The Courtly Figure: Spenser's Anatomy of Allegory

JACQUELINE T. MILLER

In the opening stanza of Book VI of *The Faerie Queene*, Spenser proposes, with some caution, a brief etymology of the subject of his book:

Of Court it seemes, men Courtesie doe call,
For that it there most useuth to abound.

(VI.i.1)

In the next lines this court-derived courtesy is associated primarily with style: it is appropriate, the narrator explains, to identify courtesy with the court, because the court is the "ground" of "all goodly manners" and the "roote of civill conversation." The hero of the book, Calidore, is presented in the following stanza as the exemplar of this courtly courtesy.

The emphasis on style is significant, for it recalls not only the emphasis of courtesy handbooks on the cultivation of style, but also the recently documented parallels that pertained between courtly decorum and the style of Elizabethan poetical discourse. More particularly, and most relevant to Spenser's own poetic style in *The Faerie Queene*, it conjures up the specific trope most closely identified with the courtier and the court, that of Allegory, which George Puttenham, in *The Arte of English Poesie*, introduces as "the Courtly figure" and actually personifies as "the Courtier," whose "profession... is in plaine termes, cunningly to be able to dissemble." Allegory, "when we speake one thing and thinke another, and that our words and our meanings meete not," is defined for its "duplicitie" as the figure of "false semblant or dissimulation" (p. 186) and for its pleasing style and effect as the

---

Jacqueline T. Miller is Associate Professor of English at Rutgers University, and author of *Poetic License: Authority and Authorship in Medieval and Renaissance Contexts*. She is currently working on a study provisionally titled "Mother Tongues: Spenser's Allegory of Power."
figure of “faire semblant” (p. 299) or “beau semblant” (p. 158). Puttenham considers the dissembling that constitutes allegory essential and efficacious because without it “no man can pleasantly utter and perswade . . . but in effect is sure never or very seldom to thrive and prosper in the world”; hence it is especially useful to those who constitute the court, from “every common Courtier” to “the great Emperour” (p. 186).

This definition of allegory as courtly, duplicitous, and expedient seems especially relevant to Spenser’s portrait of his hero in Book VI of The Faerie Queene, a character who can “thrive and prosper in the world” precisely because he can “pleasantly utter and perswade.” Calidore, whose name, significantly, means both “beautiful gifts” (Greek kalla dora) and “cunning (Latin callidus) with gold/gifts,” epitomizes the falsity and fairness of the language of allegory. Calidore is introduced as the Knight of Courtesy, the paragon of Gloriana’s court, whose “gracious speach” could “steale mens hearts away” (VI.i.2), and throughout Book VI we witness numerous incidents revealing the efficacy of his rhetoric that is not always in the service of truth, that serves “outward shows” as much if not more than “inward thoughts” (VI.Proem.5). He is willing, for example, to lie to salvage the dubious reputation of Priscilla, swearing “on his Knighthood” (VI.iii.18) a fabricated and self-aggrandizing story that wins him the gratitude of Priscilla’s father and Priscilla but does nothing to rectify the original situation that occasions the need for subterfuge. Later we observe his manipulation of Coridon, and his offer of money to Meliboe—an offer that effectively exposes how little Calidore has understood of Meliboe’s account of the internal pleasure of pastoral life, though he nonetheless manages expertly to ingratiate himself into the pastoral company. As Nohrnberg nicely sums it up, “Sir Calidore is a courtier, a kind of poet of conduct, but also a hypocrite. His allegorically veiled truth is the polite white lie: indirection, the disguise of ulterior motives, the studied use of misrepresentation, and the hermeneutical virtues of subtlety and finesse all serve his cause”—a list of strategies, we should note, that could be applied to the mode of The Faerie Queene itself, with its partial, disguised truths, its omissions and inconsistencies, its indirections and misrepresentations: in short, the dark conceit of this “clowdily enwrapped” text. The association of Calidore with allegory is most explicit when he becomes almost a personification of allegory during his “costume changes,” first doffing his knightly garb and exchanging it for pastoral weeds, and then later removing his pastoral clothing, putting on his armor underneath, and then recovering it with his shepherd’s disguise. Calidore, I
would suggest, not only is a figure of courtesy and the court, but also functions as an incarnation of the figure of allegory. Through the story of this dubious hero of Book VI, Spenser enacts an anatomy of his own allegory in *The Faerie Queene*, critiquing the rhetorical strategies that his own “dark conceit” embodies, and exposing its complicity in the discourse of power exemplified by “the courtly figure.”

Louis Montrose has demonstrated how, in Puttenham’s *Arte*, the mode of the courtly poet and of the courtier are conflated. Puttenham calls allegory the “chief ringleader and captaine of all other figures,” and he describes figures as serving functions of both ornament and dissimulation:

As figures be the instruments of ornament in every language, so be they also in a sorte abuses or rather trespasses in speach, because they passe the ordinary limits of common utterance, and be occupied of purpose to deceive the eare and also the minde, drawing it from plainnesse and simplicitie to a certaine doublenesse, whereby our talke is the more guilefull & abusing, for what els is your *Metaphor* but an inversion of sence by transport; your *allegorie* by a duplicitie of meaning or dissimulation under covert and darke intendments.

(p. 154)

Similarly, the courtier’s goals, as Puttenham defines them, are two-fold, to “geve enterteinment” and to “dissemble . . . his conceits as well as his countenances, so as he never speake as he thinkes, or thinke as he speaks, and that in any matter of importance his words and his meaning very seldome meete: for so as I remember it was concluded by us setting fourth the figure *Allegoria*, which therefore not impertinently we call the Courtier” (p. 299). Having mastered the rules set forth in the Arte, the poet “now lately become[s] a Courtier,” and as Montrose explains, “the courtier becomes a living trope; he actually incarnates the verbal figure Puttenham personifies as The Courtier” (p. 440).

A parallel equation between his own mode of allegory and his figure of the Courtier is suggested by Spenser in the opening cantos of Book VI. In the Proem, the narrator describes his work as he makes his way through the landscape he has created. His work is “tedious,” and his steps through Faeryland are “weary,” but Faeryland itself is “delightfull,”

And sprinckled with such sweet variety,  
Of all that pleasant is to eare or eye,
That I nigh ravish with rare thoughts delight,
My tedious travell doe forget thereby;
And when I gin to feele decay of might,
It strength to me supplies, and chears my dulled spright.

(VI.Proem.1)

The effects of this linguistic construct, *The Faerie Queene* itself, are both pleasing and duplicitous—he is cheered and spiritually strengthened, in one wording; he is ravished and therefore made to forget his tedious travel in another.\(^{10}\) Compare this to the description of Calidore, as a knight

Whose every deed and word, that he did say,
Was like enchantment, that through both the eyes,
And both the eares did steale the hart away.

(VI.ii.3)

Like the pleasure of traveling through the poetic construct of Faeryland, which strikes the ear and eye and ravishes the traveler, causing forgetfulness of the darker aspects of the journey, Calidore’s words and deeds perform a charmed transformation, working though the eyes and ears to “steale the hart.” The verbal delights of Faeryland are two-sided, they refresh and ravish; similarly, Calidore’s language and behavior manage to enchant and steal.

To ravish and to steal the heart both imply a kind of irresistible power, the effect of which is to win, seduce, or appropriate, and this power is associated with the gracious speech of Calidore and with the poetry of *The Faerie Queene*. When Puttenham associates the ability to use allegory with the ability to rule (“*Qui nescit dissimulare nescit regnare*” [186]), he makes a similar connection between allegory and the power to impose oneself on one’s audience, and his identification of it as “captaine of all other figures” indicates its capacity to subsume everything under its rubrics.\(^ {11}\) The sense of allegory as an instrument of power and rule finds further expression in its status as an instrument of persuasion. But what exactly is the kind of rule or persuasion that Allegory enacts? Puttenham’s heading of the chapter in which he discusses allegory identifies it as a figure of alteration, and suggests that the alteration occurs both in the language that is “wrested from his owne naturall signification” and also in the minds of its auditors: “*Of sensible figures altering and affecting the mynde by alteration of sence or intendements in whole clauses or speaches*” (p. 186). In other words, the “alteration” of sense in the language, whereby “our wordes and our meanings meete not,” affects the mind with a
similar "altering." The implications of this parallel are suggested even more forcefully when Puttenham describes the working procedures of figurative language, which enacts a kind of transformation of the mind of its hearers into an image of itself— that is, into an image of its own duplicity. The "purpose" of figures, we recall, is "to deceive the eare and also the minde, drawing it from plainnesse and simplicitie to a certaine doubleness, whereby our talke is the more guilefull & abusing." Against the more traditional notion that allegory leads its readers to truth stands this notion that allegory in fact insinuates itself into its readers, functioning as a conduit of its own doubleness. Allegory, in short, may perpetuate itself by inculcating in its readers its own strategies of dissimulation.

Spenser's professed intention in The Faerie Queene is not, of course, to create proficient dissemblers, but rather "to fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and noble discipline." And his professed intention in Book VI is to present a pattern not of the false courtesy that is "nought but forgerie" but of the true courtesy whose "seat is deepe within the mynd, / And not in outward shows, but inward thoughts defynd" (VI.Proem.5). But this definition of courtesy posits a distinction between inner and outer, true and false, that as others have noted is problematized as the book unfolds, especially by the figure of the Blatant Beast, whose attacks are directed indiscriminately against "good and bad alike" (VI.xii.28) and thus make it impossible to distinguish the two. Furthermore, the Beast seems able to infect and therefore even transform its victims internally: its wounds, though initially affecting the "outward sences," infect "th'inner parts . . . lastly scattering / Contagious poyson close through every vaine" (VI.vi.8).12 It is precisely this blurring of distinctions between good and bad, inner and outer, true and false, that also lies at the heart of the critical debate over Calidore's character, with critics unable to agree whether he is the expedient, glib epitome of false courtesy, or one of Spenser's finest heroes, or something in between. It also lies behind, and complicates, Puttenham's definition of the dissembling which is the defining feature of Allegory:

And ye shall know that we may dissemble, I meane speake otherwise then we thinke, in earnest as well as in sport, under covert and darke termes, and in learned and apparant speaches, in short sentences, and by long ambage and circumstance of wordes, and finally aswell when we lye as when we tell truth.

(p. 186)
Like the indiscriminate slander of the Blatant Beast, which infects good and bad alike, like the "courteous guize" of Calidore, which may be forgery or an expression of his inward thoughts, the duplicity of allegory serves lies and truth. If lying and truth-telling participate equally in duplicity and doubleness, the result is the blurring of moral and linguistic categories; if dissimulation is the mode of the false and the true, then we are left with a radical questioning of what is conveyed by the covert and dark terms of "the courtly figure," which functions by ravishing, stealing the heart, or drawing the mind, and which cannot escape from the duplicity it may aim to condemn, but which it also may embody and propound.

Calidore's early encounters as the Knight of Courtesy are particularly instructive concerning the function of "gracious speech" and the significance of his allegorical character. In the first canto, he extracts a promise of reform, of acquiescence to the codes of courtesy, from Crudor, but the episode implies that what Calidore obtains may only be a verbal acceptance: Crudor, "In dread of death," "promist to performe his precept well, / And whatsoever else he would require" (VI.i.43), implying that he would agree to anything just to save his life. He binds himself by oath to Calidore's precepts, we are told, "how ever liefe or loth" (VI.i.44)—as though what is important here, to Crudor and Calidore, is the verbal gesture of fealty to the courtly code, rather than any true inward acceptance of its ethos, or any true transformation of his character. The phrase "how ever liefe or loth" implies that the question of whether Crudor is truly changed or reluctantly swearing loyalty upon pain of death is a point of indifference: certainly Calidore is satisfied. But remembering that courtesy is defined by "inward thoughts" not "outward shows," we may legitimately be suspicious not only about Crudor's motives but also about Calidore's apparent lack of concern for them. Humphrey Tonkin, noting the derivation of Crudor's name (from the Latin crudes and crudelis, cruel), comments on what he finds "remarkable" about this scene: he claims that "Crudor's decision to reform seems to do violence . . . to the terms of Spenser's allegory; Cruelty ceases to be cruel," and adds that this conversion "shatters even the logic of the allegory." I would argue, however, that this scene vehemently confirms the nature of Spenser's allegory by its suggestion (from the perspective of Crudor) of the duplicity of an allegorical figure whose talk may be "guilefull & abusing," and (from the perspective of Calidore) of the way allegory perpetuates itself, insinuates itself into the landscape, transforming what it encounters into an image of its own
equivocal doubleness. If there is a conversion here, it is from a simplistic allegorical notion that the figure named Crudor will be cruel to the more complex, dark, and sinister notion of allegory in which the figure who is “cruel” may well speak a language that resembles its nature.

Perhaps the scene most revealing about Calidore’s use of language, his success in “pleasing,” and its ominous results occurs when he comes across Calepine and Serena and interrupts their dalliance (while they thought themselves “from daunger free” [VI.iii.20]). Calidore manages to allay Calepine’s “conceiv’d displeasure” with “his gentle words and gladly wit” so much so that Calepine invites him to sit down and relate his adventures, which Calidore does with “delightfull pleasure” (VI.iii.22), while Serena, apparently ignored, wanders off into the clutches of the Blatant Beast. Calidore’s intrusion, his accomplished acquittal of himself, his theft of Calepine’s heart from Serena as both men relish the narration of Calidore’s story, precipitate Serena’s abduction by the Blatant Beast, the many-tongued beast who epitomizes the most explicit form of the abuse of language in Book VI.16 Calepine’s susceptibility to Calidore’s words prefigures - (if not occasions) Serena’s vulnerability to the Blatant Beast; Calepine’s seduction by Calidore is analogous to Serena’s abduction by the Blatant Beast. Calidore’s language is thus associated with the Beast’s, and the only cure for the wounds it inflicts, according to the Hermit, who “the art of words knew wondrous well” (VI.vi.6) is “Your eies, your eares, your tongue, your talk restraine / From that they most affect, and in due termes containe” (VI.vi.7): a cure that recalls the earlier descriptions not only of Calidore’s efficacy in stealing hearts, but also of the way Faeryland ravishes, both making the senses—the eyes and ears—the object of their verbal pleasures and expertise.

The triple echo suggests that the Hermit’s advice is not only applicable to the objects of the Blatant Beast’s attacks, but also to those who come in contact with the tactics of Calidore, and furthermore to the readers of *The Faerie Queene*. In the allegorical patterns that obtain in many places throughout *The Faerie Queene*, we see that heroes do battle with aspects of themselves: Red Cross Knight with error and despair, for instance, and Guyon with his own inclinations towards intemperance and sexual arousal in the Bower of Bliss. The same may likely be the case in Book VI. The Blatant Beast, as described by Calidore himself in canto i, is not simply the alien evil beast disrupting an otherwise idyllic landscape, but a reflection of an already corrupted world: “Into this wicked world he forthe was sent / To be the plague and
scourge of wretched men” (VI.i.8). In other words, the Beast is presented both as a corrupting influence and as the image of a “wicked world.” As his later description in canto xii suggests, the majority of his poisonous thousand tongues are not the tongues of beasts; rather, “most of them were tongues of mortall men” (VI.xii.27). It may well be, then, that in Calidore’s assigned quest to capture the Blatant Beast we see the hero confronting the monstrous, magnified image of his own corrupted and corrupting speech that his “comely guize” so effectively masks.17

As with Calidore, so perhaps with Spenser. The Blatant Beast may symbolize not only the language of detraction used against Lord Gray and his own Faerie Queene by those in power, but also the language of allegory employed in The Faerie Queene itself, a language that in its own tactics of dissimulation may blur moral categories, that deals in half-told, mangled, and disguised stories, and that exerts its own kind of dubious power over its readers.18 Much has been written on the nature of Book VI being “pre-allegorical,” a realm from which allegory has receded, or is muted.19 In this reading, when it is extended, the Blatant Beast figures as one of the few allegorical figures, as the enemy that is allegory, which functions, in Isabel MacCaffrey’s words, “where being and seeming have parted company.”20 MacCaffrey thus claims that “Calidore must capture the Blatant Beast in order that allegorical fictions may remain unnecessary in Fairy Land”; Elizabeth Bellamy, in a recent article, writes: “the quest structure, as outlined by Calidore’s search for the Blatant Beast, becomes the effort to arrest allegory itself.”21 While I would agree with the association of the Blatant Beast with allegory, I would not agree with MacCaffrey that it is alien to Book VI, or with Bellamy that it is alien to Calidore. Indeed, the quest structure, as outlined by Calidore’s course in Book VI, while it may be intended as the attempt to arrest allegory, in fact perpetuates the course of allegory, which contaminates the landscape and inhabitants that it encounters. The Hermit’s advice is thus not only, as others have suggested, directed against allegorical speaking (in its warning to “talke in open sight”22 but also (in its caution to restrain the eyes and ears) against reading, against leaving oneself open to the seductions of allegory that has the capacity to breed its false semblant within.

Seen in this context, the pastoral interlude in Book VI takes on new significance. To argue whether Spenser condemns Calidore’s escape in this episode or whether he sympathizes with it, is to assume misleadingly that the pastoral is an escape at all. The pastoral interlude actually continues and in fact intensifies what
has come before; Spenser uses the pastoral to penetrate to the equivocal core of Calidore's characteristic modes, while conducting his most probing anatomy of the dual nature and potential of his. Isabel MacCaffrey correctly notes that the pastoral, as described by Puttenham, is "inherently allegorical," but when she proceeds to claim that the pastoral in Book VI, "in contrast, shows us the innocent life before the birth of allegory," she distorts the impact of the pastoral in this book.23 Despite the romance element of the story of Pastorella, allegory, as I have been using the term, is everywhere present in this episode; despite the proclaimed opposition between the pastoral and the court, Spenser's depiction of the pastoral undoes the contrast, so that the pastoral itself ultimately exemplifies the "courtly figure." It is here, I would suggest, that Spenser subjects his allegory to the most careful scrutiny, exposing just how doubtfully allegories may be, and should be, construed.24

As other critics have suggested, Calidore's behavior in the pastoral, especially towards Meliboe and Coridon, is hardly exemplary: it is, in fact, manipulative and condescending. It has also been noted that when Calidore enters the pastoral, he brings in with him destructive elements that infect the pastoral with the aspects of his own character that associate him with the Blatant Beast.25 In fact, the pastoral itself functions in a way similar to that of Calidore (and The Faerie Queene): when Calidore first arrives we learn that the combination of Meliboe's speech and the vision of Pastorella, which together appeal to sight and hearing (the eyes and ears), ravish and entrance: Meliboe's

\[
\text{sensefull words empierst his hart so neare,} \\
\text{That he was rapt with double ravishment,} \\
\text{Both of his speach that wrought him great content,} \\
\text{And also of the object of his vew,} \\
\text{On which his hungry eye was always bent;} \\
\text{That twixt his pleasing tongue, and her faire hew,} \\
\text{He lost himselfe, and like one halfe entraunced grew.} \\
\text{(VI.ix.26)}
\]

Most pertinent to my argument, however, are Calidore's means of wooing Pastorella, and the true nature of the object of his devotion here. When Calidore first sees Pastorella, she is "placed" on a hill, "Higher then all the rest" (VI.ix.8), and to him she seems "So farre the meane of shepheards to excell, / As that he in his mind her worthy deemed, / To be a Princes Paragone esteemed" (VI.ix.11). She is, despite her name, the object of a very courtly desire and aspiration, and as her full story later reveals, she too is a version
(though unintended on her part) of false semblant, a "courtly figure" in disguise. And Calidore’s major mode of courtship is expediency, and a more deliberate form of false semblant. Because Pastorella “Did little whit regard his courteous guize” and in fact despises it, Calidore decides it is best to change his “guize,” literally doffing his armor and clothing himself in “shepheards weed,” exchanging his spear for a shepherd’s hook (VI.ix.35-36). This change of costume signifies no internal transformation of Calidore into a rustic sort; it is very much a disguise, for Calidore hardly becomes a true member of the rustic brotherhood. Indeed, he remains very much the master of dissimulation and manipulation for his own ends, as evidenced by his behavior towards Coridon:

Yet Calidore did not despise him quight,  
But usde him friendly for further intent,  
That by his fellowship, he colour might  
Both his estate, and love from skill of any wight.  
(VI.x.37)

But the ultimate evidence of Calidore being “cunningly . . . able to dissemble” like Puttenham’s “courtly figure,” comes after the Brigants have invaded the pastoral and abducted Pastorella. Having convinced the fearful Coridon to take him to the thieves’ den, they set out, “Both clad in shepheards weeds agreeably, / And both with shepheards hookes,” but Calidore undertakes one more and very telling costume change: “But Calidore / Had underneath, 
him armed privily” (VI.xi.36). Calidore has essentially removed his shepherd’s disguise, put on his armor, and then cloaked it over with those same shepherd’s weeds. In so doing, he becomes an explicit personification of allegory itself, “when we speake one thing and mean another.” This double disguise enables Calidore to accomplish his much touted heroic deed of rescuing Pastorella; but though this achievement is certainly lauded, especially by Calidore’s contrast to the cowardly Coridon, the actual terms of his rescue must be viewed in a larger context. Calidore rescues Pastorella only so that it can be revealed that she, too (like Calidore) is something other than she seems: far from the humble shepherd’s daughter, she is in fact the daughter of the noble knight and lord, Sir Bellamoure, and his lady, Claribell. What allegory can do, then, is save its own reflection, preserve an image of itself, while it is incapable of a similar rescue of any of the true shepherds. And yet, at the same time that Calidore resurrects the epitome of illusion—Pastorella (and himself)—he also unveils its
true nature, by precipitating the revelation of Pastorella's identity (though this, significantly, occurs after Calidore has already left the scene: he neither directly participates in, nor witnesses, the uncovering of Pastorella). Even more telling is the actual history of Pastorella's lineage: Bellamoure and Claribell are proficient if not unsympathetic practitioners of dissimulation themselves. When their love is opposed by Claribell's father, they are secretly wed; when the father learns of this he throws the two in a dungeon and "Yet did so streightly them a sunder keepe, / That neither could to company of th'other creepe." But Bellamoure, "whether through grace / Or secret guifts so with his keepers wrought, / That to his love sometimes he came in place," and in such circumstances is Pastorella conceived: "Whereof her wombe unwist to wight was fraught" (VI.xii.5-6). When her daughter is born, Claribell pays her handmaid to secret the baby away. Pastorella is born out of three separate acts of dissimulation, the major one being attributed, significantly and ambiguously, to either "grace" or bribery ("secret guifts"); and until her rescue by Calidore her very existence has been grounded in dissembling. In short, when Calidore saves Pastorella by becoming an actual representation of the figure of false semblant, of allegory, he simultaneously exposes and fulfills its own dubious origins in the strange combination of love and subterfuge, desire and deceit, truth and lies, victimization and subversion that characterizes the story of Pastorella's birth and the events that led her to "be fostred under straunge attyre" (VI.xii.6).

The analogy that describes Calidore's first costume change into shepherd's weeds is, as many critics have noted, a telling one:

And doffing his bright armes, himselfe addrest  
In shepheards weed, and in his hand he tooke,  
In stead of steelheadd speare, a shepheards hooke,  
That who had seene him then, would have bethought  
On Phrygian Paris by Plexippus brooke,  
When he the love of fayre Oenone sought,  
What time the golden apple was unto him brought.

(VI.ix.36)

The reference to Paris is a revealing commentary on how we are to view Calidore here: as Richard Neuse succinctly states, "One false shepherd illuminates another."27 It also comments on Pastorella, who in the literal analogy may be associated with the faithful Oenone, but is also a false shepherd(ess), not unlike Paris, a royal prince sent away and fostered as a shepherd. In a sense, all three, Paris, Calidore, and Pastorella, are varieties of the figure of false semblant.
There is, however, one more false shepherd in these cantos of Book VI that describe Calidore's stay in the pastoral world, and that is Colin Clout. Colin ("who knowes not Colin Clout?") is the figure of Spenser himself, or, as E.K. describes him in The Shepheardes Calender, he is the figure "under whose person the Author selfe is shadowed," a disguise "he chose rather to unfold great matter of argument covertly, then professing it." As the courtier in rustic disguise, as the aspiring court poet in the guise of a humble, isolated shepherd, Colin Clout is in fact another version of Calidore. We might recall Montrose's analysis of pastoral here—in particular, the association of pastoral, courtiership, and allegory: "Puttenham personifies his ironic figure of allegory as a Courtier; and the Elizabethan courtier incarnates such an allegory when he dons the mask of a shepherd." And as he reminds us, "The 'profession of a very courtier' is 'cunningly to be able to dissemble' . . . And Puttenham's courtier dissembles most cunningly when he is masked as a gentle shepherd."28 We should also note that at Mount Acidale, as Calidore first witnesses the dance of the graces, he is "rapt with pleaasance" (VI.x.17), and later, as he and Colin Clout discourse at length, we are told that Calidore

with delight his greedy fancy fed,
Both of his words, which he with reason red;
And also of the place, whose pleasures rare
With such regard his sences ravished.

(VI.x.30)

As Thomas Cain notes, "On Mount Acidale, Calidore is again enchanted by sound and sight, the media he has himself used to steal men's hearts away."29 Such echoes associate the entire pastoral landscape, its inhabitants, and especially Colin Clout and the scene on Mount Acidale with Calidore and with The Faerie Queene itself. What Calidore confronts in the pastoral episode and on Mount Acidale, I would suggest, is the site of the beautiful cunning, the false and faire semblant, that characterize allegory and that make it so potentially sinister.

To suggest, as I have, that Colin Clout is a figure of false semblant, and that he and his vision on Mount Acidale embody the dubious characteristics I have associated with Calidore and the allegory of The Faerie Queene, would seem to run counter not only to critical assessments of the scene as a transcendent image or an "authentic vision" but also to the essence of the scene itself: its lyric quality and heightened language that make it "the most
luminous, magical, and haunting episode in the poem." I do not wish to deny any of this, but would rather like here to isolate certain aspects of the episode that complicate such interpretations. What seems crucial to me in this scene, no matter what interpretation is attached to the graces themselves, are the odd juxtapositions that obtain. The nakedness of the dancing ladies, implying their naturalness, directness, openness, and as Colin explains, their lack of "guile / Or false dissemblance" (VI.x.24) is complicated by the image of concentric circles, the enfolding of the nakedness circumscribed by and contained within the framing circles. The circles are not unlike the layers of narrative that frame the vision. The narrator's description of Calidore's view of the scene, in which he identifies the three naked ladies as the graces, the shepherd as Colin Clout, and the central lady as "that jolly Shepheards lasse" (VI.x.16), is both elaborated and complicated by Colin Clout's explanation of the scene to Calidore after it has disappeared, particularly by the questions he raises about that crucial center of the image, whose nakedness by no means makes her identity or status transparent, and who ultimately remains undefined: "Who can aread, what creature mote she bee, / Whether a creature, or a goddesse graced . . . ?" (VI.x.25). Especially significant is the deliberate artifice of the scene (its echoes of other scenes in Book VI, its echoes of other poems of Spenser's), which is contradicted by the claim of the Spenserian persona, Colin, to complete helplessness in controlling the vision or evoking it: "For being gone, none can them bring in place, / But whom they of them selves list so to grace" (VI.x.20). What I am trying to emphasize here are the grave discrepancies and equivocations within the Mount Acidale episode, despite its apparent nakedness and transparency, between what is contrived and what is spontaneous or natural, between what is direct and what is hidden. If this is the allegorical core of the book, then what we have here as the core of allegory is a site of indeterminacy. This is, indeed, a place where words and meaning meet not, where contrivance and control are countered by claims of helplessness, where continued discourse blurs as much as it clarifies, where openness is enclosed, a place where what is most cunning and dissembled seeks expression in a claim of authenticity and even inspiration.

Daniel Javitch has commented on the discrepancy between the poetic matter and manner of Spenser's pastoral interlude and the Mount Acidale scene, focusing on how the poet's "cloak of pastoral simplicity offered him the . . . means of veiling the claims of his poetic manifesto" and on the contradiction inherent in the
indirection and dissimulation that reveal the poet's "total command of the 'courteous guises' he ostensibly discredits." But Javitch smooths away the disconcerting aspects of these contradictions. On the one hand, he claims, Spenser's mastery of discretion and indirection serves to demonstrate his qualifications as an "arbiter of manners," his "authority as a legislator of beautiful conduct" (pp. 157-58). Furthermore, he explains, despite Spenser's "reservations about 'outward shows' . . . the cunning and artifice gracing his poetry show that . . . he still values the art by which courtesy is made externally becoming." Spenser may, in Javitch's words, "deplore artifice that cloaks emptiness and malice within, but his own verbal manners in Book VI serve as proof that deceptive artifice is not always sinister" (p. 157). But I have been suggesting just the opposite: that Spenser is less concerned here with proving that the poet's deceptive artifice is not always sinister than he is with exposing the deceptive artifice—which may in fact always be sinister—that lies at the heart of his allegory. While Javitch provides much insight into the dilemma of writers like Puttenham and Spenser who recognized the "ethical fragility" of an aesthetic principle that "depends on a discrepancy between being and seeming and therefore invites . . . immoral practices" (p. 111), he nonetheless insists that Puttenham manages to distinguish poetic dissimulation from unethical fraud and falsehood (p. 67; also p. 110), and that Spenser makes it impossible to identify his poetic feigning with the fraud and deceit he condemns in the courtier (p. 158). But just as others have disagreed with Javitch's reading of Puttenham, so would I disagree with his reading of Spenser in Book VI, for here I think Spenser investigates the disturbing *affinity* between the courtier's mode and his own, which lies precisely in the practice of "false semblant or dissimulation" that carries "the risk of permitting the deceptive means it might require" (Javitch, p. 111).

In his Letter to Raleigh, when Spenser explains both the method and intention of *The Faerie Queene*, his dual use of the word "fashion" implies an analogy between the intended effect of the poem—"to fashion a gentleman"—and the way the poem itself has been constructed: "the general intention and meaning, which in the whole course thereof I have fashioned." As Montrose notes in his provocative article, "The Elizabethan Subject and the Spenserian Text," "the fashioning of the text and in the text may induce a refashioning in and of its audience." Montrose defines this refashioning as one that "can make the gentry truly gentle and the powerful virtuous" (p. 318), but he is ultimately concerned with how the poet engages in and profits by refashioning the
representations of royal power that shape him and his discourse. From a different perspective, I have argued that Spenser is *troubled* by the possibility that the fashioning of the text in a “dark conceit,” in the form of the “courtly figure,” may refashion its readers not “in vertuous and noble discipline” but in its own image; in short it may perpetuate the dissembling language of power that it employs.

Spenserian allegory has its basis in the “false semblant” that is the mode of the powerful (recall Puttenham’s “*Qui nescit dissimulare nescit regnare*”).34 When Stephen Greenblatt writes that “one of the highest achievements of power is to impose its fictions upon the world and one of its supreme pleasures is to enforce the acceptance of fictions that are known to be fictions,” he highlights the duplicity and dissembling that power enacts, depends upon, and perpetuates.35 Montrose offers a corrective to this: that the gesture of submission to such forms of power, to such fictions, contains an appropriation of them that claims a reciprocal act of power—the power not just to celebrate but also to help produce such forms and fictions. But Montrose may not be wholly correct in insisting that this is “one of the supreme pleasures available to the subject of power” (p. 331). For a writer like Spenser, who does indeed *aim* to make “the gentry truly gentle and the powerful virtuous,” there is also something else at stake. For Spenser, the supreme pleasure derived from converting the representation of and submission to (the language of) power into an appropriation of power—which can claim to utilize and produce the forms of power—may have its disturbing counterpart in the evidence of his own complicity in those forms, of his own role in projecting, reproducing, and insinuating them. It is this that Spenser, I would suggest, anatomizes in Book VI: the way his own complicity in the courtly language of dissimulation and indirection may function in relation to those readers it intends to reform: in short, how it may function as the power itself does, perpetuating fictions, enforcing their acceptance, and inculcating his readers with a similar power to produce, employ, and exploit them.

After Puttenham defines figures as “abuses or rather trespasses in speach,” whose purpose is to “deceive the eare and also the minde, drawing it . . . to a certain doublenesse, whereby our talke is the more guilefull and abusing,” he adds that it is precisely this property of language, which seeks to “inveigle and appassionate the mind,” that “made the grave judges *Areopagites* . . . to forbid all manner of figurative speaches to be used before them . . . as mere illusions to the minde” (p. 154). He then provides the following analogy: “to allow such manner of forraine & coulored
talke to make the judges affectioned, were all one as if the carpenter before he began to square his timber would make his squire crooked.” If the carpenter’s square is crooked, the timber he shapes or fashions will be crooked as well: so language generates the form it embodies. Puttenham absolves the poet from the serious implications of this charge by claiming that he concerns himself with “pleasant & lovely causes” and that “all his abuses tende but to dispose the hearers to mirth and sollace by pleasant conveyance and efficacy of speach.” Whether or not we can take Puttenham’s exculpation of the poet from this context at face value, this disclaimer can hardly be said to apply to Spenser, who intends his Faerie Queene to deliver “good discipline” “clowdily enwrapped in Allegorical devises” (Letter to Raleigh). But he is also aware that it is precisely these “Allegorical devises” that put in jeopardy the good discipline he wishes to impart, for like the carpenter, the poet risks instead fashioning his readers in the form of his own text, the false semblant of that courtly figure who is the “chief ringleader and captaine” of all others.

NOTES

1All quotations from Spenser are from The Poetical Works of Edmund Spenser, ed. J.C. Smith and E. de Selincourt (New York and Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1912; rpt. 1979). I have modernized u to v.


4Puttenham calls beau semblant “the chiefe professio aswell of Courting as of poesie” and considers it a “science” appropriately taught to those who wish to “make now & then ditties of pleasure” (p. 158).


6The seminal critique of Calidore as “anti-hero” is Richard Neuse’s “Book VI as Conclusion to The Faerie Queene” (1968), rpt. Critical Essays on Spenser from “ELH” (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1970), pp. 222-46.


Tonykin notes that “In the sixteenth century the term *ravishment* often implied heavenly rapture” (p. 18), but as Patricia A. Parker notes in *Inescapable Romance: Studies in the Poetics of a Mode* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1979), its use here “also recalls the false Una brought to Red Cross (‘So lively, and so like in all mens sight, / That weaker sence it could haue rauisht quight,’ (I.i.45.4-5)” (p. 102). Parker’s list of similar echoes in this stanza belies her claim that it neutralizes the sense of danger associated with certain images and phrases.


I borrow my last phrase from Isabel G. MacCaffrey’s comment on this passage from Puttenham: “Allegory is a double-edged weapon, serving both lies and truth.” *Spenser’s Allegory: The Anatomy of Imagination* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1976), p. 56. See also Maureen Quilligan, _The Language of Allegory: Defining the Genre_ (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1979), who argues, with specific reference to Spenser in Book VI, that “the question basic to all allegorical narrative” is “are my words lies, or do they in fact thrust at the truth?” (pp. 46-47).

Cf. A. Bartlett Giamatti’s argument, in _Play of Double Senses: Spenser’s "Faerie Queene"_ (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1975), that “The Faerie Queene is constantly trying to solve the problems of duplicity that are embodied in the poem” (p. 106) because Spenser is acutely aware that “Through words, the poet can deform or reform” (p. 107). See also A. Leigh DeNeef’s *Spenser and the Motives of Metaphor* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1982), which argues for “Spenser’s growing awareness of how thoroughly he is himself implicated in and even dependent upon the misrepresentations of the fictional false poets” (p. 91).

Tonykin, pp. 38-40.


See Cain, pp. 172, 175, on Calidore containing the Blatant Beast within himself.

On the Blatant Beast’s association with Spenser’s poetry, see Gross, *Spenserian Poetics*, pp. 224-34, especially his comments on the Beast as representing “a power that exists potentially within the poem and its images” (p. 229). See also Giamatti’s comments on how “the poem warns against the poem itself” (p. 88), since “As long as men use words, they must risk letting slip the Beast” (p. 91).

MacCaffrey, p. 410. See also Bellamy, pp. 12-13, on the Beast as "the slander that is allegory, denying . . . the Speaking of Being."

MacCaffrey, p. 410; Bellamy, p. 13.


MacCaffrey, p. 410, n. 8.

See Miller, p. 284.

On this and the following point, see Cain, p. 174.

See Stewart, pp. 77-78.

Neuse, p. 239.


Cain, p. 158. My reading is more in line with recent critics like Gross, pp. 211-24, and John Guillory, *Poetic Authority: Spenser, Milton, and Literary History* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1983), pp. 41-45, who argue that the Mount Acidale "vision" is "staged," and with Bellamy, who argues against the customary description of the scene as "visionary" (p. 15).


