the later romantics we can see a change. Romanticism has become firmly entrenched and is accepted and its writers are able to write criticism that is not coloured by the first dawning of a new movement. Thus it is that William Hazlitt, with acute perception, writes, in his essay "On Shakespeare and Milton," that "The characteristic of Chaucer is intensity; of Spenser, remoteness; of Milton, elevation; of Shakespeare, everything." And, he continues, "Chaucer most frequently describes things as they are; Spenser, as we wish them to be; Shakespeare, as they would be; and Milton as they ought to be."12

In another essay Hazlitt says that Spenser "...paints nature, not as we find it, but as we expected to find it and

13 Loc. cit.
fulfills the delightful promise of our youth." And, he goes on -

The two worlds of reality and of fiction are poised on the wings of his imagination. His ideas, indeed, seem more distinct than his perceptions. He is a painter of abstractions, and describes them with dazzling minuteness.15

To Hazlitt there were no poets either before Chaucer or between Chaucer and Spenser that were of general interest or whose genius merited a comparison with either one. Both Chaucer and Spenser were active in life, yet Spenser's poetry cannot be called active. It was, says Hazlitt, "...inspired by the love of ease, and relaxation from all the cares and business of life."16 As a final evaluation, Hazlitt states simply that Spenser, "of all the poets, ... is the most poetical."17

Far from the dictum that Keats was to popularize, "Beauty is truth, truth is beauty," is Hazlitt's statement that

The love of beauty, however, and not of truth, is the moving principle of his mind; and he is guided in his fantastic delineations by no rule but the impulse of an inexhaustible imagination. He luxuriates equally in scenes of eastern magnificence on the still solitude of a hermit's cell, in the extremes of sensuality or refinement.18

14 "On Chaucer and Spenser," in Lectures, p. 46.
15 Loc. cit.
16 Ibid., p. 45.
17 Loc. cit.
18 Ibid., p. 47.
In Spenser's allegorical personages and fictions, Hazlitt finds an "...originality, richness, and variety... which almost vie with the splendour of the ancient mythology." Unlike Ariosto, who carries his readers into the world of romance, Spenser carries his into a world of fairy land, a world of "ideal beings."

Hazlitt follows in the footsteps of those critics who, as we have seen, do not believe that it is of any importance to comprehend the allegory. He writes that some people...

...are afraid of the allegory, as if they thought it would bite them; they look at it as a child looks at a painted dragon, and think it will strangle them in its shining folds. This is very idle. If they do not meddle with the allegory, the allegory will not meddle with them. Without minding it at all, the whole is as plain as a pike-staff. It might as well be pretended that we cannot see Poussin's pictures for the allegory, as that the allegory prevent us from understanding Spenser.

In answering the charge that Spenser lacks both passion and strength, Hazlitt replies that he has a great amount of

19 Hazlitt, op. cit., p. 46.
20 Loc. cit.
21 Ibid., p. 49. It is interesting to see what Mr. Tucker Brooke has to say of Spenser's allegory. He writes, "Allegory, forsooth! If the Faerie Queene is allegorical, so in their different ways are Hamlet and Tom Jones and the Book of Job; so is all great fiction and most poetry. Spenser's fairyland is no mystic fantasy, but a true picture of the democracy of life. His men and women pursue their careers through ever fresh and apparently unpremeditated incidents, resisting or yielding to the natural temptations they encounter, performing their heroisms and their meanesses; lost sometimes for long series of cantos to the reader, but always reappearing in the natural progress of
both.

He has not indeed *he writes* the pathos of immediate action or suffering, which is more properly the dramatic; but he has all the pathos of sentiment and romance - all that belongs to distant objects of terror, and uncertain, imaginary distress. His strength, in like manner, is not strength of will or action, of bone and muscle, nor is it coarse and palpable - but it assumes a character of vastness and sublimity seen through the same visionary medium, and blended with the appalling associations of preternatural agency.  

According to Hazlitt, comparisons should not be made between Spenser and Shakespeare. It would be better to compare the *Faerie Queene* with Milton's *Comus* or with Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. The comparison with Comus would "not be unfavourable to Spenser." But, Hazlitt believes, the events, never hurried on to forced conclusions, always advancing from task to task in the simple human way. While life lasts, interest continues and duty drives." (p.499). Later Mr. Brooke adds that "...the poem moves, one of the truest Human Comedies and one of the most beautiful. Still beginning, never ending, character is added to character, incident to incident, as our motley life flows past the windows of Kilkcolm Castle. Here, if ever, is art concealed in art; every episode seems to grow to its perfection as inconspicuously as if the sun and rain of heaven fostered it, and one caught by the witchery of this narrative may at times be tempted to blaspheme against the other gods of Parnassus. Even Chaucer's art may look puerile, and besides the tidal flow of Spenser even the great dramatist's method, with its spotlights and overhaste, may sometimes seem like tinsel against moonlight." (ll. 500-501). From "The Renaissance," in "A Literary History of England, Albert C. Baugh, ed., New York, Appleton, 1948.

It is, indeed, dangerous ground upon which to tread. If, as according to Mr. Brooke, there is no allegory, then we have nothing to worry us. If, on the other hand, there is allegory, as Spenser and most writers say, then I sincerely believe that in order to get the most from the *Faerie Queene* we must attempt to comprehend it to the best of our ability.

22 Hazlitt, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

23 *Loc. cit.*
Pilgrim's Progress has more interest but less imagination than the Faerie Queene.\(^{24}\)

Hazlitt speaks in more detail about Spenser's language, stanza and versification. The stanza, he remarks, was borrowed from the Italians (a controversial point) and although fitted to their language was not particularly suited to English because of the "...stubborn, unaccomodating resistance...of its consonant endings...."\(^{25}\) To fill out the complicated riming of this "sing-song" stanza, Spenser was "...seduced into a certain license of expression...."\(^{26}\)

For Spenser's versification Hazlitt has the highest praise. He writes,

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\text{[It]}...\text{is at once the most smooth and the most sounding in the language. It is a labyrinth of sweat sounds...that would cloy by their very sweetness, but that the ear is constantly relieved and enchanted by their continued variety or modulation, dwelling on the pauses of the action, or flowing on in a fuller tide of harmony with the movement of the sentimental. It has not the bold dramatic transitions of Shakespeare's blank verse, nor the high-raised tone of Milton's; but it is the perfection of melting harmony, dissolving the soul in pleasure, or holding it captive in the chains of suspense. Spenser was the poet of our waking dreams; and he has invented not only a language, but a music of his own for them. The undulations are infinite, like those of the waves of the sea; but the effect is still the same, lulling the senses into a deep oblivion of the jarring noises of the world, from which we have no wish to be ever recalled.}\(^{27}\)

\(^{24}\) Hazlitt, op. cit., p. 55.
\(^{25}\) Ibid., p. 56.
\(^{26}\) Ibid., pp. 56-57.
Hazlitt, like nearly all the critics we have studied so far, agrees on the absolute supremacy of Spenser's versification.

A short two years after Hazlitt wrote, Washington Irving commented briefly upon the "purity and stability" of the English language. The point he makes in his "Sketchbook of Geoffrey Crayon" is particularly well taken. Irving, it should be remembered, attempted to blend the classical and European cultures into an American culture. He succeeded in such works as his Homeric-Cervantesque History of New York and the elemental burger, or old wives', tales of Rip Van Winkle and The Legend of Sleepy-Hollow. It is not difficult, therefore, to understand the mind of a man who wrote that

Even now many talk of Spenser's 'well of pure English undefiled,' as if the language ever sprang from a well or fountain-head, and was not rather a mere confluence of various tongues, perpetually subject to changes and intermixtures. It is this which has made English literature so extremely mutable, and the reputation built upon it so fleeting.28

It is unfortunate that Irving has not given us his opinions concerning the Faerie Queene. It is probable that his keen literary sensibility would have added something valuable although not deeply penetrating, to our store of Spenser scholarship.

A rather surprising and welcome attack on Spenser's minor poems, written by an anonymous author, appeared in the Retrospective Review of 1825. The attack was welcome, not in that it was justified, but in that it offered a needed

relief from the praise that was growing more and more un-
qualified. Steady praise, like unruffled water, soon
stagnates the works of a writer. Few readers will approach
such a writer because they feel that they also will be
forced to praise him. On the other hand a critical con-
troversy will stimulate readers to approach the works of the
writer under discussion. Unjustified adverse criticism,
however, when it makes a sudden appearance is not stimulating
unless it excites an indiscriminating reader to memorize a
mot or two that it turns and to use them about works he has
not taken the trouble to read. The stone that the Retrospective
Review threw into the calm waters of critical complacency
was, however, without effect, for the total lack of
justification turned the stone into a pebble and only
momentary ripples broke the surface calm.

Our Retrospective critic, and the adjective is ironic,
writes that

In the eulogiums heaped upon Spenser's minor
poems, little discrimination has, in our
opinion, been exercised; the judgment of the
critic seems to have been hood-winked, and
his taste deprived of the faculty of dis-
tinguishing the good from the bad, the soul
and spirit from mere corporal substance,
which is mortal and ought to be inhumed.29

This is, it must be admitted, in part true: certain of Spenser's
minor poems are of little value - but they are seldom held up
by critics as examples of great poetry. Our anonymous

critic, therefore, is beating a dead horse.

Of the eclogues in the Shepheardes Calender this critic thinks that "They contain...some, although but a small quantity of poetry...."30 Such a statement is absurd. If the Calender is not poetry then very little that followed it is poetry either, and, it must be remembered, its influence was immeasurable.

Another example of this critic's bias is his statement on the Amoretti. He says,

A bad sonnet is one of the dullest things in creation, and a series of them absolutely intolerable. Those in question are, for the most part, cold, passionless, and conceited; indeed, we actually feel it a task to get through them.31

There is sincerity in Spenser's every sonnet. In the Amoretti Spenser reveals an evenness of tone, style, and feeling exhibited elsewhere only by Daniel, but Daniel, with all his sweet perfection, unlike Spenser, lacked the creative spark.

There was a voluptuous repose about him /The Review continues/ which prevented him from leaving the beaten track, which induced him to rest satisfied with the subjects on which poetical talent was ordinarily exercised, and with the forms of composition in which they were invented, models on which natural sentiment, and the simple language of passion, were sacrificed to absurd fictions and cold ingenuity. His smaller pieces are...for the most part, actually dull.32

30 Retro. Review, p. 144
31 Ibid., pp. 157-158.
32 Ibid., p. 164.
It seems hardly necessary to comment upon this criticism except to ask what is meant by "voluptuous repose," and to wonder if the writer really believed that "absurd fictions" were the "subjects on which poetical talent was ordinarily exercised"?

In the same year (1825) an article appeared in the Quarterly Review which contrasts favourably with the one just described. Whereas the Retrospective referred to Spenser's "absurd fictions," the Quarterly finds that basically Spenser was a sacred poet. The Faerie Queene, writes the unknown author of the article,

...is a continual, deliberate endeavour to enlist the restless intellect and chivalrous feeling, of an inquiring and romantic age, on the side of goodness and faith, of purity and justice.33

Although this critic is disappointed to find some vulgar passages in Spenser, he remarks that even in these passages Spenser is never "seductive." Indeed, he says, "Vice in him, however truly described, is always made contemptible or odious."34

Spenser's writings are filled, he points out, with allusions to the sacred writings of the Bible - "...allusions breathed, if we may so speak, rather than uttered, and much fitter to be silently considered, than to be dragged forward for quotation or minute criticism."35 These veiled allusions

34 Ibid., pp. 225-226.
result from the fact that Spenser

...would have shrunk more from the chance of degrading a sacred subject by unhandsome treatment, than of incurring ridicule by what would be called unseasonable attempts to hallow things merely secular.36

It is no more correct to view Spenser as essentially a sacred poet than it is to view him as a political writer or a moral philosopher. He is all three; and he is much more - he is a fanciful story-teller.

Although neither last in merit or chronology of the critics mentioned in this chapter, I have reserved a discussion of Coleridge until now because of his importance. Coleridge's "Appendix on Spenser" is a short passage which appears with other appendices at the end of his Lectures and Notes upon Shakespeare. The appendix has a three-fold value: its comparison between Shakespeare and Spenser; its definition of allegory; and its enumeration of the seven characteristics of Spenser's works. These three points should be taken up in some detail.

In the first place we have the Shakespeare-Spenser comparison, which is most astute. Coleridge writes -

There is this difference, among many others, between Shakespeare and Spenser: - Shakspere is never coloured by the customs of his age; what appears of contemporary character in him is merely negative; it is just not something else. He has none of the fictitious realities of the classics, none of the grotesqueness of chivalry, none of the allegory of the middle ages; there is no sectarianism either of

36 Quarterly Review, p. 228.
politics or religion, no miser, no witch, -
no common witch, - no astrology - nothing
impermanent of however long duration; but
he stands like the yew tree in Lorton vale,
which has known so many ages that it belongs
to none in particular; a living image of end­
less self-reproduction, like the immortal tree
of Malabar. In Spenser the spirit of
chivalry is entirely predominant, although
with a much greater infusion of the poet’s own
individual self into it than is found in any
other writer. He has the wit of the southern
with the deeper inwardness of the northern
genius.37

Secondly, Coleridge’s definition of allegory is extremely
valuable. It not only includes the dictionary definition
but also is extended to give a fuller understanding of all
the necessary components. A student would do well to keep
Coleridge’s definition in mind while studying the Faerie
Queene or any other allegorical work. Coleridge says that
allegory is

...the employment of one set of agents and
images to convey in disguise a moral meaning,
with a likeness to the imagination, but with
a difference to the understanding, - those
agents and images being so combined as to
form a homogeneous whole. This distinguishes
it from metaphor, which is part of an allegory.
But allegory is not properly distinguishable
from fable, otherwise than as the first in­
cludes the second, as a genus its species: for
in a fable there must be nothing but what is
universally known and acknowledged, but in an
allegory there may be that which is new and
not previously admitted.38

He then continues: "Narrative allegory is distinguished from
mythology as reality from symbol, it is, in short, the

37 Lectures and Notes upon Shakespeare..., T. Ashe, ed.,
London, G. Bell, 1900, pp. 510-511.
38 Ibid., p. 511.
The seven characteristics of Spenser's work, according to Coleridge, are:

1. There is a sweetness and fluency in the verse of Spenser that can be distinguished from the more complicated textural harmonies to be found in the works of either Shakespeare or Milton.

2. In the metre of the *Faerie Queene* there is a certain "scientific" construction which can be seen in Spenser's able alliteration that doubles an image's impression. It is interesting to note that on June 24, 1827, Coleridge recorded in his *Table Talk* that

> Spenser's *Epithalamion* is truly sublime; and pray mark the swan-like movement of his exquisite *Prothalamion*. His attention to metre and rhythm is sometimes so extremely minute as to be painful even to my ear, and you know how highly I prize good versification.

3. Spenser has an excellent gift for blending descriptions of external nature and story incident with the allegory and the epic activity. The descriptions are not picturesque but constitute a series of dream-like images.

4. In the *Faerie Queene* there is a wonderful absence of particularities of both space and time. There is neither history nor geography. It is a true fairy-land, or, a land

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39 *Lectures*, p. 511.


of mental space. "The poet," Coleridge says, "has placed
you in a dream...and you neither wish, nor have the power,
to enquire where you are, or how you got there." 42

5. There is a basic character of Christian chivalry
in all Spenser's persons, but especially in his women,
Coleridge writes, and the point may well be held in doubt,
that

The Greeks, except, perhaps, in Homer, seem
to have had no way of making their women in-
teresting, but by unsexing them, as in the
instances of the tragic Medea, Electra, &c.
Contrast such characters with Spenser's Una,
who exhibits no prominent feature, has no
particularization, but produces the same
feeling that a statue does, when contem-
plated at a distance.43

To this writer at least the image of Una as a statue is
particularly inappropriate. There cannot be anything more
"unsexed" than a statue which is in an everlasting static
position. Whereas, on the other hand, the sex of Medea and
Electra is stripped away by the tragic circumstances which
engulf them. Tragedy is a great leveller, not in the sense
of making common, but of making human - or rather, in the
sense where maleness or femaleness is no longer of impor-
tance and only humanness remains with its general, perhaps,
universal responses to the tragic stimuli.

6. There is in Spenser the workings of a nationalism
that was characteristic of England's elder poets. It is

42 Lectures, p. 514.
43 Ibid., p. 515.
the glorification of England. The magical use of national
names was known by Spenser as is illustrated by his chronicle
of the British kings (FQ. II, 10) and the marriage of the
Thames and Medway (FQ. IV, 11). "What a damper to all
interest," Coleridge writes, "is a list of native East
Indian merchants! Unknown names are non-conductors; they
stop all sympathy." But, we may ask, is this true? A
list of the names of the East Indian merchants by itself is
uninteresting but not much less so than a straight list
of British kings. Any list of names taken out of a context
is hardly inspiring. Yet a list of these merchants cited
inside the framework of a poem or story may be of great
interest in that their very strangeness adds to the tone,
the colour, and usually, in the case of pieces with an East
Indian background, the mystery. One would suppose that
Coleridge would also say that the less that is known about
a name would lower the name's conductive power. Thus the
conductive power of say 'Queen Elizabeth' would be infinitely
greater than that of 'Kubla Khan' or 'Xanadu.' This is not
ture. In the case of 'Queen Elizabeth' it is a matter of
historical recall, while with 'Zanadu' and 'Kubla Khan' it
is mostly a matter of imagination.

7. Coleridge's seventh point is of vital interest as
it reveals the first adequate and ingenious view of Spenser's
intellect. He writes,

44 Lectures, p. 516.
...the great and prevailing character of Spenser's mind is fancy under the conditions of imagination, as an ever present but not always active power. He has an imaginative fancy, but he has not imagination, in kind or degree, as Shakspere and Milton have,.... Add to this a feminine tenderness and almost maidenly purity or feeling, and above all, a deep moral earnestness which produces a believing sympathy and acquiescence in the reader....

If we accept Coleridge's theories of 'fancy and imagination' then we may accept the statement above as it stands; if we do not accept his theories we, of necessity, would have to re-word the statement to suit our own ideas - but the conclusions reached in either case would be the same.

Whereas the early romantic critics give Spenser unqualified praise, the later romantics and the early Victorians reveal restraint. Gone is the idea of subservience to a "master." It is true that we find censure, like that printed in the Retrospective Review, but it is of no great importance. What is important is the fact that we have a critic like Coleridge who can turn a clear and unbiased intellect towards Spenser. Of course we need not agree with all he says; indeed, he says little, but we can find much of value in that little. The same is true, to a degree, of Hazlitt whose brief comparisons between Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare and Milton are brilliant.

Unlike the previous chapters this one must end without the usual brief review of the adverse criticism.

45 Lectures, pp. 516-517.
With the exception of the author the article printed in the Retrospective Review (which has been given sufficient space already), Hazlitt is the only one of the critics included here who has made a definite attack on Spenser. This he did when he wrote that the "sing-song" stanza of the Italians, which, he says, Spenser adopted for his Faerie Queene, forced Spenser to use a "certain license of expression...." Now this lack of adverse criticism is not a sign that the romantic critics were filled with only unqualified praise of Spenser. It is true that the early romantic critics wrote in highest praise of Spenser because he influenced them greatly—especially in versification. Southey considered him as his "master," and Wordsworth ranked him with the Holy Scriptures and Milton as being one of the "grand store-houses of enthusiastic and meditative Imagination." Wordsworth also comments on the little attention that is paid to Spenser both inside and outside England. He does not, however, question the incongruity of a highly praised but scarcely known poet; he simply concludes that the laurel had been awarded Spenser.

From the pen of Gilman we have unqualified praise that is most fanciful. Yet he makes a remark that may contain some truth. People do not read the Faerie Queene, he writes, because they do not like allegory. Why, we ask, did not Wordsworth take time thus to speculate? The answer is simple: the romantic critics, on the whole, were too much occupied in writing on poetry in general and aspects of it
in particular to devote much time to a complete study of any poet. One critic makes a dogmatic statement but foregoes any reasoning for it, and another critic may supply a reason. But dare we weave these questions and answers, these facts and reasons, together and say that we have a complete picture of the romantic criticism of Spenser? No; we may not. Wordsworth may be far from agreeing with Gilman (if we could ask direct questions) that the lack of interest shown in Spenser is the result of a lack of interest in allegory. Whereas the neo-classicists were knit fairly well together by means of the rules, the romantics were knit together by a lack of rules. This is a condition that makes final evaluation difficult. Each critic was free to say what he pleased and, of Spenser, he said so little that what he did not say poses a problem.

The later romantic critics, Hazlitt and Coleridge, were more definite and less biased than those immediately preceding them. They thought highly of Spenser. Of course, they were not in agreement: Hazlitt thought that Shakespeare and Spenser should not be compared; Coleridge makes such a comparison without any ill effects; Hazlitt said that allegory is not important and that the reader need not comprehend it; Coleridge said that it is important because it is the "proper intermedium between person and personification." Neither Hazlitt nor Coleridge fell into the critical pitfall of viewing the Faerie Queene from one side only as did the anonymous writer in the Quarterly Review.
who saw the *Faerie Queene* as a religious work only. It is the acute critical perception of both Hazlitt and Coleridge that holds them above their contemporary critics.

In the next chapter we shall study critics such as Macaulay, Wilson (North), Hallam and Morley, and will discover in the criticism of the early Victorians an abrupt change from that of the romantics.
Lord Macaulay in his essay "The Pilgrim's Progress," written about 1830, says that Spenser is one of the greatest poets who ever lived but that even he cannot make allegory interesting - the "One unpardonable fault," he writes, which "pervades the whole of the Fairy Queen."¹

We can only surmise how correct Macaulay is in his estimate of readers of the Faerie Queene. It is an appalling estimate - more appalling still when one considers that few readers who appear to approach the poem at all. Macaulay says,

We become sick of cardinal virtues and deadly sins, and long for the society of plain men and women. Of the persons who read the first canto, not one in ten reaches the end of the first book, and not one in a hundred perseveres to the end of the poem. Very few and very weary are those who are in at the death of the Blatant Beast. If the last six books, which are said to have been destroyed in Ireland had been preserved, we doubt whether any heart less stout than that of a commentator would have held out to the end.²

² Loc. cit.
Virginia Woolf was to state the same idea in a way more kind when she wrote that "The Faery Queen, it is said, has never been read to the end; no one has ever wished Paradise Lost, it is said, a word longer..."³

The story of the loss of the last six books of the Faerie Queen appears now and then in critics' reviews. It is highly improbable that these books were ever written. The shortness of the period between the publication of the second three books and the Kilcolman fire belies Spenser's accredited rate of composition - considered to be slow and leisurely.

An anonymous reviewer in the Quarterly Review of 1830 says that Spenser allowed his story, except in the case of Book One, to lead him away from his moral. He says that "...the attempt at too much ingenuity has marred the simplicity of his allegory, and deprived it, in a great degree, of consistency and coherence."⁴ This statement is, in part, true. But to attribute the fault to too much "ingenuity" seems to be poor judgment on the part of the critic. The method of composition of the poem, as we have it, is not certain. If Spenser started out consciously to follow Ariosto then Books Three and Four may be said to have been written first as they follow Ariosto's method closely. This, however, is critical conjecture. It does


⁴ Vol. 43, 1830, p. 487.
seem probable, nevertheless, that the *Faerie Queene*, as originally conceived by Spenser, underwent many changes during composition, and lost, therefore, some of the consistency and coherence suggested by the plan. In a poem of such length we cannot expect more consistency or coherence than the *Faerie Queene* now exhibits because problems of composition arise that necessarily alter the original plan.

The writer in the Quarterly also remarks that although Spenser sided with virtue he was a cold moralist and turned easily from his work to pay a compliment or to indulge his own fancy. This point that Spenser was a cold moralist, or that he lacked passion, is interesting. Can it be that the key to the problem of Spenser and his readers lies in Spenser's own character? Is it possible that the basic fault in Spenser's work is the direct result of a lack of warmth in himself? One must keep in mind the brutal coldness revealed in his expression of his Irish views.

John Wilson, better known as Christopher North, set himself a difficult task when, feeling that Spenser was not being read, he decided to construct a narrative of the poet's life with specimens from the minor poems. The finished work was published as a series of seven articles in *Blackwood's Magazine* from the year 1833 to 1835. For our purpose the articles are of very little use; which is

5 Quarterly, (1830), p. 487.
not to say that they are of little value. They are exactly what North planned them to be - a narrative of Spenser's life. The specimens from the minor poems constitute an appreciation rather than a critical analysis. Criticism, however, was bound to creep into a work of this kind and with these critical fragments we shall have to be content.

North reveals, in his second article, a belief that the English language "...is in all things superior to any other language now spoken by man." An idea such as this is a dangerous one for a critic to hold because it immediately relegates the greater literatures of other nations to a position of inferiority on the grounds that they are not written in the right language. I mention this point because, in the same article, North trips over his own statement. He writes,

Shall our own Spenser...be neglected by his own people, and the Faery Queen lie unread, while in a year we have a second edition - for behoof of those who have no Greek - of Sotheby's Homer?

There appears to be no reason why a neglected Spenser should be connected with Sotheby's Homer. The implication North is making is unfortunately clear. The only real significance of the statement is its revelation of the taste of readers of North's time. A plea to read Spenser because he is "our own" is pretty shallow.

7 Ibid., p. 430.
Throughout the articles North is content to make such discoveries as: Spenser had a greater sense of the beautiful than any other poet; his genius was as profuse as Shakespeare's; the Spenserian stanza was conceived by the soul of music; the *Faerie Queene* was the greatest allegorical poem ever conceived within half the diameter of the earth; Spenser is the greatest allegorical poet; and Spenser, Milton, and Wordsworth can be linked together because they were dedicated spirits.  

North finds only one major fault in Spenser's work and that, surprisingly enough, is in the *Shepheardes Calender*. He writes,

> But to our minds the irredeemable sin of the Shepherd's Calendar - we wish we could use gentler words, but cannot find them - is the cold, uncomfortable, and unhappy air that hangs in it over almost the whole of rural life. We are always wishing for the sun, but no sun shews his face. Nature is starved, and life hungry - and sleep seems but the relief from labour. There is nowhere Joy.

It is harsh, indeed, to say that the tone of a poem is a "sin". Obviously North missed the point.

In his *Lives of the most eminent literary and scientific men of Great Britain*, S.A. Dunham makes an interesting point - one that has not been made previously. He writes that the *Faerie Queene* "...has the singular distinction of having

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9 "No. I," vol. 34, p. 832.
produced a vast number of imitators, without having established a school.\textsuperscript{10} It may be added, however, that, even without the creating of a school, and the post-Spenserians surely constitute one, Spenser's importance was greater and longer lived than that of poets like Marlowe and Jonson who have had the honour to have a 'school' named after them. Spenser's influence has been diffused through the centuries.

An anonymous writer in the \textit{Quarterly Review} of 1840 writes that "...we are indebted \textsuperscript{7} to Spenser\textsuperscript{7} for the first display of the latent riches and harmony of our native tongue.\textsuperscript{11} He also attributes Spenser's faults to his "...wanton redundance of power, rather than from the constraint of insufficient or inflexible diction."\textsuperscript{12} This writer seems to have forgotten that Surrey, Sackville and Sidney had already given an impetus to this "display of... latent riches."

Henry Hallam in his \textit{Introduction to the Literature of Europe} turns the judgment of a classical scholar upon the works of Spenser with certain interesting results. Spenser, he writes, in the \textit{Shepheardes Calender}

\textit{...gave a Doric rudeness to his dialogue, which is a little repulsive to our taste. The dialect of Theocritus is musical to our ears, and free from vulgarity; praises which we cannot bestow on the uncouth provincial rusticity of Spenser.}\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{10} London, 1836, vol. 1, p. 348.
\textsuperscript{11} Vol. 55, p. 354.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., p. 355.
Hallam also attacked the poem because it alluded to political history and to the religious differences of the period. He does not, because of this, condemn the poem, for, as he says, "...mere pastoral must soon become insipid, unless it borrows something from active life or elevated philosophy."\(^{14}\) The *Shepheardes Calender*, Hallam says, has, in many passages, spirit and beauty, but, he finds, it is not much read or approved by the critics.

Turning his attention to Spenser's *Epithalamion*, Hallam says, briefly, that "It is an intoxication of ecstasy, ardent, noble, and pure."\(^{15}\)

Like Wordsworth, Hallam finds that Spenser is little known outside England even in an age when English literature is comparatively well known on the continent. Ariosto's fame, Hallam writes, is spread through Europe, but, even so, "...we have little reason to blush for our countryman."\(^{16}\)

Comparing Spenser and Ariosto, Hallam says that, in mind and poetic character, they are complete opposites. "The Italian is gay...," he says, while "Spenser is habitually serious...."\(^{17}\)

Hallam devotes most of his space to a study of the *Faerie Queene*. His opinion of the work can best be summed

\(^{14}\) Hallam, *op. cit.*, p. 222

\(^{15}\) Ibid., p. 226.

\(^{16}\) Ibid., p. 236.

\(^{17}\) Ibid., p. 235.
up in his statement that "There is, perhaps, less reason than some have imagined, to regret that Spenser did not complete his original design." Such a remark engenders little hope that we are to meet with any practical criticism.

Of the latter books of Spenser's masterpiece, Hallam comments that Spenser's "...muse gives gradual signs of weariness, the imagery becomes less vivid, the vein of poetical description less rich, the digressions more frequent and verbose." The statement concerning digressions may, perhaps, be justified. The rest of the statement, however, is hardly fair to Spenser. Who can possibly read cantos nine to twelve of Book Six and find signs of weariness, less vivid imagery, or a less rich vein of poetical description? It is true that this particular book may be criticised because of its change of heroes - but certainly not for any other reason. Hallam betrays the basis for his views when he writes that

It is felt already in Spenser, as it is perhaps even in Ariosto, when we read much of either, that tales of knights and ladies, giants and savages, end in a satiety which no poetical excellence can overcome.20

Even the allegories do not pass muster according to Hallam's requirements. "One of their greatest offenses...," he writes, "is that they gave birth to some tedious and

18 Hallam, op. cit., p. 237.
19 Loc. cit.
20 Loc. cit.
uninteresting poetry of the same kind."21

Besides the defects of obsoleteness and redundancy found in the Faerie Queene, Hallam finds that Spenser was...sometimes deficient in one attribute of a great poet, the continual reference to the truth of nature, so that his fictions should be always such as might exist on the given conditions.22

What kind of criticism, we may ask, is this? It is one of Spenser's many achievements that his characters can exist, within his fairyland, exceptionally true to life, or true to nature. Spenser's task was not a simple one - it was highly complex. His characters had to fit into three separate moulds - in the first place, they had to fit into a fairyland; secondly, they had to conform to medieval chivalry; and, in the third place, they had to be suitable to allegory - and the allegory is triple. We may even add a fourth requirement - they had to be true to life. It need not be commented upon that the perfect achievement of all four is impossible. The idealization requisite for an allegorical character makes it difficult for that character to be true to life. But Spenser almost achieved this result. We can read the Faerie Queene and forget that the allegories exist (not, however, with the full poetic enjoyment of the poem), whereas in a work such as Pilgrim's Progress the allegory is always evident - indeed, the story loses much of its impact if the allegory is ignored.

21 Hallam, op. cit., p. 238.

22 Ibid., pp. 238-239.
Hallam passes his final judgment on the *Faerie Queene* when he writes that

*Time, however, has gradually wrought its work; and, notwithstanding the more imaginative cast of poetry in the present century, it may be well doubted whether the Faery Queen is as much read or as highly esteemed as in the days of Anne. It is not perhaps very difficult to account for this; those who seek the delight that mere fiction presents to the mind (and they are the great majority of readers) have been supplied to the utmost limit of their craving by stories accommodated to every temper, and far more stimulant than the legends of Faeryland.*

In 1840, the *North American Review* published a review by H.K. Cleveland, of the first American edition of Spenser's works. To Cleveland the *Faerie Queene* is completely representative of Spenser's age and unlike the works of Shakespeare and Milton which are ageless, or, written for all time — "...their wealth," Cleveland writes, "was an eternity, and to eternity they entrusted their fame." On the other hand, Spenser...was remarkably the child of his age....He was the creature of his times, because the times were distinguished for their grandeur and nobleness. It was his high privilege, that the sure road to greatness was to conform to the spirit of his times; to rise up to the stature of their robust manhood.

"The whole poem of the 'Faerie Queene'," he writes,...is a faithful mirror of the times. It is filled with the prevailing sentiments,

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24 Vol. 50, p. 187.
25 *Loc. cit.*
the loyalty and the gallantry, the bravery, the wit, the learning, the patriotism, and the piety, which distinguished the reign of Elizabeth.  

This sounds very fine but it means very little. We would hardly turn to Spenser to get a picture of the Elizabethan Age. We would more probably, and more correctly, turn to Shakespeare and Jonson and other dramatists, to poets like Sidney and Ralegh, to the Voyages of Hakluyt, to the pamphlets, to the realistic fictions - but hardly to the Faerie Queene. There is too much of the medieval in the poem to enable it to be called a "faithful mirror of the times."

To enjoy fully the works of Spenser, Cleveland advises that they be read at least three times. The first reading should be done only with the aid of a glossary and without any attention being paid to the allegory or to the historical allusion. The second reading should not soon follow the first. When it is undertaken it would be accompanied by an explanation of the allegory. An extensive study, however, should not be made of the allegory, for, as Cleveland remarks, "That man who binds himself to an exclusive search for allegory, may have a philosophical, but certainly not a poetical mind."  

We must remember, he continues,

...that the great object of the reader should be the poetry, the story, the work as a production of art; he should study the text far more than the notes and comments.

26 Cleveland, op. cit., p. 188.
27 Ibid., pp. 189-190.
28 Ibid., p. 190.
The third reading should be done with a text that explains the less obvious historical and classical allusions.

The plot of the *Faerie Queene*, says Cleveland, is exceptionally simple -

A British prince sees in a vision the Fairy Queen; he falls in love, and goes in search of this unknown fair, and at length finds her. This fable has a beginning, a middle, and an end.29

This is remarkable when one considers the *Faerie Queene* to be unfinished. Cleveland appears to be criticising not so much the work of art as the idea behind it. And is the plot really so simple? Indeed not. Cleveland's idea of the plot is only the simple thread upon which the beads of individual stories are strung. Each book has a plot of its own which is more important to the fulfilment of Spenser's intention than the simple background fable outlined by Cleveland.

The "Imaginary Conversations" of Walter Savage Landor constitute a unique approach to criticism, biography and fable. There is little of value and much of interest. The conversations are not all critical by any means. The one entitled "Essex and Spenser"30 is not much more than an attack on the Irish, the Jews, and the Catholics. It relates the story of the Kilcolman fire and the burning of Spenser's child.

29 Cleveland, *op. cit.*, p. 194

In the conversation, "Southey and Porson," Landor says of Spenser, through the mouth of Porson, that "There is scarcely a poet of the same eminence, whom I have found it so delightful to read in, or so tedious to read through."31

The same idea, elaborated slightly, is repeated in "Milton and Marvel." The conversation goes -

Milton. ...I would rather have written two such scenes [as those in Dante] than twenty such poems as the Faery Queen.

Marvel. Allegory grows tiresome; nevertheless, you have found, as I have heard you say, much to please you in Spenser. The heart, I confess it, is never toucht by him; and he does not excite even a light emotion.

Milton. He leads us into no walks of Nature. A poet must do that, or forfeit his right to a seat in the upper house.32

Landor's judgment, that the Faerie Queene is "tedious," that its allegory is "tiresome," and that Spenser does not reveal Nature to us, may be true - but let us reserve opinion until later.

The opinion of Landor can best be shown, probably, by a few lines from his poem "Chaucer, O how I wish thou wert."

He writes,

Ah, surely verse was never meant
To render mortals somnolent.
In Spenser's labyrinthine rhymes
I throw my arms o'er head at times,
Opening sonorous mouth as wide
As oyster shells at ebb of tide.33

The advice given by H. Morley in an article published

31 Landor, op. cit., vol. 4, pp. 74-75.
32 Ibid., vol. 4, pp. 150-151.
33 Ibid., vol. 8, p. 318.
by the Athenaeum makes an appropriate conclusion to this survey of more important Spenser criticism.

About the annotators of Spenser, Morley writes,

> With all human learning they appear to have been fed, - but the plain fancy which should sustain those who follow Spenser's steps seems rarely to have found its way into their mind.\footnote{18487, vol. 21, p. 800.}

How true this is.

Spenser's use of antique words, Morley remarks,

> "...acquired \textit{for these words} increased wealth of expression, and scattered the lights and shades of language with peculiar delicacy."\footnote{Loc. cit.}

Morley makes a statement with which this chapter may justly conclude:

> The foppery which considers the meaning of Spenser too plain to be thought about, and the pedantry which would see in him only a dealer in the "marine stores" of petty history, have alike tended to scare away natural and unaffected perceptions from most public expositions of Spenser. The train of thought from canto to canto is not "too plain"; - individual allegories are manifest enough, but the exact design which they all unite to form, the leading arguments in which they all occur, are sufficiently recondite to demand a search and sufficiently ingenious to be worth discovery. To point these out would be to increase the popularity of Spenser, - and add to the delight of many readers who do not care to study poetry, but seek in it only relaxation and amusement.\footnote{Loc. cit.}

It has been necessary to omit certain writers from this
chapter because they add nothing to the study we have undertaken. Notable among these is Sir Walter Scott, who contributed brief praise in his two articles to the Edinburgh Review (vol. 7 and vol. 17), and John Keats, who found immense inspiration in the works of Spenser. Keats, early in life, contributed a short, insignificant poem to the long line of Spenser imitations, and later presented an annotated edition of the Faerie Queene to his beloved Fanny.

The most striking note in the Spenserian criticism of the Early Victorians is the abrupt change from the praise of the romantic critics. Unlike the previous periods in which one movement is foreshadowed in its predecessor and fades gradually in the movement that follows, there is no transition from romantic criticism to the criticism of the Early Victorians. This lack of transition is strange when one remembers that the Victorian Age was predominantly romantic. Yet it is not so strange when one realizes that the Victorian romanticism was tempered by the Victorian interest in science, politics, religion, philosophy and morality. Victorian romanticism was more conventional in attitude than was the romanticism of the turn of the nineteenth century. If this is kept in mind the abruptness can be better understood.

With the exception of Hallam, who attacked the language of the Shepheardes Calender and labelled it "repulsive," the Early Victorians limited their adverse
criticism of Spenser to attacks on his subject matter. Macaulay found that allegory was the one unpardonable fault in the *Faerie Queene*. Hallam also attacked the poem because of its allegories. He writes that they "gave birth to some tedious and uninteresting poetry of the same kind." The word "tedious" is also applied to them by Landor. An anonymous writer in the *Quarterly Review* explains that Spenser's allegory was deprived of its consistency and coherence because of too much ingenuity and that Spenser, except in Book One, allowed his story to lead him away from his moral.

Christopher North, reviewing Spenser's minor poems, attacks the *Shepheardes Calender* because of its "cold, uncomfortable, and unhappy air." He is unable to find, he says, any joy in the poem at all.

The most vehement attack on Spenser came from the pen of Hallam. Besides attacking the *Calender* because of its "repulsive" language, he condemns the poem because it contains allusions to political history and to the religious differences in the Elizabethan Age. When he turns to the *Faerie Queene* Hallam is even more bitter. He, for one, he writes, does not regret that Spenser's original plan was not completed. The later books of the poem, he remarks, show signs of weariness, and contain less vivid imagery, less rich descriptions, and more frequent verbose digressions than do the earlier books. Tales of knights and ladies, Hallam concludes, "end in a satiety which no poetical
excellence can overcome."

Of course, not all early Victorian criticism was adverse - but that which was produced by the major writers, on the whole, was. Gone is the praise for Spenser's versification, for few of the critics at this time were themselves poets. These critical attacks may be a sign that Spenser is fading into the background and is losing his literary popularity. In the next chapter an attempt will be made to view the two hundred and fifty years of Spenser criticism surveyed in the preceding chapters and to see what trends have been revealed.
Spenser was by no means as popular in 1850 as he was in the years from his death to 1650. I must stress that we are dealing with popularity and not with importance; they are two entirely different things. The popularity of a writer is usually determined by the extent to which he is read, whereas his importance is best considered in relation to the influence he has had on other writers in matters of thought or style, and on readers in matters of thought, manners or delight. A writer may be popular without being important, or important without being popular. It is a supreme achievement for a writer to be both popular and important. There is, however, little correlation between popularity and importance; nor is there any rule for measuring either.

Today, when a book sells over a million copies we can be fairly well assured that over a million people have read it and we can infer that it is popular. Even if, however, it exerts an influence over its readers we cannot measure its importance while we are contemporary with it.
Its influence, indeed, may only be seen as a passing fad of thought, manners, or style.

When we view the Elizabethan Age we must take into consideration a number of factors that do not trouble us when we view our own age. In the first place, we are unable to estimate the number of readers a book had then, because high cost of publication probably caused a wider hand-to-hand circulation of books than exists at present. Secondly, the average person, or reader, whom our publishers cater to today, was different three hundred and fifty years ago: he either could not read or was not capable of absorbing anything beyond the "broadsides" or, with difficulty, religious tracts. In the third place, the educated Elizabethan differed from his modern counterpart. The educated Elizabethan gentleman had been 'impelled' into the Trivium and Quadrivium: He was soundly grounded in the classics, in languages, in theology, in philosophy, and, if at all possible, he received his final polish on the 'grand tour.' Elizabethan literature, on the whole, was produced by writers with such educational backgrounds (Shakespeare was an exception to this).

By keeping these things in mind, we can see from the large number of allusions and references to Spenser by both Elizabethan and Jacobean writers how great was Spenser's popularity. He was writing for men whose education enabled them to comprehend his classical and theological allusions
with an immediacy that ensured their enjoyment. Furthermore, Spenser was writing at a time when his innovations in versification, when his masterful handling of rhyme, metre and stanza created an immediate interest. Such skilful versifying had never been seen before in English, except in Chaucer's works, which, at Spenser's time, were overshadowed by a preoccupying interest in the classics and in Italian literature.

Besides making innovations in versification, Spenser, like his contemporaries, also turned to Latin and Italian models, looked to medieval chivalry for inspiration, wrote religious, moral and political allegories, and copied the language of Chaucer. As a result his work was a mixture of medieval gothic and renaissance classicism tinged, perhaps, with baroque. Everything was in the spirit of the times except the antique diction which drew critical attacks from Sidney, Jonson, Bolton and Davenant - all contemporaries or near contemporaries of Spenser.

With the advent of the Restoration the spontaneity of the Elizabethan and Jacobean writers was replaced by the sobriety of the neo-classicists with their reason and their rules. The critics found fault with Spenser's archaic language, his subject matter, his allegories, his stanza forms, and his use of the pastoral. Rymer, Dryden, Pope,
Gay, and Johnson - all censured Spenser. He was still widely read in this period, as the number of allusions shows, but his prestige was at a low ebb. His great influence on versification, however, was still strong, and, there was no lessening of the number of Spenser imitations that were flowing from the pens of writers - usually minor authors. It never occurred to the neo-classicists that the reason the Faerie Queene did not conform to the rules was that it was not written according to the rules. The neo-classicists were certain that they were right, and they cited Aristotle and Horace, Rapin and Boileau as corroboration. Aristotle was the great name, the great critic, and what he said was law, or, rather, what they thought he said was law. Thus they proceeded to condemn writers like Spenser and Shakespeare for not conforming to the rules; and they themselves wrote literature that, stymied by their own regulations, tended to become stilted.

The literary pendulum, however, is never still, and the neo-classicists were superseded by the pre-romantics - a peculiar group of writers who were neither neo-classical nor romantic, but rather occupy a transitional state in between the two schools. Warton and Hurd, early pre-romantics, were authors of the two most valuable and important tracts concerning Spenser that come out of the whole period covered by this thesis. Each showed a considerable neo-classical influence which, however, was counter-balanced by their demand that the Faerie Queene should be studied for what it
is and not in the light of any restrictions imposed by post-Spenserian literary conventions.

In general, it may be said, the pre-romantics wrote less adverse criticism and less genuine praise of Spenser than earlier writers. And, indeed, few writers in this period were concerned with him. Spenser's influence was still to be seen, however, in many Spenserian imitations, and allusions to Spenser and his muse were still numerous. Nevertheless, the fervour of the Elizabethan and Jacobean writers, and even that of some neo-classicists, was not repeated. With the exception of Warton's Observations and Hurd's Letters the criticism was pallid.

The early romantic writers, on the other hand, heaped on Spenser the most wholehearted and unqualified praise. They found in Spenser the voice of their own romanticism; they found in his poetry the same music of word and melody of verse that they themselves wished to achieve. But even so, two disturbing developments were apparent. In the first place the trend of neglecting Spenser's allegories, which became evident during the seventeenth century, was strengthening; and, secondly, as Wordsworth revealed, Spenser was little known either in England or elsewhere. In other words, Spenser's general popularity had declined considerably. The appreciation of his works had become limited almost entirely to poets who, on the whole, were influenced principally by the sweetness of his versification.

Although never adverse in their criticism, the later
romantic critics were less unqualified in eulogizing Spenser. There was, however, no transition between the romantics and the early Victorians. The abrupt change of idea between these two groups is surprising because, after all, the early Victorians were romantics themselves. There can be only one explanation for this abruptness, and that is that the sudden interest of science, politics, religion, philosophy and morality induced the Victorian romantics to hold a more conventional attitude than was possessed by the romantics at the turn of the nineteenth century.

With such a background it is no wonder that the early Victorians limited their adverse criticism almost completely to attacks against Spenser's subject matter and his allegory. Theirs was predominantly a moral criticism, and with the jaundiced eyes of moralists they were unable to see the beauties of medieval and renaissance richness, the delights of fairy-land, or the pleasures of tales dealing with knights and ladies. Two observations can be made: Spenser's popularity was at its lowest point, and his influence, if felt at all, was not acknowledged.

Spenser's popularity appears to have been in a general decline since the period of the neo-classicists, not, of course, among the poets, but, according to various statements made by Wordsworth, Macaulay and others, among the reading public. But even among the poets many aspects of Spenser's work were not considered interesting; indeed,
his versification remained the main reason for their holding his writings in any esteem whatsoever. The allegories lost their importance. The key to the political allegory, it must be admitted, may never be discovered, and the subject matter was considered either old-fashioned, or too simple, or was attacked on moral and religious grounds. Too many commentators viewed the *Faerie Queene* for the pleasures it afforded, notwithstanding the fact that Spenser wrote, in his letter to Ralegh, that "The generall end therefore of all the book is to fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline...."

In order to confirm my opinion that Spenser's popularity had been steadily decreasing, I have attempted in the appendix to this thesis to show the present state of Spenser study and scholarship.
APPENDIX

The general intent of the questionnaire sent to seventy-five leading North American Universities was to determine the extent of Spenser study and scholarship today. At the time this thesis was written replies had been received from sixty of these institutions (for names see list at end). On the whole the results show a surprising indifference to Spenser.

Since Spenser is usually ranked with Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Milton as one of the four greatest English poets, the following results of the survey are interesting. Of the sixty universities reporting, only one does not offer a course on Chaucer, or a course that centres in Chaucer; all offer a Shakespeare course of some sort; and all but seven offer courses stressing the study of Milton (two universities report that they offer their Milton course only occasionally). Compared with these figures the amount of Spenser study is disappointing: only twenty-six universities offer courses that are, in some way, predominantly Spenser courses (this figure includes three Canadian institutions, Queen's University, The University of Saskatchewan, and The University of Toronto).

The work of these twenty-six colleges can be broken
down as follows: twenty study the *Faerie Queene* in full; ten offer their Spenser courses to graduate students only; five include the study of other writers in their courses (Queen's lists its course as "An Honours course devoted almost entirely to Spenser and Milton although with some attention to minor poets."); three offer their courses in the form of a seminar; one offers its course in alternate years, one every two or three years, and one only when registration demands (so far twice in ten years). Three other universities have withdrawn their Spenser courses because of insufficient interest. The average enrolment in these classes is eighteen, varying from three (University of Colorado) to seventy-five (Columbia University). The average enrolment in other advanced English courses is forty.

Of the sixty universities heard from only forty-nine offer literary survey courses on a first or second year level, and forty-two of these courses include compulsory readings from Spenser. The extent of this reading varies greatly among colleges, but, on the whole, they include all or part of the following: one to three cantos of the *Faerie Queene*, one eclogue of the *Shepheardes Calender*, five to thirteen connets from the *Amoretti*, and portions (!) of the *Epithalamion* and the *Prothalamion*. Vassar and Wellesley, both women's colleges, include the reading of two books of the *Faerie Queene*.

Advanced courses that include a study of Spenser are
offered by thirty-five universities. The amount of time spent on Spenser in these courses varies from two lectures to eight weeks of lectures. The average time, however, is two and one half weeks.

Only twenty universities report that they have had students carry on graduate research work on Spenser, of which fifteen have listed the amount; the other five record that there has either been "considerable over the years," or "not much," or "none recently." From the fifteen universities which have stated the amount of research done, there have come eighteen master's and thirteen doctoral theses (of which five master's theses and one doctoral thesis are in preparation at present). Only two Canadian universities claim any graduate work on Spenser: The University of Toronto has had one doctoral thesis, and McGill University says "not much" work has been done. Of the colleges reporting, the universities of Nebraska and Texas have had the most research work carried on by graduates: they have had five these's apiece. The University of Florida says that "M.A. candidates do not know enough" to undertake graduate work on Spenser, and the University of Washington states that the "falling off [of graduate research work] is proportionate to the falling off of Spenser scholarship generally." (During the thirty years that the late F.M. Padelford lectured at the University of Washington that institution was one of North America's leading centres of Spenser scholarship).
Universities which do not offer a Spenser course were asked whether or not they thought that the incorporation of such a course into their curriculum would be successful. Of the twenty-five universities which answered this question, only six thought that a Spenser course would be successful. The University of Alaska replied favourably even though their average enrolment in advanced English courses is six.

A number of the comments as to why a Spenser course would not be successful illuminate attitudes that are being taken toward Spenser at the present time. Professor A.L. Wheeler of the University of Manitoba writes that "Perhaps The Faery Queen lacks for even an advanced student the solid meat of Milton, Chaucer etc." Spenser's "limited appeal" is stressed by Mr. Pacey of New Brunswick University, by Miss Marion Carson of the University of Nebraska (their Spenser course failed, in 1946, the first year it was offered), and by Miss Muriel J. Hughes of the University of Vermont. The lack of competent teachers for a Spenser course is pointed out by Professor J.W. Huggins of the University of Arizona, by Miss Marie Dunvas of the University of Georgia, and Mr. T.P. Harrison of the University of Texas, which offers a course on Spenser.

Some comments are most interesting. Mr. Claude W. Faulkner, Acting Head of the English Department of the University of Arkansas writes that "Most students (and teachers) find Spenser very dull." Professor F.Y. St. Clair of the
University of North Dakota thinks that a Spenser course would be "too specialized for the amount of natural appeal that the subject matter would have for American students." There is "No great interest on part of either students or faculty" at the University of South Carolina, according to J. Edwin Whitesell, Chairman of the Graduate Committee. Although New York University offers a Spenser course with an average enrolment of twenty-five students, Spenser is found not to be "appealing enough in competition with an unusually rich offering." Professor U.A. Shaaber of the University of Pennsylvania states that "Undergraduates find Spenser hard to read; an intensive course should overcome this handicap; but there are too many other writers equally eligible for intensive study who present no such obstacle." Laurence L. Smith of the University of Wyoming also finds that there are more "apparent needs" for an student than a study of Spenser. A rather surprising criticism is made by Professor T.M. Pearce of the University of New Mexico who writes, "You know, as well as I, that it would expand only into literary history, Elizabethan politics, classical backgrounds, world literature, and esthetic criteria." However, these things alone, it seems to me, would make a Spenser course of vital importance for a better understanding of all Elizabethan literature.

Mr. Marcus Selden Goldman, Spenser lecturer at the University of Illinois, in checking to determine the number of theses written on Spenser at that university was
surprised to find the total less than he expected, considering that H.S.V. Jones was Spenser lecturer at Illinois before his death.

Professor Goldman comments on a newly developing literary trend. He writes,

The trend here in recent years seems to have been away from English literature to American literature, away from poetry to prose fiction, and away from the older periods to the most recent ones. From conversations with men in the faculties of other universities, particularly universities in the Middle West, I have the impression that the trend is not a local phenomenon but rather general. It is, of course, greatly to be regretted, for at long last it is certain to make for both narrowness and superficiality in literary scholarship.

If such a trend exists then we must truly fear for the future state of literary scholarship and for the state of Spenser scholarship, which appears to be already tottering on a crumbling foundation.

A survey, similar to the one I have made, was conducted in 1949 by William B. Hunter, Jr., of Wofford College among all four-year colleges and universities of Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee. Mr. Hunter writes that fifty-seven of sixty-six reporting colleges included Spenser in a sophomore survey course with three to six class hours of lectures. At the upperclass level only nineteen colleges had courses that touched on Spenser with six to twenty-four hours devoted

to his study, and fourteen colleges had courses devoted entirely to the study of Spenser (twenty to forty-five class hours) with enrolments of ten to twelve students. On the whole, the results of Mr. Hunter's survey and of my own are similar, with the exception that he found that there was more graduate research in preparation at smaller colleges than I found in the larger institutions.

About Spenser and Milton scholarship, Mr. Hunter writes:

...the most telling judgment of this survey should be aimed at our graduate schools. Only half of them offer advanced study of these two poets, who assuredly rank among our top five. The colleges appear to be doing their jobs better than the universities, but if the latter do not interest their graduates in the work of these two poets, teaching of them will inevitably decline in the colleges, whose faculties must be trained in the larger schools.  

and, he says:

Spenser comes off better proportionately in research and theses, but fares worse among the undergraduates than Milton, who, in turn, is widely read by all levels of students although interest in him does not appear to carry over very well into the graduate school.

The intellectual apathy revealed by Spenserian criticism up to 1850, and shown by these two surveys of Spenser study today, is startling. It is hardly possible to continue talking of our literary heritage when the great writers who make up that heritage are being forgotten or overlooked.

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2 Hunter, op. cit., p. 6.
3 Loc. cit.
Canadian universities reporting were:

University of Alberta
(University of British Columbia)
McGill University
McMaster University
University of Manitoba
New Brunswick University
Queen's University
University of Saskatchewan
University of Toronto

American universities reporting were:

University of Alabama
University of Alaska
University of Arizona
University of Arkansas
Bryn Mawr
University of California
University of Colorado
Columbia University
University of Connecticut
University of Delaware
Duke University
University of Florida
University of Georgia
Harvard University
University of Illinois
State University of Iowa
John Hopkins University
University of Kansas
University of Kentucky
Louisiana State University
University of Maine
University of Michigan
University of Minnesota
University of Mississippi
University of Missouri
Montana State University
University of Nebraska
University of Nevada
University of New Mexico
New York University
University of North Carolina
University of North Dakota
Northwestern University
University of Oklahoma
University of Pennsylvania
College of Puget Sound
Purdue University
Rutgers University
University of South Carolina
University of South Dakota
Stanford University
University of Texas
University of Utah
Vassar College
University of Vermont
University of Virginia
University of Washington
Wellesley College
University of Wisconsin
University of Wyoming
Yale University
APPENDIX TWO

The following brief summary of the numbers of editions of Spenser's *Faerie Queene* and his complete *Works* to the year 1850 is interesting. Separate editions of various minor works are not considered nor are collections of poetry which include selections from Spenser's poetry.

During Spenser's actual lifetime only the two parts of the *Faerie Queene* (Bks. I to III, and Bks. IV to VI) were published. Before 1650, however, three editions of his *Works* appeared.

The *Faerie Queene* did not appear in print by itself during the Neo-Classical period (1650-1750) but three new editions of the *Works* came from the press.

The Pre-Romantic and Romantic periods were particularly rich - four editions of the *Faerie Queene* and eleven of the *Works*. Six more editions of the latter, published by the Early Victorians, appeared before 1850.

It would seem safe to say that these figures indicate the spread of literacy and growth of textual scholarship rather than reveal any information about Spenser's popularity.
The number enclosed in brackets at the end of each entry signifies the number of the chapter in which the material may be found.


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