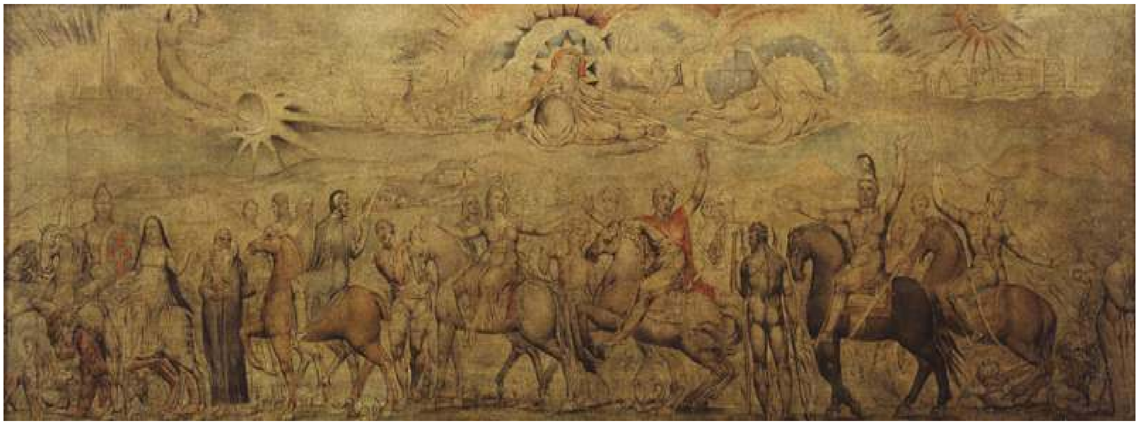
# "FOUR-FOLD VISION SEE": ALLEGORY IN THE POETRY OF EDMUND SPENSER AND WILLIAM BLAKE



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> I give you the end of a golden string,
> Only wind it into a ball:
> It will lead you in at Heavens gate,
> Built in Jerusalems wall.
>
> William Blake, *Jerusalem* plate 77

## ELIZABETH JANE DARNILL

# “Four-fold vision see”: Allegory in the Poetry of Edmund Spenser and William Blake.

Two volumes: volume one of two.

Submitted by Elizabeth Jane Darnill, to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy by Research in English Literature, March 2010.

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# “Four-fold vision see”: Allegory in the Poetry of Edmund Spenser and William Blake.

This thesis examines the role of readerly engagement in the allegorical poetry of Edmund Spenser and William Blake. An analysis of their poetry reveals important affinities between the two poets. Not only was Blake aware of Spenser’s work, he can be seen to incorporate and build upon Spenser’s self-conscious poetic style in order to engage readers in the active process of interpretation. Meaning in their poetry can be shown to unfold gradually by way of complex interactions between the reader and the text, interactions fostered by the reader’s imagination and the (differently) visual quality of the two poets’ works. Blake promotes this way of seeing as being “four-fold,” the ability to perceive on several dimensions.

The first chapter of this thesis looks at the definitions and attitudes towards allegory from the early sixteenth century onwards, showing how the mode has been constantly redefined. Chapter two investigates the self-conscious nature of allegory through an analysis of the placement of words, metaphors, unconventional language, and the way the poems may be read by readers. Both poets encourage a heightened awareness of the process of reading which may be termed allegorical. Blake owned his own printing press allowing him greater control over the words and design of his text. This enabled him to be more forceful in his communication of images and ideas than Spenser. Chapter three focuses upon the multiple (and contradictory) ways in which the text may be interpreted by the reader. Allegory is a means of communicating and simultaneously disguising criticism. Both poets can be seen to use it to voice resistance to forms of authority, even as they encourage readers to recognise these meanings within their texts. Spenser and Blake had to combat different forms of censorship with differing strategies. Whereas Spenser felt compelled to uphold the status quo, Blake sought to deconstruct rigid social conventions. Chapter four explores the relation between allegory and the imagination. Spenser uses allegory to inspire the imagination, whereas for Blake the imagination encourages allegory. The imagination is a means of pushing readers towards further learning and a deeper appreciation of allegorical meaning. Chapter five analyses Spenser and Blake’s verbal and imagistic visuality in relation to allegory. Blake’s illustrations promote further reader engagement, while Spenser’s illuminations are a part of his metaphorical and allegorical text. Both poets use the visual to trigger imaginative readerly interaction and to promote new ways of perceiving and relating to their poems.

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## Illustrations

William Blake's illuminated verse and is reproduced from *William Blake: The Complete Illuminated Books*, introduced by David Bindman. Every effort has been made to trace and acknowledge copyright.

Figure

1. *All Religions Are One*, first principle (c. 1788), by William Blake. The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

2. "The Bard. A Pindaric Ode" (c. 1794-97). From *Illustrations to Thomas Gray's "Poems*," by William Blake. Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection.

3. *Portrait of Edmund Spenser*, by William Blake (c. 1800-03). Reproduced by permission of Manchester City Galleries.

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22. *The Dance of Albion*, by William Blake (c. 1793-96, 1804). British Museum, London. ©The Trustees of the British Museum.

## Abbreviations

Quotations from Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene* are from *The Faerie Queene*, edited by A.C. Hamilton, Hiroshi Yamashita and Toshiyuki Suzuki (London: Longman, 2001). Quotations from Spenser's other poems are from *The Yale Edition of the Shorter Poems of Edmund Spenser*, edited by William A. Oram et al. (New Haven: Yale UP, 1989). Quotations from *A View of the Present State of Ireland* are from the first edition published in 1633, edited by Andrew Hadfield and Willy Maley (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997).

Quotations from William Blake's poems are from *The Complete Poems*, edited by Alicia Ostriker (London: Penguin, 2004). Quotations from Blake's prose are from *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, edited by David V. Erdman (New York: Anchor Books, 1988), unless otherwise stated.

### Spenser's Work

| | |
|---|---|
| *FQ* | *The Faerie Queene* |
| *SC* | *The Shepheards Calender* |
| *View* | *A View of the Present State of Ireland* |

### Blake's Work

| | |
|---|---|
| *A* | *America* |
| *E* | *Europe* |
| *EG* | *The Everlasting Gospel* |
| *BA* | *The Book of Ahania* |
| *BL* | *The Book of Los* |
| *BU* | *The Book of Urizen* |
| *FZ* | *The Four Zoas* |
| *J* | *Jerusalem* |
| *M* | *Milton* |
| *MHH* | *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* |
| *SI* | *Songs of Innocence* |
| *SE* | *Songs of Experience* |
| *VLJ* | *A Vision of the Last Judgement* |

### Common Abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| E | Erdman, ed. *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* |
| *ODNB* | *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* |
| *OED* | *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. |
| *PL* | *Paradise Lost* |
| *PP* | *The Pilgrim's Progress* |
| *Sp Enc* | *The Spenser Encyclopaedia* |

# Introduction

> Spenser's literary influence is much more important for the student of Milton and the Romantics, than for the student of the Elizabethans. The history of great literature has a slower rhythm than that of literature in general. The biggest things do not work quickly. It is only after centuries that Spenser's position becomes apparent and then he appears as the great mediator between the Middle Ages and the modern poets….What the Romantics (Keats, Shelley) learned from him was something different from allegory; but perhaps he couldn't have taught it unless he had been an allegorist.
>
> (C.S. Lewis 359-60)

C.S. Lewis's comment towards the end of *Allegory of Love* provides some indication of the topic of this thesis: the allegorical influence of Edmund Spenser. My primary focus is on Spenser's allegorical impact upon William Blake, for, along with Keats and Shelley, Blake too was influenced by Spenser. While I agree in part with Lewis's statement, this thesis will argue that instead of teaching Blake "something different from allegory," Spenser's allegorical style of teaching enabled Blake to develop his own self-conscious allegory. Allegory is not a mode that is usually associated with Blake. This is partly due to the fact that it has been misrepresented and misunderstood over time. Allegory is a complex and dynamic mode, engendering multiple meanings, a process that has been relatively little explored. I will show in the following chapters the ways in which allegory has been variously perceived and portrayed, and the means by which its reflections and influences cut across genres and defy neat "forms" and categorisation. I will also reveal how Spenser and Blake develop their allegorical styles in relation (or reaction) to social, religious and political pressures within their respective contexts. In so doing, I will explain how Blake nurtures his own allegorical style, his "fourfold vision," partly influenced by Spenser and extended by his own creative genius.[1] Far from being conventional, this allegorical mode deliberately engages the reader in a dynamic process of learning and interpretation, a process which requires a continuous awareness of the workings of words and images.

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[1] I will explain the term "four-fold vision" in chapter one.

To compare the poetry of Edmund Spenser and William Blake seems, perhaps, an odd choice. There appears little to connect a university educated man, serving as a clerk to the ruling governor of Ireland in the 1580s and 1590s, with William Blake, born in 1757, who lived most of his life in London working as an engraver and tradesman. Upbringing, education, lifestyle, geographical location, and two hundred years sever them. Much occurred during these intervening years that serves to alienate Spenser from Blake: the death of Elizabeth I and the continued weakening of a traditionally absolute monarchy from 1601, the Civil War, Restoration, the unification of England and Scotland in 1707, rapid industrialisation during the eighteenth century, the expansion of urban conglomerates within Britain, and the British Empire abroad – and these are only the most obvious events. The poets themselves led very different lives.

Differing political and religious contexts surrounding both poets played a vital role in the formulation of their allegory. Spenser wrote *The Faerie Queene* from the comparative fringes of power. This is reflected in his verse, especially in books Five and Six and the *Mutabilitie Cantos*, as I shall show. Spenser was sent to Ireland in 1580 as secretary to Lord Grey, the Lord Deputy of Ireland, where he remained until 1598. He undertook various roles during these years, acquiring the estate of Kilcolman (Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* 185), eventually becoming Sheriff of County Cork in 1598 (Rambuss 8). Ireland is represented by Spenser in Book Five and in *A View of the Present State of Ireland* as being both a home and a foreign land, loved and despised, beautiful and wild, a complex association of a multitude of meanings. Spenser used his comparative distance from the hub of English courtly power to comment on the political situation in Ireland and England, as will be discussed in chapter three. The Irish were resistant to English rule and there was a constant threat of violence and rebellion. Spenser's castle was sacked and burned by rebels during the Tyrone Rebellion in October 1598 and his family were forced to flee (*FQ* xvi). Spenser died in January 1599, possibly as a result of the trauma of this incident, although no concrete evidence has been put forward.[2] The tumultuous political environment of the sixteenth century had a profound impact on his work and allegory; arguably, the religious environment had an even greater impact.

As a government official with connections in Ireland, England and the court of Elizabeth, Spenser was caught up in the deep religious divisions of the day.[3] He was a Protestant who supported reform (King, *Spenser's Poetry* 9; McLane 117-18; Hume, *Protestant Poet* 2-3), although the exact nature of his Protestantism has been debated.[4] He had in common with Protestants who were zealous to reform the English church a habit of drawing on the imagery of the Book of Revelation. He grew up with images of Revelation, as depicted in the woodcuts and poems of Jan van der Noot's *A Theatre*

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[2] Jonson reported "That the Irish having Robd Spensers goods & burnt his house & a litle child new born, he and his wyfe escaped, & after, he died for lake of bread in King Street" (*FQ* xvi-xvii). Camden supports the notion that Spenser died for lack of bread (*FQ* xvii), but this does not accord with the money he was being paid for work, and the pension of £50 per annum granted by the Queen.

[3] Spenser, born in London in 1552 or 1553, was the son of a cloth worker (Rambuss 112), and educated at the Merchant Taylors' School (Giamatti, *Double Senses* 4; Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* 185). He went to Cambridge before being employed by John Young, Bishop of Rochester, in 1578 and then being appointed to the household of the Earl of Leicester and associated with the Sidney circle, a Protestant group at court (Rambuss 7-8; McLane 22).

[4] McLane suggests that Spenser was moderate in his religious views and was "anti-Puritan" (117-18). Hume, however, argues that "Spenser's Protestantism was of the militant variety associated with the Leicester circle and that his religion requires the label of 'Puritanism'" (*Protestant Poet* 2-3). King notes that Spenser's religious principles should be beyond debate as the "ecclesiastical eclogues in the *Calender* identify him explicitly with the progressive Protestant movement to continue the process of church reform" (*Spenser's Poetry* 9).

*For Worldlings* (1569).[5] The Book of Revelation took on renewed meaning during the Reformation, its typological and allegorical potential fully realised by Spenser and fundamental to his poetry. For Spenser, as for other Reformers, the Book of Revelation provided powerful visual symbols both for the excesses of the Catholic Church and for the forthcoming regeneration, renewal and reform of the True Church. The interpretation of the word had potent political implications during this period. Texts, in particular biblical chapters, were pressed to assume meanings of complete coherence, despite the fact that they had often been written by many authors (Suttie, *Self-Interpretation* 5-8).[6] Spenser employs the same tactics of seeming coherence by presenting an apparently straightforward epic allegory, in praise of Elizabeth I, as displayed in his Letter to Raleigh. In fact, he uses the Letter as a shield to disguise the complex and subversive undercurrents in his text, thereby appeasing the authorities and allowing his work to be published (Suttie, *Self-Interpretation* 9). Allegory was used by writers and critics to manipulate words, at times to read *against* the text's manifest intention (Suttie, *Self-Interpretation* 7). So, as will be discussed in chapters one and two, Reformation readings were imposed on late-antique texts, as seen in the case of the Book of Revelation. Glosses in the Geneva Bible instruct readers to find in the malevolent and redemptive characters and symbols of the biblical apocalypse references, respectively, to the Catholic Church and the True Church.

John King notes that Spenser employs for Book One of *The Faerie Queene* the binary opposition between good and evil which is inherent in Revelation (*Spenser's Poetry* 72). John Dixon, one of the first commentators on *The Faerie Queene*, draws many analogies between figures in Revelation and the characters in the poem (King,

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[5] See especially depictions from Revelations 13, 17, 19, 21 depicted in Sonnets 12-15 of *A Theatre* (*Shorter Poems of Edmund Spenser* 481-84).

[6] Suttie argues that a similar pattern of pressed coherence is undertaken by readers of *The Faerie Queene*, who attempt to make total sense of the poem, as advertised by Spenser's Letter to Raleigh (*Self-Interpretation* 8). This topic is discussed in further detail in chapter two.

*Spenser's Poetry* 72). He pointed out what most readers now accept without question: that Duessa is the Roman Church, robed in scarlet and resembling the Whore of Babylon (*FQ* 1.7.1n; 1.7.17n); that Una is the "True Church" or Christ, the Lamb of God (*FQ* 1.2.9n; 1.12.20n); that Redcross is St George and that his betrothal to "lilly white" Una signifies the potential union of the "True Church" with "England" (*FQ* 1.12.20-23, 37).[7] Throughout Book One, Redcross "struggles to differentiate between Una and Duessa, thus epitomising the Reformation dilemma of choosing between 'images' of competing Churches" (King, *Spenser's Poetry* 73). What is significant for my purposes is that the Book of Revelation provided Spenser with a justification for the didactic use of allegory, tarnished for Protestants by its association with Roman Catholic exegetical practices (Suttie, *Self-Interpretation* 5-7). Spenser realised the extent to which the Bible was allegorical and he integrated its allegorical methods into his verse. He uses the Bible, and in particular the Book of Revelation, to justify his use of allegory and its importance as a didactic mode of reform and enlightenment. Although Spenser makes use of Revelation's binary oppositions, Redcross's struggle to differentiate between Una and Duessa reflects the extent to which his allegory deliberately complicates these oppositions. Influenced by sixteenth-century explanations of the Bible, he uses allegory to investigate the processes of reading and interpreting.

Spenser had to navigate a fine line between depicting images of religious and political power and yet denying the potency of the image itself. Images were viewed with caution during this era, especially by Reformers. Potentially dangerous or controversial icons were restricted by government authorities.[8] This situation accounts for the ambivalence in his representation of certain scenes within his verse, and thus critics' confusion as to Spenser's religious affiliation. John King notes that in this atmosphere of intense religious and political scrutiny, a pattern permeates *The Faerie Queene* "where false projections of the artistic imagination are dismantled time after time" in order to defend the poet "against any charge that his own art may be idolatrous" (*Spenser's Poetry* 65-66). Spenser voices double-edged views and criticisms of the church, as in the depiction of Kirkrapine's robbery of churches (*FQ* 1.3.16-19). Here, Spenser presents a satire against both the monastic misappropriation of alms and tithes and the failure of the English monarchy to redistribute ecclesiastical wealth to the poor following the dissolution of the monasteries (King, *Spenser's Poetry* 109, 55-56). There is an implied criticism of the violent and rapid nature of what was done to the monasteries, an acknowledgement that eradicating religious "error" does not ensure the foundation of a "pure" religion to follow (King, *Spenser's Poetry* 109). However, despite the potential pitfalls of the method, Spenser uses allegory deliberately to navigate this complex religious and political climate, conveying his own ideas and concerns in an era that constantly monitors and censors alternative and "unlicenced" viewpoints, challenging readers to form their own opinions while engaging with the text. His verse insists that images and allegory cannot be escaped. They exist to some degree within all forms of representation. Foregrounding the intensely imagistic and allegorical Book of Revelation as a central source for Book One of his *Faerie Queene*, Spenser attaches great importance to the allegorical nature of the Bible as a means of reading and interpreting the text. He uses this biblical source as a means of complicating the process of reading, encouraging

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[7] The betrothal also echoes Rev 19.7-8: "the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white."

[8] Grogan notes that an "astonishing feature of sixteenth-century English culture is that despite the major theological and cultural concerns that accrued around the idea of images and vision, the

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extensive remit of visual paradigms within Renaissance culture and the ways in which they grounded Renaissance epistemology and poetics went largely unnoticed" … "The sheer effectiveness of images was precisely what made the field of the visual both attractive and dangerous" (6). Images and the notion of "vision" are vital aspects of Spenser and Blake's allegory, and will be discussed throughout the thesis.

self-conscious (or what Suttie terms "self-interpretive") readings of the text (*Self-Interpretation* 9). Inspired by religious and political commentaries on the Book of Revelation, Spenser encourages his readers to appreciate ambivalence and contradiction rather than searching for clear and totalising answers. In other words, he asks his readers to read anew. This strong biblical-allegorical method is also profoundly displayed in Blake's work.

Blake was born into an age of immense turmoil and change which saw an explosion of industry, resulting in an increasingly mechanised work force. Following his apprenticeship and training at the Royal Academy, he purchased a press and set up business as an engraver, taking commissions and developing his own exceptional artistic style of drawing and etching. His religious outlook was independent, unique, and like Spenser's, thoroughly integrated into the essence of his verse. As for Spenser, the Bible was a vital source for Blake's poetry, and his verse is filled with literal, typographical and allegorical biblical interpretations (Tannenbaum 23). Blake takes the allegorical potential of the Bible and extends it within his own verse. In so doing, he goes further than his contemporaries in creating a text that systematically employs biblical poetics (Tannenbaum 24), as seen by the creation of his illuminated prophetic texts, such as the books of *Urizen*, *Los* and *Ahania*, *Milton* and *Jerusalem*. His own unique interpretation of the Bible creates a revolutionary aesthetic whereby every aspect of his verse is loaded with political, religious and social meaning. His dissenting (possibly Antinomian or Enthusiastic) background may have contributed to his allegorical reading of the Bible. Dissenting communities shunned the ceremonial laws of the Established Church, relying upon their own interpretation of the Bible and the use of texts such as emblem books for the education of children. Blake rarely attended church but avidly read the Bible (Morton 14). His education enabled a freedom of mind disassociated from mid-eighteenth-century principles and doctrines and more related to seventeenth-century methods of emblematic and allegorical forms of teaching.

Dissenting communities had broken away from mainstream religious organisations during the seventeenth century but lived under a shadow which limited their rights and freedoms (Ryan 19). Dissenters were excluded by law from participating in local and national government, prevented from taking degrees at Oxford and Cambridge, and could not be legally married or buried by their own ministers (Ryan 19). The Industrial Revolution had created huge urban conglomerations which dramatically altered the landscape and lifestyle of both city- and countryside dwellers. Religious and political tensions became identical in England during the last years of the eighteenth century, inspired in part by the French Revolution. Between 1787 and 1791 several Dissenting sects gathered together and petitioned parliament for religious liberty and the break up of the legal monopoly of the church (Ryan 20). This repeal campaign failed but it highlighted the extent to which religious, economic and political struggles were indistinguishable. The government reacted to public resistance by closely monitoring any suspicious and seemingly seditious activity (Makdisi, *Impossible* 49-50), much as Elizabeth's government did during the sixteenth century.[9]

Blake used his background as a Dissenter on the comparative fringes of society to challenge political and moral structures that his contemporaries often took for granted. His working output was extraordinary: as well as painting, he wrote and illustrated many prophetic poems, *America*, *The French Revolution*, the books of *Los*, *Ahania* and *Urizen*, *Milton*, *Jerusalem* and *The Four Zoas*. He continued to take engraving commissions, for instance, for Young's *Night Thoughts* and the poems of Thomas Gray. Everything Blake wrote "was intended to change the national religious consciousness so that better moral and political effects would follow" (Ryan 9). Blake's religious enthusiasm was corrective and restorative, a weapon against the economic and political brutalities of his time (Ryan 9). He used allegory to express his religious and political ideas in an era, like Spenser's, which did not tolerate alternative voices and opinions. "To defend the Bible in this year 1798 would cost a man his life" (E 611).[10] Dissenting practices and methods of biblical reading may have added to Blake's notion of the allegorical, along with his awareness of Spenser's style of poetry. Allegory, this thesis will argue, is used by Blake as a means of stating social and political observations and grievances, a way of voicing truth, a way of conveying densely interwoven thoughts, images and ideas using methods which demand intense reader engagement.

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[9] The topic of censorship will be discussed in chapters two and three. For more on Elizabethan modes of censorship, see Montrose, "Idols of the Queen" 108-61.

## Critical reflections on Spenser and Blake

What drew me initially to associate the poetry of Blake and Spenser was the all-encompassing nature of their verse, its didactic energy and its constant, self-conscious call for interpretation. Spenser and Blake's work encourages readers to look more attentively at the texture of what they are reading, to perceive the verse in different and new ways, to be aware that mis-reading may be a means of finding other ways of interpreting the text. I found these elements within both poets' verse and I wanted to investigate this further. I discovered a network of connections between the two, and it is clear that Blake was aware of, indeed very familiar with, Spenser's work. Traces of this influence exist in Blake's textual work. A line from Spenser's *Hymn to Beauty* (1596), "For soule is forme and doth the bodie make" (*Shorter Poems* 712), is alluded to in Blake's *All Religions are One* (1788) (fig. 1): "That the Poetic Genius is the true Man and that the body or outer form of Man is derived from the Poetic Genius." The similarity between these lines is no coincidence. The importance of the soul or mind of individuals and its relation to the physical world is of great importance to the function and meaning of Spenser's and Blake's verse. The life of the mind, while being fundamental to human identity and divinity, is of paramount importance to visual allegory. It is the key to opening perceptions, thinking beyond the self, and acknowledging different perspectives.

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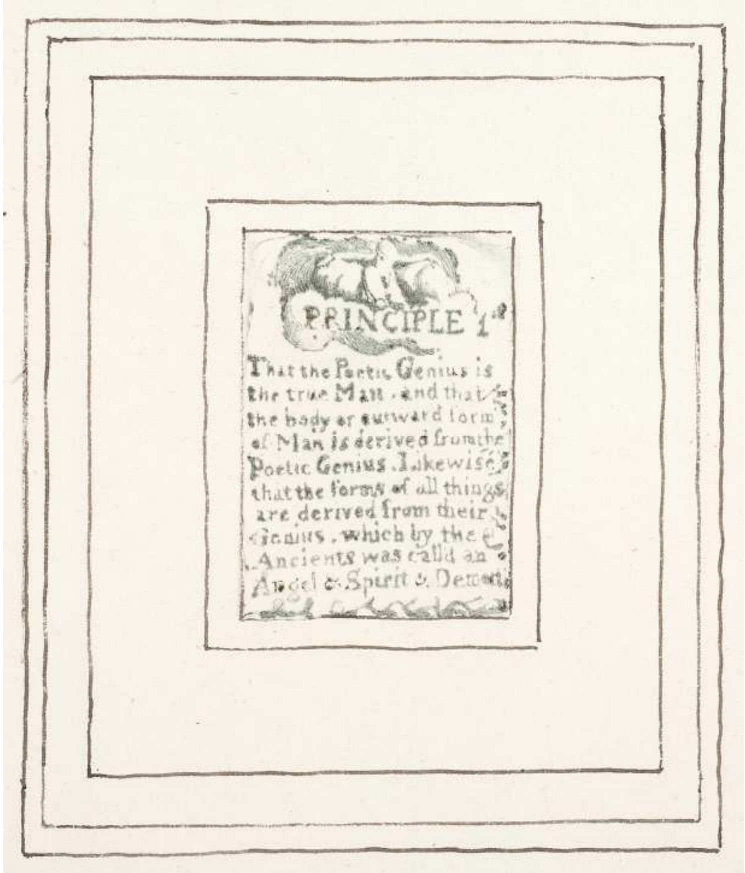
[10] See Bentley, *Blake Records*, for examples of Blake's encounters with agents of government. One instance occurred when Blake and other young artists took a boat trip on the Medway in order to sketch. A group of soldiers took them prisoner on the suspicion that they were spies for the French. Only when evidence came from the Royal Academy asserting that they were indeed artists, were they released (23-24).



PRINCIPLE 1st

That the Poetic Genius is
the true Man. and that
the body or outward form
of Man is derived from the
Poetic Genius. Likewise
that the forms of all things
are derived from their
Genius. which by the
Ancients was call'd an
Angel & Spirit & Demon.

Fig. 1 *All Religions Are One*. First Principle, by William Blake
This item is reproduced by permission of The Huntington Library, San Marino, California

Early poems within Blake's notebooks point to his understanding and appreciation of Spenser. Robert Gleckner in *Blake and Spenser* (1985) notes the astonishing range, subtlety and sophistication of Blake's allusions to Spenser's poetry in "Poetical Sketches."[11] He argues that these poems show the delicate, allusive ways in which Spenser impinged upon Blake's work and Blake's sustained and developing appreciation and critique of Spenser's poetry (28). He suggests that Spenser had considerable impact on Blake's conception of the fallen female and on his analogising of love and war (28). Gleckner notes, however, that instead of copying Spenser's Elizabethan concepts of love, Blake challenges or inverts their meaning. To take one example: it is well known that the depiction of eyes, as symbols for both seeing and being seen, was a central metaphor in sixteenth-century poetry. Eyes led to the entrapment of the viewer, enabling exchanged looks of love or jealousy. Spenser devotes Sonnet 47 of *Amoretti* to cruelly "smyling lookes" which are like "golden hookes" that "bayt" and ensnare (*Shorter Poems* 628). Spenser shows that the mistress's eyes are her most potent and influential weapon with a powerful ability to captivate her lover (Gleckner 33-34). The implication of the sonnet is that love may be threateningly destructive, a powerful force that causes pain rather than joy and contentment to the lovers. Eighteenth-century church authorities strengthened this attitude by popularising the purity of self-restraint and virginity. Blake embellishes this imagery of warlike love to convey the sterile futility of the defensive virgin, Thel, in *The Book of Thel*. She ends her days staring at her own open grave rather than giving in to love. Thel becomes the ultimate symbol of the distant and cruel mistress, unwilling to surrender to any lover. Gleckner notes that in *Thel*, Blake points towards the complications of "sexual warfare in a world of the senses, a warfare whose destructiveness is inherent in an imaginative blindness to the fact that the very conventions thus made real are the same fictions that … poets create" (Gleckner 35). Blake uses the principles outlined in Spenser's poetry to demystify conventions as the constructs they are, that is, fictions with the power to blind more than they enlighten (Gleckner 35). So, for instance, in an example unnoticed by Gleckner, Blake inverts Spenser's harmonious metaphor of the Thames and Medway from Book Four of *The Faerie Queene* (*FQ* 4.11.8-53) in order to represent discord in the relationship between Albion and his Emanation, Jerusalem (*J* 4:33-34) (Bloom 370). Even these brief observations mark the extent to which, from an early date, Blake was familiar with Spenser's work and used it in new ways to prompt readers towards fresh readings of the text.

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[11] Gleckner's study, *Blake and Spenser* (1985), is the only work I have found that considers the two poets together directly, as discussed below. Other critics have commented on various parallels between Spenser and Blake, but these observations have only been made in passing. See A.C. Hamilton on Harold Bloom's observation that Spenser and Blake are mythopoetic poets (*FQ* 18); Peter Ackroyd on Blake continuing Spenser's allegorical tradition (117); Robert Essick on Blake's sublime allegory (*Language of Adam* 97); Isabel MacCaffrey on the way in which Spenser and Blake immerse themselves in dense and complete imaginative worlds (*Spenser's Allegory* 394), and Angus Fletcher, noting the links in the prophetic tradition from Spenser to Blake (*Prophetic Moment* 9-10).

To be able implicitly to critique Spenser, Blake must have had a thorough knowledge of the poet's verse. Gleckner, implies that Blake exposes Spenser's limitations in his work. I will argue, in contrast to Gleckner, that Blake's work implies a genuine and deeply founded respect for Spenser. Their depiction of nature, especially, seems at times very close. For instance, Spenser uses the metaphor, "the wide wombe of the world" (*FQ* 3.6.36), which Blake adapts as "Nature's wide womb" in *The Book of Urizen* (*BU* 4:17) (Gleckner 41-2).[12] Kathleen Raine, in *Blake and Tradition*, analyses Blake's poem *Thel* through a comparison with Spenser's depiction of the Garden of Adonis in Book Three of *The Faerie Queene* (1: 100-112). Raine argues that in both accounts the mutability and fragility of life is prominent, as well as an awareness of the natural, cyclical nature of birth, death and regeneration. Similarly, Blake takes the image of "nets" as snakey "golden tresses," ensnaring the lover in Spenser's *Amoretti* 37, and uses this image in his poem, *The Golden Net*, in which a lover is entangled in the female's hair (Gleckner 49-50). Blake goes on to develop this image in other poems to suggest that nets are imposed mental constructs that bind individuals, disabling them from being able to utter their views and desires.[13] In this sense, Blake borrows and adapts an allegorical metaphor found in Spenser's work and makes it his own.

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[12] Milton also uses the phrase, "womb of Nature" in *Paradise Lost* (2.911).

David Wagenknecht, studying the pastoral in the poetry of Blake, looks at Spenser's *Epithalamion*, comparing it to Blake's "To the Evening Star" (which was published in 1783 and eventually evolved into "Night"). He argues that lines 353-363 in *Epithalamion* contain overt references to eroticism, so personal to Spenser that as soon as the speaker states his desires – "sweet snatches of delight" – he almost simultaneously denies them, making them "secret darke," "conceald through covert night" (*Shorter Poems* 676). Here, Spenser is thinking of love to be practised in "dark secret." This can be compared to Blake's "Evening Star," in which eroticism has been absorbed into aestheticism: "Speak silence with thy glimmering eyes" (*Blake's Night* 35-6). Blake takes Spenser's secret eroticism and displays it openly as existing within every living thing in his poem. Wagenknecht goes on to compare Spenser's use of "night" in *The Shepheards Calender* with Blake's use of it in his poems, suggesting that darker connotations and intense desires can be articulated in the pastoral, which in turn can be viewed innocently. Seemingly irreconcilable paradoxes, that is, can be reconciled within the genre of the pastoral (39). Wagenknecht's study is useful in suggesting the extent to which Spenser and Blake's verse is complicated by ambivalence and paradox. His study also highlights the futility of trying to reconcile the various aspects of both poets within a unifying concept or explanation. Instead, the reader is encouraged to develop a new vocabulary and a new way of seeing in order to understand the poems (as I shall argue in chapter two).

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[13] Images of nets, snares and binding appear for example in *The Book of Urizen*, and in *Songs of Experience*: "binding with briars, my joys and desires" (*SE* "The Garden of Love") and "Then Cruelty knits a snare / And spreads his baits with care" (*SE* "The Human Abstract").

## Blake's reflections on Spenser

Connections between the two poets, however, can be seen most obviously in Blake's illuminations and paintings, which prove that Spenser's verse influenced him throughout his life, from childhood to the years before his death.[14] Blake created several representations of Spenser during his lifetime, the earliest of which is a watercolour illustration to Thomas Gray's "The Bard. A Pindaric Ode" (c. 1794-97) (fig. 2). Despite references in Gray's poem to other great poets including Shakespeare and Milton, Blake chose to present Spenser. He represents the moment in the poem when Gray's Bard says: "The verse adorn again / Fierce War, and faithful Love, / And Truth severe, by fairy Fiction drest." The image shows a youthful curly-haired Spenser creating his faeries, tiny newly-formed figures in the palm of his hand. The ring of dancing faeries towards the bottom of the watercolour alludes to Spenser's strength as a poet, his ability to build visionary worlds and offer "wisdom" in "fairy dreams" (Taylor 104). The depiction can be related to Blake's early notebook poem,

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[14] Gleckner suggests that Blake's "Imitation of Spen[s]er," included in *Poetical Sketches* (1783), may have been written as early as 1771 (6). Blake's Notebook also contains a four- line quotation from the Amavia-Ruddymane episode in Book Two of *The Faerie Queene* (*FQ* 2.2.1-4). The spelling and text follow Hughes' 1715 edition, reprinted in 1750 with minor changes (Gleckner 19). Gleckner notes that the sketched emblem above these lines is one of a series of sixty-four which were produced between 1787 and 1792, entitled "Ideas of Good and Evil" ("Blake, William," *Sp Enc* 94). The emblem features a boy about to capture a flying cherub in his hat and a tiny figure outstretched and dead at his feet. The cherub-catching boy is later shown in plate 7 of *For Children: The Gates of Paradise* (1793), but without the Spenser quotation ("Blake, William," *Sp Enc* 94). These examples show that despite an intervening period of several years, Spenser's influence can be detected within Blake's work at regular intervals.

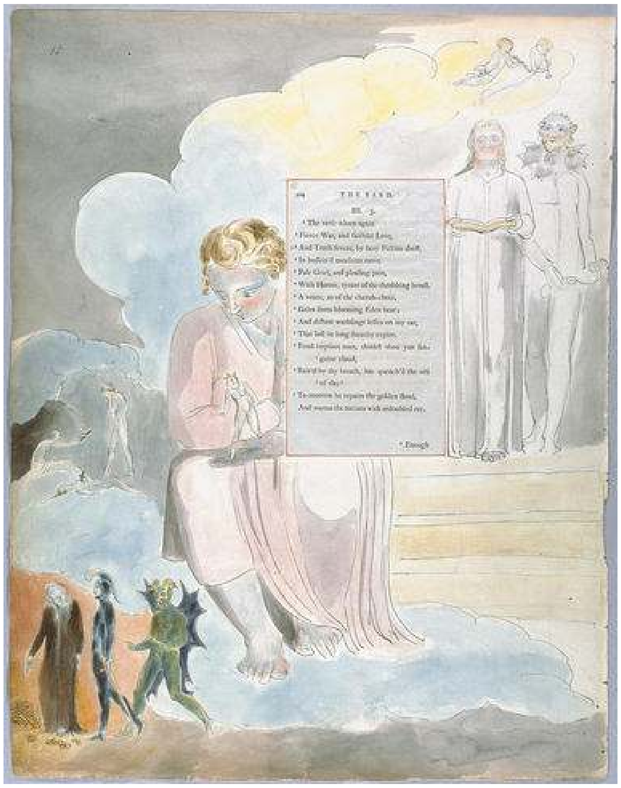

Fig. 2 “The Bard. A Pindaric Ode,” by William Blake
Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection

“An Imitation of Spen[s]er,” in which he writes that “truth’s beams” … “may descend in fairy dreams” (Taylor 103). Behind the central figure of Spenser towards the upper right hand side of the image are two figures, possibly representing “Truth” with a book in hand, and “Faerie Fiction,” dressed in a harlequin suit with a spiked collar and holding a scroll (Keynes, *Poems of Thomas Gray* 59). Images of books (and scrolls in Blake’s illuminations) feature prominently in the work of both poets as self-conscious reminders to readers of the material construct of their work, its physical and fundamental format, but also reflecting the authorial weight of tradition and custom, the social, historical and religious impacts that impinge upon the poet and text. We shall look at this topic further in chapter two. The presence of the figures of “Truth” and “Fiction” in Blake’s illustration conveys his awareness of the text as a means of presenting truths through the medium of allegory and fiction.

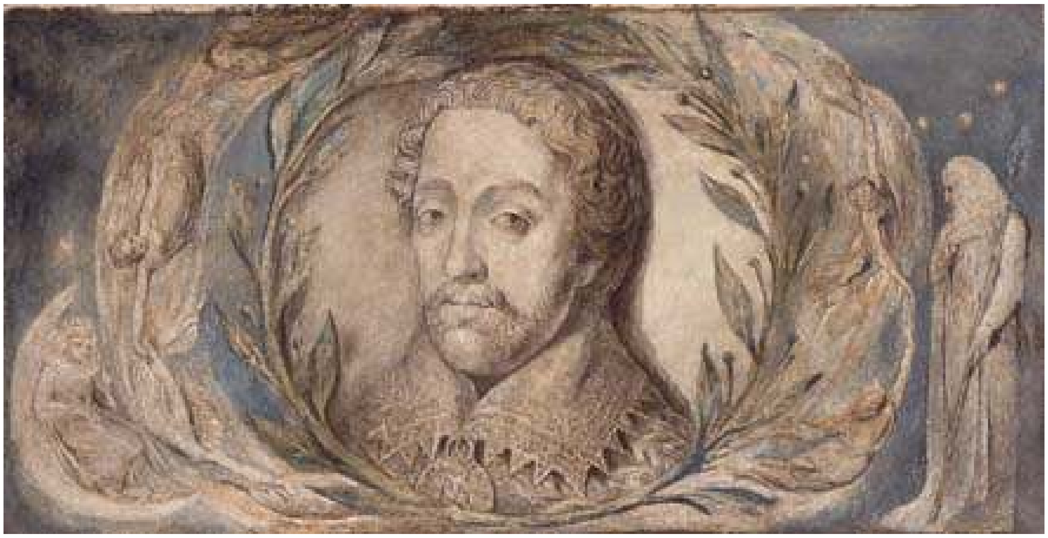

Fig. 3 *Portrait of Edmund Spenser*, by William Blake
Manchester City Galleries

Several years after his first representation of Spenser, Blake was commissioned by William Hayley to paint Spenser's portrait among several others for a collection somewhat inaccurately entitled the "Heads of the Poets," to decorate the library of his patron's Turret House in Felpham between1800 and 1803 (Bentley, *Stranger* 221) (fig. 3). That Spenser was incorporated into a group which included Homer, Cicero, Dante and Milton reflects the esteem in which he was held in the late eighteenth century. Blake's image of Spenser was taken from an engraving by George Vertue (Taylor 104), and shows the poet with a beard and a half smile on his lips, his eyes cast towards the viewer. Around Spenser's neck Blake painted a decoration, a gold medallion upon which is an image of Elizabeth I. To the left is a further depiction of the Queen in regal finery, perhaps a reminder of Spenser's most famous work in the Queen's name, *The Faerie Queene*. To the right stands a large venerable man with a staff, the shepherd-poet, apparently the recipient of her command (Taylor 104). The reiterated images of Elizabeth in the painting underline the controlled political climate in which Spenser wrote and to which he was bound. Irene Taylor argues that the image communicates Blake's view that Spenser was compelled to uphold the Queen's command, craving the praise of and status conferred by the court and thus lacking poetic independence (Taylor 104). Indeed, according to Taylor, Elizabeth's powerful political presence was an authoritative force that constrained and hindered Spenser's creative vision (Taylor 105). I disagree that Blake's image shows the limits of Spenser's vision. Rather, I would argue, by the use of allegory, Spenser escapes from political constraints and is able fully to exercise his own poetic creativity. The two figures on either side of his portrait can be seen to represent this fact. Through his verse Spenser communicates the political epic in praise of his Queen and with it his own implicit feelings concerning the state of the country. He is both the courtier and the shepherd, both at court and away from it, both praising and critiquing his monarch.[15] If anything, this closely monitored political situation challenged him to be *more* creative in order to convey complex and ambivalent verse while maintaining the status of his text as being ostensibly a hymn that praises the Queen.[16]

## Blake's *Characters in Spenser's Faerie Queene*

The final and perhaps most important visual artefact connecting both poets is Blake's *Characters in Spenser's* *Faerie Queene*, painted around 1825 (see fig. 4). This watercolour and ink on muslin has drawn less attention than it deserves. It is in poor condition and the little interest it has received has led to few copies and no reproductions. Yet the painting's size, complexity and finish establish it as one of Blake's major surviving works (Grant & Brown 56). It is a significant link between

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[15] Robert Gleckner argues that the dualities in Spenser's work would have been criticised by Blake as being akin to the separation of body and soul (11-13). In contrast, I think Blake would have appreciated the complexity of Spenser's verse and its ability to convey a multitude of meanings simultaneously.

[16] This topic will be discussed in greater detail in chapter three.

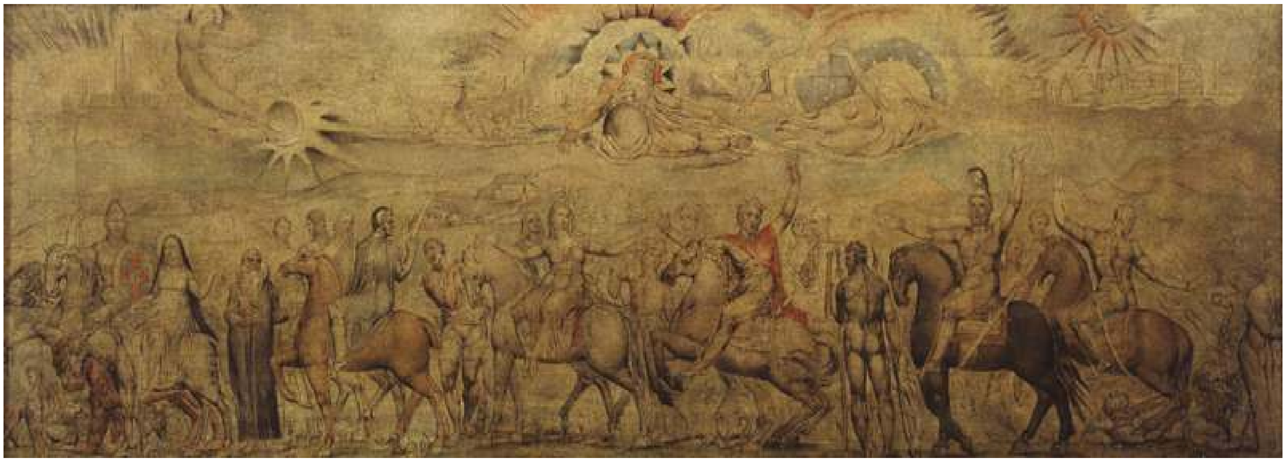

Fig. 4 *The Characters in Spenser's* *Faerie Queene* (c. 1825), by William Blake. Petworth House, The Egremont Collection (acquired in lieu of tax by H.M. Treasury in 1957 and subsequently transferred to the National Trust), ©NTPL/Derrick E. Witty

Spenser and Blake in terms of allegorical and visual importance. It has been suggested that the watercolour is a companion to Blake's tempura of *Chaucer's Canterbury Pilgrims* (1809), as the painting is almost exactly the same size and also depicts a mirrored procession of characters (Grant & Brown 56; Foster Damon 383-84). These processions move in opposite directions but are balanced by some correspondence between the two sets of characters. "Redcrosse, like Chaucer's Knight, leads the cavalcade; Una, next to him, balances the Prioresse; Sir Guyon looks backward, just as does the Pardoner" (Foster Damon 383). These parallels are suggestive of Blake's interest in Chaucer and Spenser as forefathers of English verse, but they must not distract us from a careful consideration of the *Characters in Spenser's* *Faerie Queene*. The detail and work Blake put into the painting highlights his deep knowledge of Spenser's *Faerie Queene*. A host of characters from the poem are depicted in the watercolour. Grant and Brown identify them in groups according to the books in which their actions are described. The first group includes the Dwarf, Lion, Una with an open book, and the Redcrosse Knight. The second group constitutes the Palmer carrying a Christ-like baby Ruddymane, Guyon, and a figure with a wide and leering grin, who may be Satyrane.[17] Britomart is in the third grouping along with her nurse, Glaunce. The garters on her legs suggest that she may be wearing armour beneath her clothing (Grant & Brown 67). Artegall is next with the stony Talus, his back to the viewer and his mace in hand. Behind them, Arthur is identified by his helmet (*FQ* 1.7.31-32), but without his brilliantly blinding shield (*FQ* 1.7.33-35). Bringing up the rear is a heavily armoured Calidore, turning to a muzzled Blatant Beast and the bound and bowed figures of Archimago and Duessa. The landscape behind these figures is filled with various buildings and places relating to scenes in the poem, some hard to determine. Among those that can be picked out by Grant and Brown are Despair's Cave to the very left of the painting, a body of water, possibly the Idle Lake (*FQ* 2.6.10) or the Gulf of Greedinesse (*FQ* 2.12.2ff), and a domed doorless building, perhaps the castle of Celia (*FQ* 1.10.3ff) (Grant & Brown 78). A cottage amidst some woodland could be the Hermit's Hermitage where victims of the Blatant Beast come to rest (*FQ* 6.5.35-40). A castle depicted above Una's outstretched hand could possibly be her parent's palace in the kingdom of Eden (Grant & Brown 78).

Above this Blake has incorporated a further level of significance in what Grant and Brown term the "supernal regions" of the picture. Within this region the radiant cathedral of Jerusalem is seen along with Cynthia, leaping from her crescent moon, arms outstretched, and Jove at the centre of the painting (Grant & Brown 81), looking down on Britomart and Artegall. Guyon's spear is pointed up toward a grouping of ten or more nudes in different postures, suggesting a representation of the Bower of Bliss (Grant & Brown 81). All the characters, places and supernal figures can be seen to relate to one another and generate further meaning when read together. The figures in the foreground interact with those in the background (Grant & Brown 59). Thus, Justice or Astraea (*FQ* 5.1.5) holds up her yellow scales, wearing a white halo and bird wings. Her left hand hovers just above the head of Arthur while she looks down, with the hint of a smile, towards Talus, who used to be her "groome" and who metes out punishments in Book Five (*FQ* 5.1.12) (Grant & Brown 84). Within Blake's illustration lies an allegorical impulse akin to that of Spenser. The level of allegorical detail within the painting calls for readerly engagement and demands interpretation in ways that parallel the allegorical function of Spenser's *Faerie Queene*. Blake seems to be both recalling the allegorical nature of Spenser's poem and actively re-creating, in graphic visual form, the readerly processes of textual interpretation initially inspired by Spenser's verse. Investigative skills and keen perception are required in order to unravel the many interpretive possibilities raised by the positioning and interaction of the characters within this detailed landscape.

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[17] Satyrane looks up at the stern face of Guyon. Foster Damon and Grant & Brown agree that this exchange between the two characters has the effect of "undercutting Guyon's 'temperance' with suggestions of animality" (Grant & Brown 66). See Foster Damon, 384. Satyrane helps Una and fights the pagan Sansloy, thus proving that he is as worthy as any of the knights in the procession and that he is not merely a lusty satyr. As always, Blake's image suggests more than is conveyed on the surface.

Robert Gleckner provides an extremely detailed analysis of *The Characters in Spenser's* *Faerie Queene* (163-262) in *Blake and Spenser*. Gleckner is interested in the ways in which Blake is influenced by Spenser, as demonstrated by Blake's simultaneously re-representing and critiquing Spenser's work within his own. The title of the book, however, conveys Gleckner's approach. *Blake and Spenser* is not a chronological ordering of the poets, but a reflection on the predominance of one over the other. Gleckner takes what he calls a Blakean perspective, basing his analysis on his supposition that Blake's reaction to Spenser's poetry would be critical. I think this argument is too narrow and does not account for the extent to which Blake respects, learns, incorporates and progresses from Spenser's allegorical mode of teaching in order to enlighten his readers with his own unique allegorical form.

We can gauge Gleckner's approach and analysis of Spenser and Blake's work through his interpretation of Una in *The Characters of Spenser's* Faerie Queene. Grant and Brown comment that the Una figure in Blake's picture "is notably lacking the veil described by Spenser" in his poem (64). Una's pure holiness, her skin, her face throughout most of Book One is hidden "Vnder a vele, that wimpled was full low, / And ouer all a blacke stole shee did throw" (*FQ* 1.1.4). Only the pure of heart and mind may wholly view her sublimity. Gleckner provides an interpretation of this figure from what he feels to be a Blakean viewpoint. He argues that Blake deliberately left off Una's "vele," illustrating his rejection of the common Renaissance notion that Truth is veiled. Blake "interprets it as a measure of Spenser's own error in *The Faerie Queene* as a whole; for its 'dark conceite' that continually veils the truth 'beneath' the allegory is but Spenser's veiled Una writ large" (210). Not only does Gleckner argue that Blake critiqued the way in which Spenser covertly wraps "truth" within his text, he goes on to suggest that the wearing of a veil implies a falsehood, a Vala-like parody of genuine truth.

> Freed of her veil, Blake's Una is not, then, the *Virgin* Mary but the Mary of *The Everlasting Gospel* as well as the woman Jerusalem, whose alter-configuration, the city, shines dazzlingly in its truth above her head in the painting…In this light, Una's book is redeemed by Blake from its Urizenic implications. (Gleckner 211)

Gleckner often views Spenser through a critical light which he then suggests belongs to Blake. However, Gleckner seems to forget that Una removes her veil at the end of Book One, so that her truthful beauty may be perceived by all, including the reader. "So faire and fresh, as freshest flower in May; / For she had layd her mournefull stole aside, / And widow-like sad wimple throwne away" (*FQ* 1.12.21). It may be that

Blake chose to depict her in all her glory without her veil in his pictorial presentation of *The Faerie Queene*. This powerful character can now be seen by the viewer. She has never been deceitful towards her readers or her fellow characters, warning them instead to "read beware" in moments of danger (*FQ* 1.1.13). She is therefore justified in being able to remove her veil and show her glowing face to readers who appreciate its significance. Throughout his discussion of the painting, Gleckner acknowledges Blake's encompassing and dedicated reading of his predecessor's poetry, noting comparative details between both poets' works that are helpful to readers. However, his constant assumption that Blake was critical of Spenser prevents a genuinely fruitful comparison of the two poets and limits the scope of his study.

The presentation of Una without her veil is just one of many intriguing elements in Blake's picture that demand our attention. The fact that Arthur is depicted without his glistering shield, an important aspect of his power and majesty in the poem, is another striking feature of Blake's watercolour. We do not know why Blake chose not to depict the shield, but its lack of representation is important. It is a "gap" or disjunction in the text that demands investigation and interpretation. Another arresting figure is Calidore, the Knight of Courtesy, who spends most of Book Six in the pastoral world, wearing shepherd's weeds in order to win the heart of Pastorella. However, Blake chooses to represent him clad in more armour than any other knight in the procession. He is completely encased in grey metal and only his face is visible. Perhaps Blake sought to represent Arthur and Calidore as they are "truly," like Una, without their props and disguises. However, before we attempt to make assumptions and categorisations, we must consider the book which is open on Una's lap in the painting, when no books are associated directly with her in the poem. Is this a book of authority and instruction or one of "Truth" and enlightenment? In presenting Una with a book, Blake indicates that he, like Spenser, believed the printed word to be of vital importance to human knowledge and understanding. The fact that the content of the book remains unknown, however, attests to his perception of the ambivalence of language, of the ability of the word to misguide if misinterpreted. Is Una reading or dictating to other characters from the Bible, in which she would be able to identify herself as the Bride of Christ? Is Blake depicting her reading *The Faerie Queene* itself? The reader is left to engage with the image in order to decide. Curiously, Duessa and Archimago appear at the very end of the procession to the far right of the painting. Although Duessa reappears in Book Five, both characters feature predominantly in Book One, particularly Archimago, and it seems that Blake has painted them out of order. Their bound and arched postures are very Blakean, suggestive of oppression and enslavement. They, along with the muzzled Blatant Beast, whom we know escapes Calidore to roam "the world at liberty againe" (*FQ* 6.12.38), convey the ever present threat of disquiet, violence and darkness that taints the jubilation of the parade. These "gaps" and disjunctions in the text are fundamental to the function of allegory. Like emblems, they encourage readers to make associations and to explore the "disconnect" between seeming connections. Throughout the course of this thesis I will attempt to provide some reasons and answers for these disjunctions as well as explaining why they are important to Spenser and Blake's notion of allegory. Calidore's Courtesy and Arthur's shield will be discussed, along with the self-conscious implications of the book as a medium for conveying verse through words and images. Blake's hunched and bound figures are expressive of more than Archimago and Duessa's deceit and evil. They comment on oppressive religious, political and social practices. These disjunctions are part of the allegorical process. They are deliberate forms within the text which challenge readers to discover other ways of perceiving meaning and searching for truth.

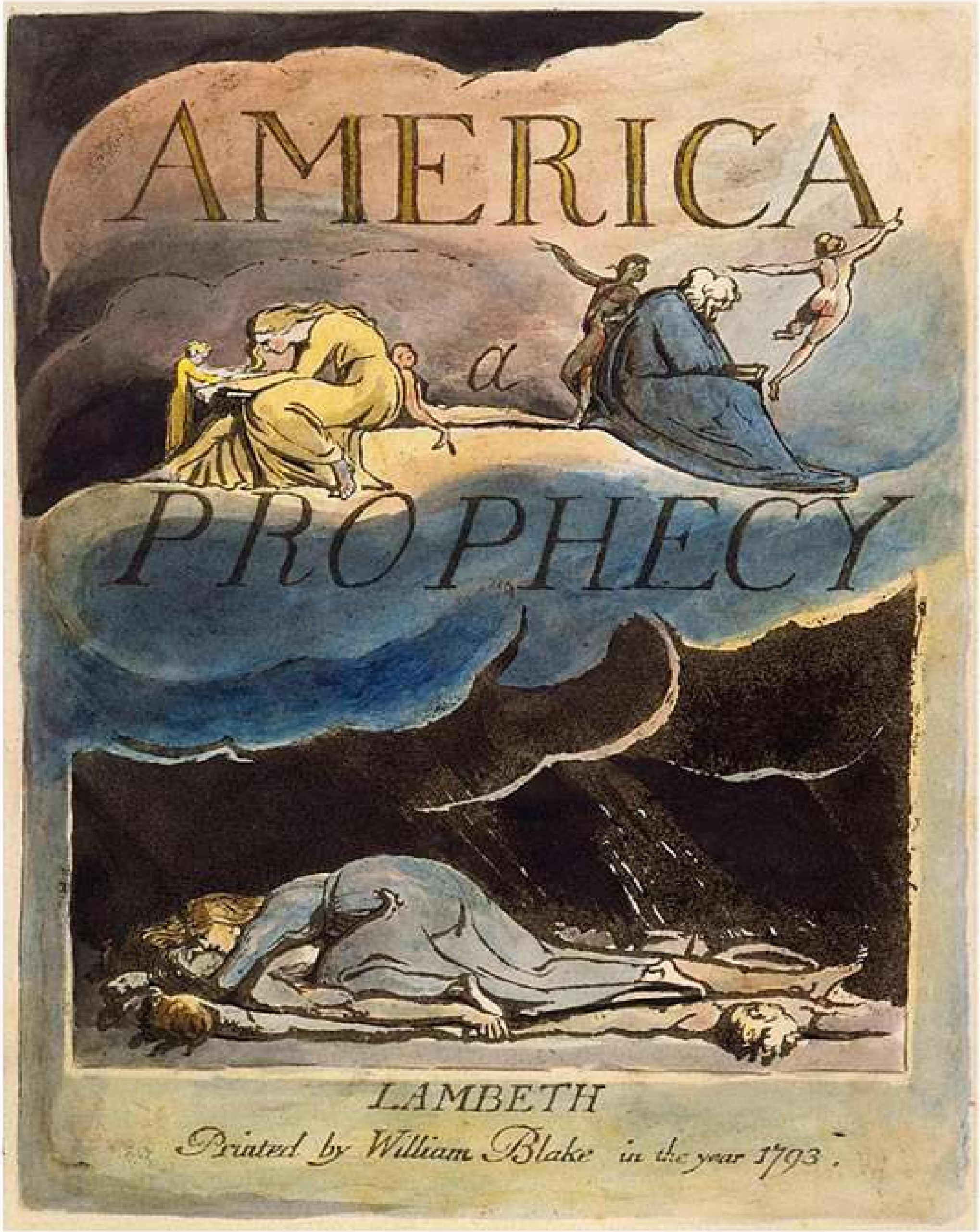
AMERICA
a
PROPHECY
LAMBETH
Printed by William Blake in the year 1793.

Fig. 5 Frontispiece to *America a Prophecy*, by William Blake
British Museum, London. ©The Trustees of the British Museum

Within the painting Blake incorporates self-conscious reflections of the poet, possibly of himself and of Spenser. To the right of the picture directly above the character of Artegall is the supernal image of “The Artist.” He is sitting next to a raised plinth upon which he draws or writes without looking at his work. He is gazing directly at the viewer. On his left thigh a slightly smaller "double" figure appears to be seated. The double is shown to be looking at the work (Grant & Brown 83). Parallels can be noted between this figure and his helper and the forms in Blake's frontispiece to *America* (see fig. 5), where seated figures are bent over large books, helped by small, child-like characters who point and turn pages. Blake's depiction of Spenser creating his little fairies in Gray's "The Bard" is also called to mind. These tiny figures are both reflective of the creative impulse of the poet/artist and of the readers who will be looking at and assessing the poet's verse. Blake is self-consciously aware of the way readers read and interpret his work. "The Artist" stares directly out at us as if challenging the viewer to judge the picture with care and close attention. This figure stands for the effort of the poet/artist in assembling his creation, but equally, in presenting himself to his viewers, he demands his audience work with similar diligence to decipher and interpret the meanings displayed before them.

This attitude does not belong solely to Blake. Repeated instances of self-consciousness appear throughout both poets' verse and they are fundamental in defining the nature and processes of allegory. Spenser was profoundly aware of the workings and implications of the text, as I will show. There is an indication within this picture that Blake recognised and was attentive to Spenser's poetic self-consciousness. In the background between Britomart and Artegall and in the space directly below Jove is a haloed or hatted piper leaning against a tree, playing for four or more nude dancers (Grant & Brown 79). This figure refers to Colin Clout, who plays for the Graces in Book Six of *The Faerie Queene* (*FQ* 6.10.10ff). The figure is out of order in relation to the chronological positioning of figures and events as detailed from left to right across the painting, a fact which immediately demands the reader's attention. The piper is close to the artist and his central position shows that he is also a figure for the poet/Spenser, especially given that Spenser used the character in *The Shepheards Calender* and *The Faerie Queene*. Colin creates interactive, imaginative engagement and meaning through his music. Spenser does likewise through his verse. Blake can be seen to follow Colin's example to show how verse is created and disseminated using the character of the Piper in the "Introduction" to *Songs of Innocence*, as will be discussed in chapter two. It is no coincidence that Blake places the Piper and the Artist near each other towards the centre of his watercolour. They can be seen as differing versions of creative insight and production, relating to the spontaneity and the physical and mental work involved in the construction and production of the text. The presence of these figures reflects Blake's profound understanding of the processes involved in the reading and understanding of Spenser's verse, and the figures represent the ways in which each poet is at once similar and yet very different in their artistic and creative approaches. However, in terms of their demand for readerly engagement and their self-conscious approach, both poets are remarkably similar. This artistic self-consciousness is fundamental to the workings of allegory as it ensures that the reader is always alert to the function and operation of the words and images and the ways in which they interact in order to generate meaning.

The allegorical and visual impact of Blake's *Characters of Spenser's Faerie Queene* encouraged me to investigate whether it was possible for Blake to use allegory in a way similar to Spenser's use of it. At the heart of both poets' verse is an insistence on the interaction of the verbal and the visual, which demands the careful interpretive engagement of readers. As I have suggested above, the selection and use of words and images is not passive, but a choice laden with religious, social and political implication. Every word and image is studied and put in its fit place.[18] Given the importance that both poets attach to the interrelation between words and images, it will be useful now to turn to a consideration of the emblem tradition and its relevance to their work.

## Emblems: a basis for allegorical and visual reading

The study of emblems is significant to an exploration of Spenser and Blake's allegory as there is an obvious overlap between the principles and characteristics of emblematic and allegorical modes. The emblem or *impresa* is an icon accompanied by a text or motto expressing a particular political or ideological message (Bath 10). The use of emblems and emblem books was increasingly widespread during the sixteenth century, and they remained popular into the eighteenth century, with over forty editions being reprinted in the nineteenth century (Bath 7, 255). Traces of this emblem culture influenced Blake, especially in the formulation of his illuminated poems. Spenser worked on perhaps the first English emblem book to appear in print in the sixteenth century. He translated Jan van der Noot's verse for *A Theatre for Worldlings* from French to English in 1569, when he was seventeen (*FQ* xii; Hume, *Protestant Poet* 7). The text appeared accompanied by woodcut emblems attributed variously to Marcus Gheeraerts and Lucas de Heere of Ghent (Schell 461-63). The use of woodcut emblems must have made some impression on the young Spenser because he uses one at the beginning of each eclogue in *The Shepheards Calender* (1579). Each woodcut shows the month's zodiacal sign and depicts the poem's plot, often in medieval serial form (whereby different scenes and characters are depicted from month to month) (Cain, *Shorter Poems* 5). Little details make each woodcut appropriate to the eclogue it accompanies. In *Januarye* Colin breaks his oaten pipe which in the woodcut becomes a broken bagpipe, symbolic of male desire (Cain, *Shorter Poems* 5). The pipe rests at Colin's feet, its bag punctured and torn open, its pipes snapped and scattered on the ground, suggestive of his thwarted attempts to win the heart of Rosalind.

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[18] See *J* 3.50-51.

*The Shepheards Calender* is more profoundly linked to Spenser's use of allegorical visualisation than is perhaps first assumed. S.K. Heninger, Jr., in the *Spenser Encyclopaedia* notes that the *Calender* is "the first poem in English with its own pragmatic set of illustrations, thereby blending verbal and visual images" (650). This blending of word and image in verse may have influenced Blake's unique production of illuminated poems. The content of the *Calender* is also densely allegorical. Paul McLane's careful study of the poem emphasises many interwoven strands of allegory existing within the twelve eclogues. Not only does the poem comment on the Elizabeth-Alençon marriage proposal that dominated English politics the year the poem was published (McLane 13), but it also touches upon religious abuses (McLane 131-59) and leading courtly factions (McLane 61-78), along with representations of monthly and zodiacal patterns and the ages of man (McLane 319). McLane argues that the woodcuts should not be omitted in editions of the poem as they are important to the full understanding of the text (320).

In contrast to *The Shepheards Calender*, *The Faerie Queene* lacks any form of illustration except for one woodcut of St George killing the dragon, an image that appeared in the 1590 and 1596 editions of the poem.[19] It is shown on a single page by itself, between the final page of Book One and the Proem to Book Two (*FQ* 156). The influence of emblems on Spenser's sense of visual allegory is more pervasive and complicated than the inclusion of a single illustration in *The Faerie Queene* may suggest. The whole notion of the emblem in the sixteenth century was complex. Readers were to use their minds to decipher the relation between a given image, its motto or adage, and the verse that usually accompanied it (Colie 37). Emblems were based upon a range of subjects, from biblical parables to popular and common English proverbs (Bath 57-58).[20] They were often used didactically in schools (Bath 31-40). They could be used as covert signs, as when Mary Queen of Scots sent embroidered emblems as disguised messages to her supporters (Bath 18). At Elizabethan tournaments jousting knights presented the Queen with a shield bearing their *impresa* – a motto alongside a picture – designed to depict the bearer's personal aspirations, virtues or state of mind (Young 123).[21] The concept behind the emblem was not one of instant gaudy display, but rather of mystery and gradual enlightenment, of the struggle for truth amid a minefield of conflicting data. Allegory is based on the same principles. Central to the emblem is the metaphor (Bath 47). The metaphor carries with it rhetorical, visual/imaginative and allegorical elements. The emblem builds upon meaning in a didactic and cumulative way, each element reinforcing and adding to its overall meanings. The emblem is a literal figure of the metaphorical process, the joining of text and image or the extension of text into image and vice versa. John Hoskins, writing in 1599, stated, "The conceipts of the minde are pictures of things and the tongue is interpreter of these pictures" (qtd. in Bath 51). The emblem encouraged the process of reading, understanding, imagining and interpreting the image, and the passing on of its message. Emblems could therefore be both literal and metaphorical, and if Spenser uses them at all, they take a metaphorical/rhetorical form in *The Faerie Queene*. Bath comments upon the ambivalence surrounding the emblem by stating that indecision over the respective claims to truth of picture and text which the emblem raised during the Renaissance was not resolved, since it valorised the truthfulness of pictures by treating them as texts and affirmed the pre-eminence of texts by treating them as pictures (Bath 53-56). This paradox remains central to the Renaissance concept of the emblem, and given the anxiety over the status of words and images during this period, it is possible to see why Spenser would use this form subtly and ambivalently, if at all.

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[19] The printer, John Wolfe, used this print of St George several times, both before and after the publication of *The Faerie Queene*, including using it to illustrate news pamphlets, one concerning the popular French Protestant king, Henry IV (*FQ* 157n).

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[20] Michel Bath notes that of the three English emblem books of the late sixteenth century – Thomas Palmer's *Two Hunderd Poosies* (1565), Geoffrey Whitney's *Choice of Emblems* (1586), and Palmer's *The Sprite of Trees and Herbs* (1598) - one third of the emblems are derived from Erasmian commonplaces, a quarter from popular English commonplaces, a quarter from *Hieroglyphica* by Pierio Valeriano, and a dozen from biblical parables and images (Bath 57-58).

[21] Philip Sidney's personal *impresa* used the word "speravi," meaning "I hoped." His "hope" being applicable to many things, from aspirations for the Queen's favour to his desire to inherit from Robert Dudley. Before 1578 Dudley had no male child and Sidney was his heir apparent. When Sidney entered a tournament in 1579 with the word upon his shield visibly crossed through there was much debate at what the new emblem pointed to. See Young 135-36 for a detailed discussion of Sidney's *impresa*.

There has been much critical debate as to whether Spenser is an emblemist or not. Piloo Nanavutty claims that Spenser was influenced by the emblems of Natale Conti's *Mythologiae*, but does not elaborate on this statement (260). Bath argues that Fraunce may have encouraged Spenser's use of emblems, especially in *The Shepheards Calender*. Fraunce's *Explicatio* is a summary of received opinion on emblems and *impresa*, published in the 1580s. His aim, like Spenser's, was to claim a high place for English poetry and prose (Bath 142-43). Fraunce was a member of the circle surrounding Sir Philip Sidney (Bath 143), and thus may have influenced Spenser, who claimed some contact with the Bishop of Rochester and the Earl of Leicester (Sidney's uncle), prominent figures at court during the 1570s and 1580s.[22]

In her classic study, *English Emblem Books* (1948), Rosemary Freeman gives perhaps the strongest argument for the influence of emblems upon Spenser. She argues that the “emblematic method is, in a greatly simplified way, Spenser’s method,” and “emblem books can be most profitably related to his poetry because the bearing they have upon it is central” (101). Freeman notes that Spenser conveys linguistic emblems that lack a picture but are otherwise “cast in the usual form of description followed by interpretation and moral” (101-02). She argues that he makes this form of description followed by motto integral to his poetry and that it is closely related to the allegorical method (103).

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[22] Letters dated from 1579-80 addressed to Gabriel Harvey suggest Spenser was in the employ of the Earl of Leicester: "Leycester House. This 5 of October 1579" (Rambuss 8). *The Shepheards Calender*, published in 1579 was dedicated to Philip Sidney (Hume, *Protestant Poet* 8). For more on Spenser's relation to Rochester and Leicester see Hume, *Protestant Poet* 8.

> Spenser’s use of imagery is emblematic in the sense that the image and its significance are clearly distinguished from each other, and the likenesses are established point by point between them. These may be implicit rather than explicit, but there is no attempt at identification or fusion of the image with its object. (103)

Examples of this “emblematic method” may include the description of figures, such as the procession of the Seven Deadly Sins at Lucifera’s palace. Spenser announces each sin – the equivalent of the motto or adage – before explaining the allegorical features of each particular character in verse, the equivalent of which accompanied many emblems (Colie 37). The only difference is that Spenser’s verse contains no pictures. Instead, the reader has to visualise the scene in his or her head, as when “loathsome *Gluttony*” is announced in Lucifera’s procession in Book One (*FQ* 1.4.21). Gluttony’s belly is “vpblowne with luxury,” his eyes “with fatnesse swollen,” and “like a Crane his necke was long and fyne” (*FQ* 1.4.21).[23] He “swallowd vp excessiue feast” when others about him starve and “as he rode, he somewhat still did eat” while spewing “vp his gorge” in order to eat more (*FQ* 1.4.22, 21). The description and the motto constituted by Gluttony’s name combine to convey a lurid image of a bloated, sweaty figure as he tirelessly gorges himself. Freeman is correct in suggesting that this method is emblematic. She is also correct in suggesting the allegorical implication of these emblematic descriptions (103, 109).

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[23] The Crane was a common emblem of gluttony (from the Latin *glutir*, to swallow), because its long neck supposedly extends the pleasure of swallowing (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 3.10.10; *FQ* 66n).

As Freeman herself notes, Spenser's verse is full of instances of figures thus externalising meaning. For example, Guyon finds Amavia by her dead husband, covered in blood having stabbed herself through the heart in a fit of sorrow. "Ay me, deare Lady, which the ymage art / Of ruefull pitty," he cries (*FQ* 2.1.44). The word "ymage" enforces the moral emblematical significance of the scene, itself meaning "emblem" or signifying a spectacle or portrait (*FQ* 166n). Amavia is a figure for the intensity of grief, the pain of grief externalised. The Palmer later gives the moral lesson accompanying this "ymage" to Guyon:

> Behold the ymage of mortalitie,
> And feeble nature cloth'd with fleshly tyre
> When raging passion with fierce tyranny
> Robs reason of her dew regalitie,
> And makes it seruaunt to her basest part:
> The strong it weakens with infirmitie,
> And with bold furie armes the weakest hart;
> The strong through pleasure soonest falles, the weake through smart
>
> (*FQ* 2.1.57)

Standing before the "emblem" of Amavia, Guyon becomes reader and audience, the student attempting to extract the lesson from the tableau (Dolven 156). In so doing, he is encouraging readers to do likewise, to read carefully, picturing the scene within their minds, and then to extract a motto or lesson from the details of the image before them.[24]

While I agree with the basis of Freeman's argument, she only discusses the descriptions of figurative personification within Spenser's text, and the extent to which he describes them through emblematic detail until their meaning becomes clear. "Often they enter carrying some significant object in their hands as a symbol of their functions. Prays-desire has a poplar branch, Excesse a golden cup, Grief carries a pair of pincers, Murder a bloody knife" (Freeman 109-10). While these personifications may be considered allegorical, I would argue that they are only a small and limited selection of the allegorical implications available within Spenser's text. To consider these personifications the sum of Spenser's allegory would be to see him and his allegory, as some critics in the eighteenth century did, as formed through simple equations of image with text. This is to do an injustice to Spenser's allegory.

Following Freeman's work on Spenser's use of emblems, there has been a reassessment of how emblems were understood. Rosalie L. Colie argues that it is limiting and debilitating for critics to expect emblems to conform too rigidly to generic expectations, as, she observes, strict and unbending genre systems never really existed during the Renaissance. Instead, a body of usually unexpressed assumptions made up a language of what Colie terms "different categories of kind" which function as fluid and overlapping systems of meaning (114).

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[24] This is where Spenser's allegorical visualisation has the capacity to be most obviously didactic. Allegory's will to reveal information while simultaneously concealing it parallels the teacherly drive to allow students to ascertain knowledge through careful explication and study. Spenser, like Blake, gives readers the basic tools to enable them to interpret the verse. However, it is how readers use this material to form interpretations that makes meaning. For more on Spenser's unconventional allegorical teaching practices see Dolven 135-71, 207-37 and Suttie 58-145.

> Just as subcultures continually melt into or are absorbed by a neighbouring culture, so did the kinds in our period melt into one another – often to enrich the possibilities of literature taken as system. (116)

Commenting on Marvell's "Upon Appleton House," Colie notes that "[t]he emblem-symbol works allusively, drawing in a whole area of association not necessarily explored directly in the poem" (38). The same can be said of Spenser's allegory and thereby his descriptive visualisations, which cannot be strictly categorised. Colie speaks directly of the influence of emblems upon poets, including Spenser:

> the emblem affected poetic practice in two ways: its condensation of meaning contributed to the intensity of some highly visual poetic vignettes, and its expectation of the reader's effort toward revelation modified expression in poems not particularly visually emblematic. (37-38)

Emblems are one way of describing Spenser's allegorical visualisation, but as Colie states, the text may be complicated and meanings "modified" by the encouragement of reader visualisation. Therefore, while I agree with Freeman that Spenser uses descriptive methods that can be seen to be allegorically emblematic, I feel that this is to ignore the ways in which he is more unconventional in his use of emblems and descriptive visual images. Paul Alpers provides us with a more balanced description of Spenser's use of emblematical descriptions.

Alpers acknowledges that *The Faerie Queene* is full of emblematic characters and personifications of the type found in popular emblem books of the late sixteenth century (200). However, he argues that Spenser is much more relaxed and flexible than has previously been assumed when it comes to presenting iconographical details in his text.

> Spenser's interest in personifications, emblems and the like did not at all entail adherence or obligation to conventional meanings and modes of representation. By the same token, the reader is not expected to bring to the poem the elaborate iconographic apparatus that is sometimes recommended to him, and when he uses his knowledge of emblem books and mythologies it is in a more flexible, a less predetermined way than we have thought. (Alpers 209)

One such example of Spenser's casual use of iconographic details is the description of Prays-desire holding a poplar branch (*FQ* 2.9.36-37). The reader naturally assumes that the poplar has an emblematic significance linked to either praise or desire. In fact, the poplar's symbolic identity has nothing to do with the desire for glory or honour. It was traditionally identified with time because its leaves are white on one side, symbolising day, and black on the other, symbolising night (Alpers 205-06). Of course, the poplar does not merely stand for time, but the difficulty of its association with Prays-desire still remains. A disconnect or tear has emerged between readerly assumption and the meaning of the image. Alpers's perceptive example highlights Spenser's deliberate complication of traditional iconographic signifiers in order to encourage a closer reading of the text. Spenser (and, as we shall see, Blake) presents the visual as a means of testing his readers. He, like Blake, does not necessarily endorse stereotyped or wholly conventional associations that accompany an image. The reader has to construct the image in the first place, and then has to be attentive to specific details that deliberately obscure or obstruct its meaning in order to look at it in new ways. While personifications and emblematical details are a distinct part of Spenser's text, it is the pertinent tiny details that address the perceptive and patient reader. Many will see only personifications. The real allegorical message lies within the grains of dissidence or difficulty that the vigilant reader of *The Faerie Queene* will inevitably encounter.

One famous example of a seemingly "emblematic" moment in the poem which carries within it grains of such dissidence is the transformation of Malbecco into the figure of Jealousy. Having been cast in an almost comical light, chasing "like a Gote" after his adulterous, lustful wife Hellenore (ironically without a goat's proverbially lustful connotations, but with the "horned" implications of the cuckold [*FQ* 3.10.47]), Malbecco's end is surprisingly poignant and un-emblematical. Full of the agony and grief of lost love he throws himself from a cliff edge.

> But through long anguish, and selfe-murdring thought
> He was so wasted and forpined quight,
> That all his substance was consum'd to nought,
> And nothing left, but like an aery Spright,
> That on the rockes he fell so flit and light;
> That he thereby receiu'd no hurt at all,
> But chaunced on a craggy cliff to light;
> Whence he with crooked clawes so long did crall (*FQ* 3.10.57)

His fall highlights the fragile transience of life, the extent to which existence is "so flit and light." Spenser takes the transformation of Malbecco into a bird-like figure with claws from a passage in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, when Daedalion throws himself from a cliff and is transformed into an eagle with curved talons (*Met* 11.339-45) (*FQ* 387n).[25] However, as Alpers notes, nowhere in traditional literature is the eagle specifically associated with jealousy, and while claws are associated with monstrosity, they can hardly serve to define the specific sin (220). Malbecco's demise can be associated more with the love-grief and despair of Amavia than with jealousy, and for this the reader feels compassion for him. The final stanzas of the canto complete Malbecco's transformation as he is condemned to a deathly eternal life in the depths of a cave, his body and organs poisoned and his liver, the traditional centre of jealous love, contaminated by "internall smart" (*FQ* 3.10.59). As Malbecco's body is infected and decayed by the poisons of jealousy he becomes more than just a figure of Jealousy. There is sympathy for this "miserable swaine" and his very human error (Alpers 228). He is more than an emblem, he is a living allegory of the pain of unrequited love, of the loss and suffering that accompanies humanity. Thus Spenser's "emblems" are more than simple one-to-one equations. They are complex visual-allegorical presentations of the processes and difficulties of life, and we must take time and care to read and understand them properly.

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[25] "Apollo, pitying him, when Daedalion had hurled himself from that high cliff, made him a bird, held him suspended there on sudden wings, and gave him a hooked beak, gave him curved claws, but he left him his old-time courage and strength greater than his body. And now as a hawk, friendly to none, he vents his cruel rage on all birds and, suffering himself, makes others suffer, too" (Ovid, *Met* 11.339-45).

Alpers concludes correctly that much work in assessing Spenser's iconographic or visual allegory is hampered by the imposition of inappropriate assumptions and expectations on the poem (229). Rather than carrying a stock of traditional emblems and associations, the reader needs to bring a clear and unencumbered mind to the text in order to gain a fuller understanding of its various workings and meanings. The text is structured upon "tears" in its fabric, both minute and mighty. These tears show the extent to which the visual is provisional while also, paradoxically, being pertinent to meaning. Each moment of dissidence or resistance to the reader's sense of conventional reading is a point at which he or she must pause and reassess their interpretation. These "tears" emphasise diverse allegorical meanings which are brought into being at points of fissure and the extent to which the text promotes multiple ways of seeing, viewing and reading, as shall be explored in greater detail in this thesis.

Emblems also influenced Blake's designs and visual constructions. In contrast to Spenser's work (with the exception of *The Shepheards Calender*), Blake's work is characterised by the many graphic illuminations which accompany his verse. Although emblems and emblem books were still known during the eighteenth century, they were increasingly used by marginalized groups in society (Bath 264). Bath argues that they were often adopted by dissenting and non-conformist congregations (of which Blake's family were a part) as teaching tools (264). This heritage, Bath notes, became the basis for the strong association of emblem books with young readers, and thus emblem books became tomes of instruction for children (264). John Bunyan's emblem book, *A Book for Boys and Girls*, was first published in 1686 and went into many editions, the last being printed in 1864 (Bath 265). It is hard to judge the extent to which this heritage influenced Blake's preoccupation with childhood and its depiction in *The Songs of Innocence and Experience*, but it is possible that the transformed emblem culture among dissenting societies played a role in the verse and illustrations Blake produced.[26] Blake's *The Gates of Paradise*, printed in 1793, around the same time or soon after *Songs of Experience*, is definitely emblematical in presentation and tone. The text was initially entitled "For Children" and contains eighteen engravings with a line or two of verse – a motto – beneath each image.[27] The text is ordered to follow the life of man from birth to death, each motto corresponding to the detailed image above it. Some of the designs produced in this text can be related to earlier children's books. For example, David Bindman, investigating elements of popular religious imagery influencing Blake, discovered that the child killing humanised creatures in plate 7 of *The Gates of Paradise* has its origin in the woodcut to Emblem XXII of *Divine Emblems: of Temporal Things Spiritualised*, which was a version first illustrated in the early eighteenth century in Bunyan's *Book for Boys and Girls* ("Popular Religious Imagery" 712). This highlights the extent to which Blake was aware of the structure and workings of emblems. As it was produced fairly early in Blake's career and within the same period as *The Songs of Innocence and Experience*, it could be argued that the principles of the emblem in terms of the union of text and design and the complexity surrounding its meanings may have been a prominent factor influencing the illustrations and text of Blake's later work.

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[26] Frye states that "the *Songs of Innocence and Experience* are in the direct tradition of the emblem-books: they are by far the finest emblem-books in English literature" ("Poetry and Design in William Blake" 36). Yet he seemingly contradicts himself by then writing that "the typical emblem is a literary idea to begin with: its design takes form, not from pictorial laws, but from the demands of the verbal commentary … In Blake the poem does not point to the picture, as it regularly does in the emblem" (Frye 36-7). While Frye makes a pertinent point about the function of emblems, there is no denying the influence of emblem literature on the formation of the *Songs*. See Bath's comments on this subject, 266.

[27] Blake later entitled the work "For the Sexes: The Gates of Paradise" when he revised the text in 1818 (Bindman, *The Complete Illuminated Books* 134). This later title is no longer aimed just at children. "For the Sexes" addresses males and females of all ages and denominations, perhaps suggesting the

Critics have noted that specific emblems popular in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century emblem books have been reproduced by Blake, suggesting his awareness of the context and culture of emblematic material. Erdman, commenting specifically upon Blake's illustrations, draws parallels between several images and their traditional emblematic significance in *The Illuminated Blake*. On plate 15 of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* Blake depicts a snake caught in the claws of an eagle (see fig. 6). This was a popular and traditional emblem among many devices depicting snakes and dragons, or winged snakes looking like dragons (Nanavutty 259).[28] Blake's representation of the plumed serpent shows the relation of body to soul, the

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extent to which Blake recognised that his texts are complex and profound, providing meaning and instruction for both sexes of all ages.

[28] Claude Paradin's *Devises heroiques* (Lyons, 1557) has fifteen emblems of serpents and dragons. This book was very popular in England and many of his devices were reproduced by Whitney in his *Choice of Emblems*. Serpents and dragons also appear in the *Hieroglyphica* of J.P. Valerian and Horapollo (Nanavutty 259).

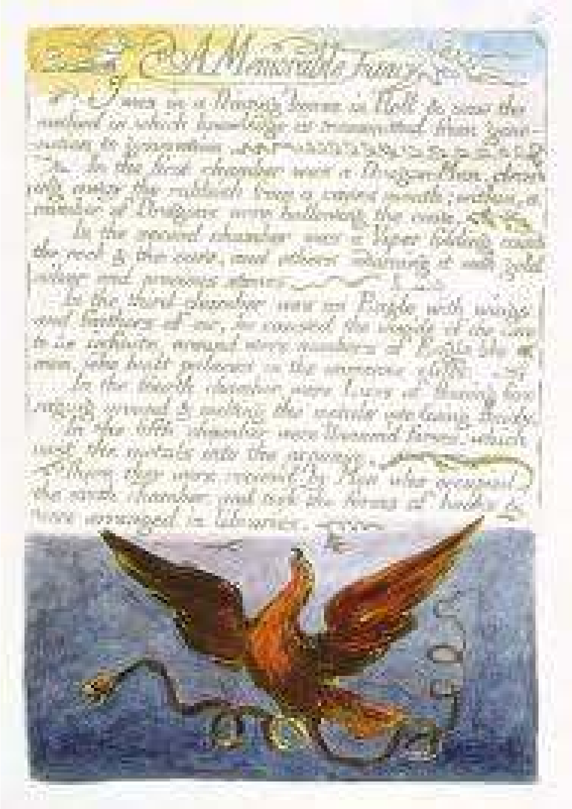


Fig. 6 *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. Plate 15, by William Blake
Morgan Library and Museum

marriage of two aspects of the human being which are inseparable (Erdman, *Illuminated Blake* 112-13, 103). He uses the emblem to highlight the fact that despite social conditioning as to the lowliness of the physical body in favour of the divinity of the soul, both body and soul are necessary to the complete and balanced function of a human being. As Blake's distortion and reversal of the function of the angels and devils in *Marriage* highlights, the soul may well be corrupt and the body pure, energetic and life-giving. This is an example of Blake's transformative use of traditional emblems to make their meaning profoundly relevant to his immediate argument. The emblem has been rejuvenated and remodelled by Blake to convey new meanings over time and to inspire readers to shake off old assumptions and look at texts and images with a renewed perspective.

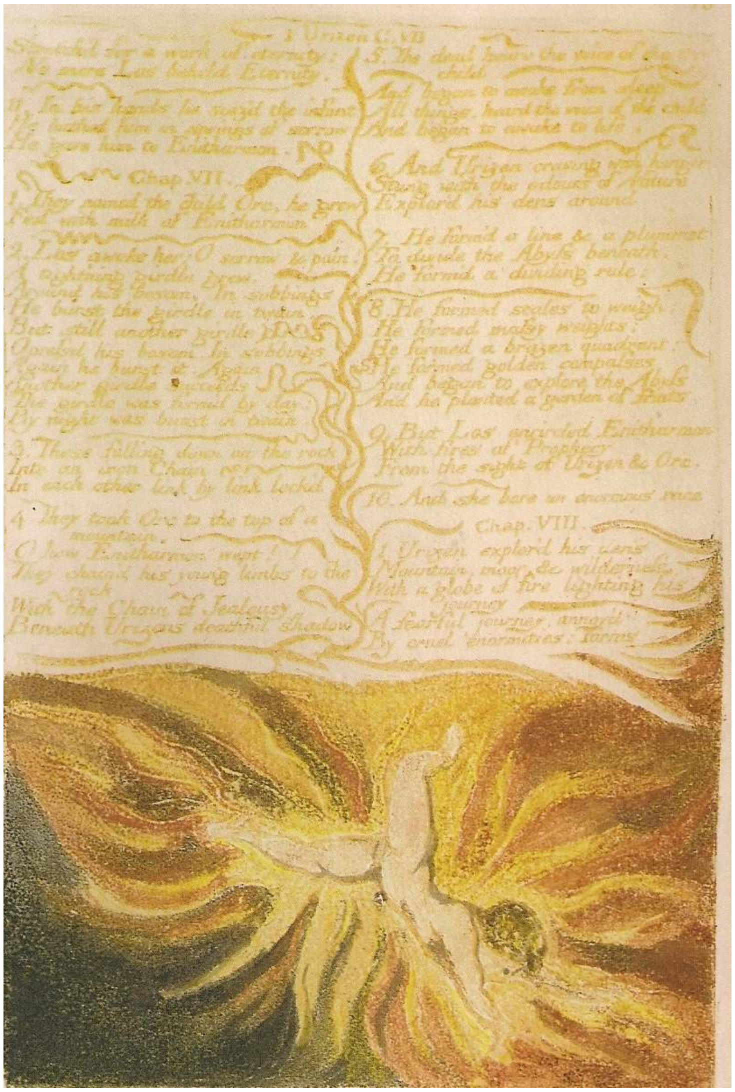


Fig. 7 *The Book of Urizen*. Plate 18, by William Blake
British Museum, London. ©The Trustees of the British Museum

Another instance of Blake's reinterpretation of traditional allegorical emblems is discussed by Piloo Nanavutty. Nanavutty's study of the influences of emblem literature on Blake's work highlights the extent to which the falling "Icarus" figure, again often depicted in emblem devices, fired Blake's imagination. There are profound similarities between Alciati's emblem of Icarus falling sideways, his wax wings melting in the heat of the sun, and the birth of Orc in flames in the *Book of Urizen* (see fig. 7) (Nanavutty 258). In Alciati's emblem, Icarus, a lusty babe, falls sideways into the sea, his melted wings drooping feather by feather. In the *Book of*

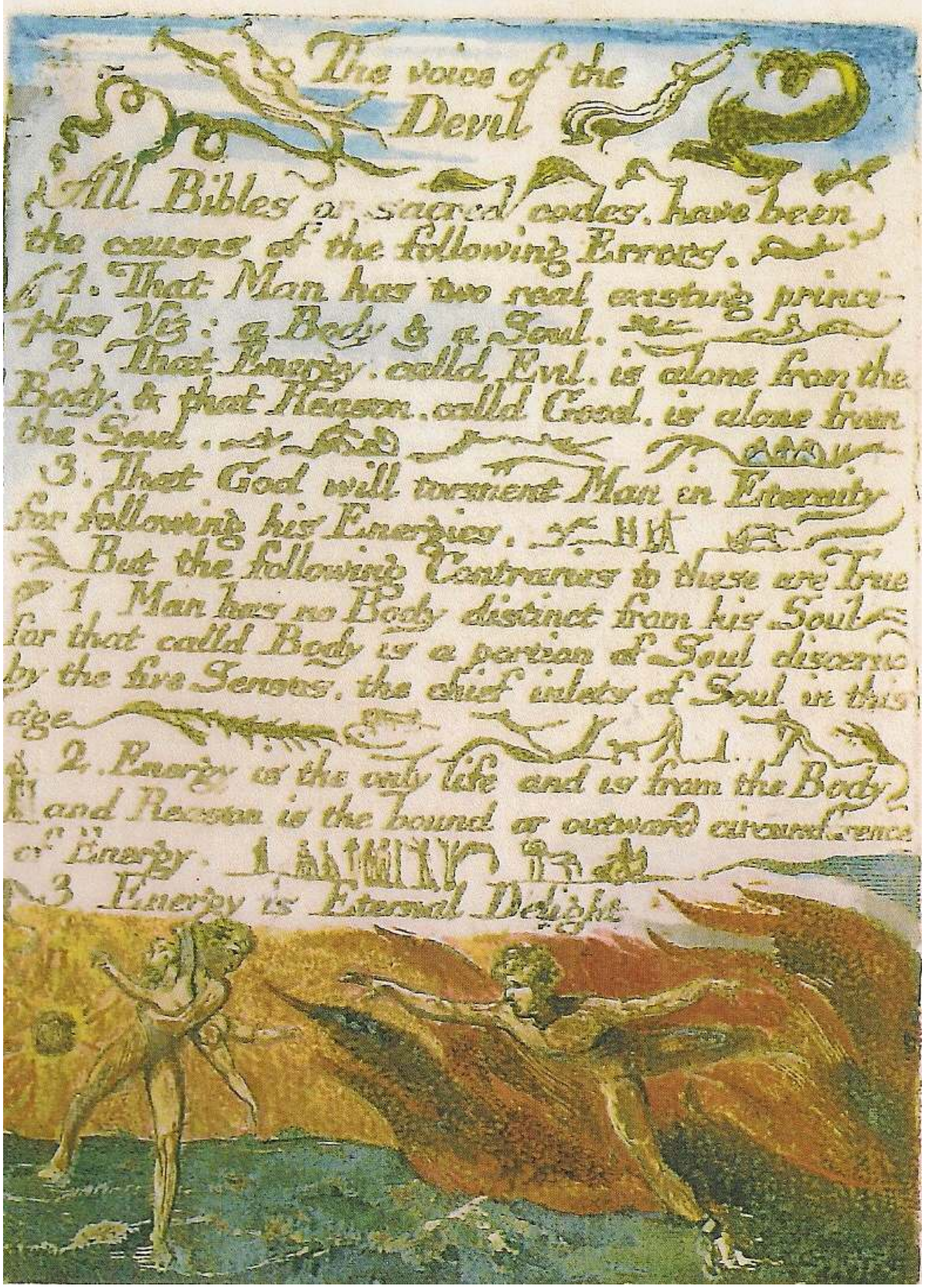
*Urizen*, the infant Orc takes up a position identical to that of Alciati's Icarus. His arms are thrust forward. His legs are wide apart with one flexed at the knee (Nanavutty 258). Nanavutty concludes:

> The resemblance between the two drawings is so close that one is justified in assuming that Blake either reproduced the Alciati emblem unconsciously, or, deliberately modelled his own drawing after it. The fall of the feathers around Icarus may have suggested to Blake the particular portrayal of the flames around the infant Orc. In any case, the resemblance is a proof that Blake was familiar with at least one emblem writer whose popularity continued down to the eighteenth century. (258)

Blake can be seen to incorporate the visual form of a popular literary medium, using it in new ways to give emphasis to the tales and moral meanings he creates and that are important to him. Like Spenser, he encourages readers to draw upon known assumptions before rejecting them and forcing viewers to reconsider the scene from alternative perspectives. The text is both veiled and unveiled. *The Book of Urizen* is original in its re-telling of the biblical story of creation (Mee 10, 162-63). Instead of depicting an Edenic paradise, Blake creates a book of "hell" composed of self-created characters, such as Orc, rather than those of traditional and religious mythology, such as Icarus, Adam or Eve. Readers are forced to confront a completely unknown mythology upon which there is no standard set of preconceptions or assumptions. However, the similarities between these emblems suggest that Icarus in his rebellious and ambitious nature is possibly Blake's inspiration for the formation of Orc. Nanavutty's brief study glimpses the extent to which emblems were one source among many that inspired the creation of Blake's illuminated texts. Much more work needs to be done on these influences, but for now it can be understood that the popular medium of emblem literature influenced Blake as much as it did Spenser, albeit in differing ways.

What is interesting to note when taking a view of Blake's poems as a whole is the extent to which his work begins in "emblem mode" and from there evolves into a completely unique form. Blake both follows and reforms the emblem tradition (Snart 64). What I mean by "emblem mode" is the rather fixed and rigid segregation of image from text as seen in *The Gates of Paradise*, and to an extent in *Songs of Innocence and Experience*. Although in the latter text small designs border and embellish the edge of the page, words and images on the whole are kept separate in the style traditional to most books presenting both prose and illustrations. However, as Blake develops, his illuminations become richer and stronger and his text increasingly incorporates small pictures and images that become one with the verse. Full pages of design often interrupt the text (Hagstrum, *Poet and Painter* 5), as seen in the prophetic poems, *The Book of Urizen*, *The Song of Los*, *Milton* and *Jerusalem*. Like Spenser, but for very different reasons, Blake uses the emblematical form before moulding it and making it more relaxed and suited to his own style of art. Snart notes that to the fixity of the emblem tradition, Blake introduces an element of fluidity, "in large measure by involving (forcing? coaxing?) the variability of readerly subjectivity as a participant in creating meaning" (64). Blake uses this fluid visual form as a springboard to lift his work to greater, more integrated and visionary forms of illustration.

The beginnings of this integration of image and text can be seen in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. Small images of figures, birds, plumes and swirling



The voice of the Devil

All Bibles or sacred codes. have been the causes of the following Errors.

1. That Man has two real existing principles Viz: a Body & a Soul.

2. That Energy. calld Evil. is alone from the Body. & that Reason. calld Good. is alone from the Soul.

3. That God will torment Man in Eternity for following his Energies.

But the following Contraries to these are True

1 Man has no Body distinct from his Soul for that calld Body is a portion of Soul discernd by the five Senses. the chief inlets of Soul in this age

2. Energy is the only life and is from the Body and Reason is the bound or outward circumference of Energy.

3 Energy is Eternal Delight

Fig. 8 *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. Plate 4, by William Blake
Morgan Library and Museum

serpents become almost one with the text (see fig. 8). The reader has to be attentive to those which are words and those which are illustrations. Elaborate, serpentine curls and flames form from trailing letters of words (*MHH* plates 11, 25). As Nelson Hilton says, “words strain to become pure graphic form … The reader of Blake must acquire new sensitivities to read the graphic signifiers identified as ‘words’” (3). Like Spenser, Blake is using these visual tools to focus the reader’s attention. Nothing is misplaced. Nothing is present without significance. Yet these meanings can be ambiguous and subtle, necessitating the need for concentration and careful, vigilant reading. While encouraging an imaginative visualisation of the text, these tiny illustrations also point the reader towards the potential harm of misreading. The swirling serpentine strands trailing from words highlight the extent to which imaginative misreading traps, ensnares and potentially leads the reader astray from the path of illumination through the text. Likewise, these swirling trails emphasise the importance of the human imagination to the generation of vision, the key to bringing the text to life. Northrop Frye in an uncharacteristic moment of dismissive impatience calls Blake’s “marginal decorations … a rather irritating form of punctuation” (“Poetry and Design in William Blake” 37). I see them as the opposite. They are yet further prompts and tools to readers.[29] The emblem, functioning much as metaphor, facilitates the mental integration of image and text, enabling Blake’s illuminations to carry as much allegorical weight as his verse within his illuminated poetry. This visual integration of text and design encourages profound and multiple readings, embellishing reader visualisation and the readerly appreciation of Blake’s verse as a whole.

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[29] See Snart, *The Torn Book* 20-23, 111-74 concerning Blake’s use of marginalia, and 59-60 on the integration of images and words.

## Structure and outline: the content and limitations of this thesis

Spenser and Blake's emblematic method can be considered allegorical in its cumulative layering of meaning and its constant demand to be interpreted. The following chapters will explore the fundamental elements that contribute to each poet's allegorical style, starting with the words on the page, and building cumulatively, one could say allegorically, incorporating a range of complex elements and interactions involved in allegorical presentation and interpretation. In terms of Spenser's work, this study will concentrate primarily on books One, Two, Three, Five and Six of *The Faerie Queene* and on the *Mutabilitie Cantos*, while brief references are also made to *A View of the Present State of Ireland*, particularly when discussing Book Five and Spenser's use of allegory both to reveal and conceal his political concerns and motivations. *The Faerie Queene* is a dense and rich work, providing a multitude of instances which inspire discussion. This thesis will not capture all examples. Nor does it intend to. My aim is to present the ways in which Spenser and Blake construct their allegorical verse and thereby encourage readers to make connections and explore other examples for themselves. I wish to further Spenser and Blake's didactic cause by giving readers the tools by which to go on and explore both poets' work in new ways.

The language and themes of Blake's poems can be seen to build cumulatively and relate to one another. Blake, like Spenser, teaches readers a radical new language, a new way of reading and thinking, and I have found that the best way of presenting this is to begin with his earlier work and progress from there. I therefore begin with (although I do not completely confine explorations to) Blake's earliest illuminated poems, in particular, *Songs of Innocence and Experience* and *The Marriage of Heaven* *and Hell*, before gradually incorporating textual examples from Blake's smaller prophetic poems, such as *America* and the books of *Urizen* and *Los*. Towards the end of the thesis, the reader will notice that extracts are increasingly from Blake's later epic prophetic poems, especially *Milton* and *Jerusalem*. In the final chapter, illustrations are taken from a range of Blake's illuminated texts. Blake's poetic style builds and grows. He often incorporates metaphors and images from earlier works into his later material. I found this means of presenting his poems to be the most organic way of discussing Blake's work and displaying how his allegorical style develops and exhibits itself. At times examples will come from a range of Blake's illuminated poems from differing stages of his life, especially when we look at his visual allegory. This is intended to highlight for the reader the extent to which Blake's meanings and textual images build upon each other and relate to various texts in order to encourage readers to make connections between different poems.

I have chosen to exclude Milton from this study for several reasons. My project seeks to focus upon what defines Spenser and Blake's verse in particular. Spenser and Blake have often been analysed and regarded as belonging within a traditional line of epic-heroic literature extending through the sixteenth to the eighteenth century (Borris 75-80). Links between Spenser and Milton, and Milton and Blake, have long been established, as highlighted in the work of Kenneth Borris, Isabel MacCaffrey and Maureen Quilligan (on the relation between Spenser and Milton), and Joseph Anthony Wittreich, Jr., Stuart Curran, Isabel MacCaffrey, Northrop Frye and S. Foster Damon (on the relation between Milton and Blake). To Milton, Spenser was "a better teacher than Scotus or Aquinas" (*Areopagetica* 311). Milton in turn influenced the poetry and inspired illustrations by Blake (who created a whole series of engravings on *Comus* and *Paradise Lost* as well as the poem, *Milton*).

However, the chief reason for leaving Milton out of this thesis is his rejection of the Spenserian allegorical epic. Milton used Spenserian elements within his verse, but he ultimately rejected Spenser's form of chivalric allegorical epic. Unlike Spenser and Blake, moreover, Milton uses allegory sparingly, especially in his later works (MacCallum 412-13).[30] He associates allegory with fallen language and the equivocation of the Catholic, or un-reformed church, as highlighted by his stylised depiction in *Paradise Lost* of Sin and Death. The deliberately allegorised representation of these personified characters reinforces the association of allegory with duplicity and deceit (Fish 38, 61, 84-85). H.R. MacCallum states that "attacks on allegorical and multiple-level interpretation were frequent in the writings of Luther, Calvin, and their successors" (404). He notes that "in … aligning himself with reformed thought, Milton abandoned much of the ancient tradition of multiple-level, figurative interpretation; those elements which he retained, he modified drastically" (MacCallum 399). Although he can be seen to alter his views towards language, Scripture, and its interpretation as he grew older (Haskin 54-59), Milton's religious principles did not allow for the overuse of allegory, and on this basis he cannot be compared with Spenser and Blake in this study.

I will now provide a brief outline of the construction of this thesis. It follows the horizontally cumulative structure of allegory, as explained in Maureen Quilligan's *Language of Allegory* (28-33).[31] I begin with the basic elements of the text – the words on the page – before going on to explain the importance of reader-participation and interpretation to Spenser and Blake's allegory. From there I suggest the ways in which both poets encourage their readers to perceive both imaginatively and visually, enlarging both their perceptions and the meaning they can glean from reading the texts. This cumulative structure involving the text, the reader, the imagination and the visual, mirrors the progressive path of learning undertaken by readers of Spenser and Blake's verse. Meaning is gradually revealed in small increments. This process is therefore "four-fold" in terms of the components involved in reading the allegorical text, and in the complex allegorical levels of awareness required by the reader to appreciate the workings of the text.

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[30] In *The Ruins of Allegory* Catherine Gimelli Martin has argued, however, that Milton *is* allegorical. "Rather than … 'emptying' Milton's poem of its allegorical content or subsuming it in the self-cancelling ironies of neo-Romantic critics, the current study thus attempts to restore these resonances by redrawing the limits of both metaphor and analogy in ways better able to discriminate between 'merely' symbolic and fully allegorical meaning" (12).

[31] Quilligan argues that allegory works horizontally and meanings accrete serially. "This is not a literal 'level,' but a self-conscious one within the reader. The reader becomes conscious of how he is reading" through "the horizontal pressure of allegory" (*Language of Allegory* 28-29, 33).

In order to analyse the "four-fold" nature of Spenser and Blake's allegorical poems, the meaning of "allegory" needs to be firmly established. The first chapter of this thesis looks at definitions of and attitudes towards allegory from the early sixteenth century onwards, showing how the mode has been constantly redefined. Allegory is not a static mode, but one that is constantly evolving. It can combine with other forms and genres in new and unique ways to promote meaning and generate interpretation. In this sense it is one of the most useful and dynamic modes at Spenser and Blake's disposal for the creation of densely didactic and illuminating verse. I will provide a detailed framework within which Spenser and Blake's work would have been read, including the reasons why each poet chose to use the mode. Spenser's letter to Walter Raleigh in which he introduces *The Faerie Queene*, and Blake's letter to Thomas Butts, in which he details his "four-fold vision," will be examined in order to highlight both poets' awareness of the use and function of allegory and its importance to their work.

Chapters two to five detail the cumulative "fourfold" nature of allegory in relation to Spenser and Blake's work. Chapter two looks at the self-conscious character of allegory through an analysis of the verbal texture, including the placement of words on the page and metaphor. This chapter considers the extent to which words and images are political tools of censorship and propaganda, powerfully reflecting the political and religious influences which impacted the work of both poets. The chapter looks specifically at the "text" and the way it may be read and viewed by the reader. Using deliberately unconventional forms of language, both Spenser and Blake invite readers to pause and re-read the text, encouraging a heightened readerly awareness of words and meaning, which may be viewed as allegorical.

Chapter three continues this process by focusing upon the multiple (and sometimes contradictory) ways in which the text may be interpreted by the reader, and hence, upon the extent to which Spenser and Blake communicate dissatisfaction and resistance through allegorical verse. Allegory is polysemous and expansive and allows for powerful and sometimes contradictory messages to be voiced. The mode is a potent means of simultaneously communicating and disguising criticism. The key to unlocking meaning resides within the reader, and the poet is spared censure or punishment because his text is not explicitly critical. Spenser and Blake's allegory is another way of voicing "resistance" to authority while maintaining the fictional elements of their verse. This resistance can be seen and understood by readers who are receptive to this content. Viewers are encouraged to see these connotations in the poems as part of a whole set of meanings communicated simultaneously, just as if they were staring at the motto and image of an emblem. In this sense, both the text and the reader are interdependent and vital to the workings of allegory. Both Spenser and Blake are unconventional teachers in prompting their readers to see their verse in fresh ways.

Chapter four explores further implications of the text, investigating the ways in which allegory encourages the imagination (as in the case of Spenser), and imagination encourages allegory (as is the case for Blake). The imagination is a means of pushing readers toward further learning and a deeper appreciation of allegorical meaning. Spenser's allegorically imaginative verse was appreciated by eighteenth-century critics to the point that he may have inspired Blake. Blake then extends his perception of "imagination" to make it the most important feature in the comprehension of his verse. This concept of active readerly imagination aids and encourages allegorical thinking. Allegory guides the imagination towards constructive and meaningful understanding.

Chapter five completes the final allegorical element by analysing Spenser and Blake's verbal and imagistic visuality in relation to allegory. The workings of vision or the visual are yet a further aspect of this thesis which asks the reader to think allegorically. Blake uses illustrations (which I shall term "illuminations") to promote further reader engagement and encourage other allegorical perspectives. For Spenser, these illuminations are part of his metaphorical and allegorical text. Both poets use the visual to trigger imaginative readerly interaction, or "vision," to extend the potency and brilliance of meaning within their allegorical verse, and to promote new ways of viewing, perceiving and relating to their texts. Spenser and Blake's poetry is expansive, inviting readers to see multiple meanings from various perspectives. Their work not only stimulates active participation in the reading of the text, but encourages this allegorical process through the use of metaphorical and imagistic aids which call upon the imagination and promote vision. Indeed, as my dissertation will show, Spenser and Blake's concept of allegory is complicated and compounded by multiple forms which encourage the use of *all* the reader's senses.

# Chapter One: On Allegory

> If allegory means … universal significance in the artist's creation of particular things, then all art worth looking at or listening to, including music, is allegorical. (Frye, *Fearful Symmetry* 125)

The definition of allegory needs to be investigated in order to understand its important function in the work of Spenser and Blake. Attitudes toward allegory are tightly related to the social, political and religious contexts surrounding it at any particular moment. Therefore, the use and structure of allegory can alter over time. This makes allegory at once difficult to define and yet malleable, flexible, and relevant to the concerns of both Blake and Spenser. This chapter begins with sixteenth-century definitions and attitudes to allegory and moves from there to explore eighteenth- and then twenty-first-century viewpoints. I will suggest how and why Spenser and Blake chose to use this mode. As a concept, allegory is complicated, a complexity vital to didactic poetic strategy. Spenser and Blake's verse depends upon reader interaction to enable an understanding of the text, and thereby the development of the reader's mind. Seemingly simple language and straightforward scenes are not all they appear to be. Paul de Man states, "Allegorical narratives tell the story of the failure to read" (*Allegories of Reading* 205). Allegory opposes conventional or suppositional readings in order to promote other ways of interpreting the text. Allegory's complexity is gradually revealed; its meanings cannot be comprehended at once. It guides readers towards a progressive understanding of its significations. We have to acknowledge our limited comprehension before the text's meaning is slowly made known to us. This is a process both Spenser and Blake's poetry shares and it is the essence of allegory's effect. Reading is made self-conscious by allegory. Instead of allowing one to read with ease, these texts challenge the reader to confront shifting linguistic constructions. The next few chapters will explore this allegorical process of reader awareness, but I will start with the concept of allegory itself.

The word "allegory" originates from the Greek *allos* (meaning "other"), and *agroeuo* (meaning "to speak in the *agor*" or "marketplace") (Quilligan, *Language* 26). "Allegory" in Greek therefore compounds "other" with the root of "speech," suggesting a "speaking other," "creating an interactive polyphony of diverse yet complementary voices and perspectives" (Borris 59-60).[32] The modern meaning of allegory according to the *Oxford English Dictionary* is (1): a "description of a subject under the guise of some other subject of aptly suggestive resemblance" or (2): "a figurative sentence, discourse, or narrative, in which properties and circumstances attributed to the apparent subject really refer to the subject they are meant to suggest; an extended or continued metaphor." Kenneth Borris's description of allegory as being the "speaking other" more usefully points to the following qualities. Allegory is expansive. It seeks to reveal while concealing. It demands reader engagement and yet it will not confirm which answers and assumptions are right or wrong. It is as frustrating as it is compelling. With guidance from the poet, readers must judge and interpret the verse: allegory cannot function without a reader. The interdependent relationship between text and reader is complex and one that this thesis will explore.

Gordon Teskey, defining "Allegory" in the *The Spenser Encyclopaedia*, notes this interaction between allegory and the reader.

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[32] For further definitions of allegory and its linguistic components, see Adams Leeming and Morgan Drowne, *Encyclopaedia of Allegorical Literature*. For a selection of texts on allegory see Borris, *Allegory and Epic in English Renaissance Literature* (2000); Teskey, *Allegory and Violence* (1996); Kelley, *Reinventing Allegory* (1997); de Man, *Allegories of Reading* (1979), and chapter 10 in *Blindness and Insight* (1983); Quilligan, *The Language of Allegory* (1979); Clifford, *The Transformations of Allegory* (1974); Fletcher, *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode* (1964); and Honig, *Dark Conceit* (1959).

> Traditionally, critics have set out to define what allegory is in isolation from how it is engaged by a reader; and they have sought, in consequence, to locate its doubleness of sense inside the text. …Such a definition tries to be more objective than it is here possible to be. For by focusing on the text itself, and its presumably inflexible meaning, the most salient feature of allegory is ignored: its deliberate and continuous provocation of what has been called [by Edwin Honig] 'the restructuring of the text by each reader.' ("Allegory" 16)

While the reader restructures the text, the text is in fact prompting this response. Little attention has been given to the role of didacticism, or the interactive "teacher-like" qualities of allegory, so vital to the allegory of Spenser and Blake. This complex relationship has been addressed only recently in the work of Saree Makdisi (2003), Paul Suttie (2006), Jason Allen Snart (2006), Jeff Dolven (2007) and Jane Grogan (2009). I will return to discuss these critics in the final section of this chapter. For the moment we must look at the critical response to allegory as Spenser would have known it in the sixteenth century.

## Spenser's "darke conceit": Allegory in the sixteenth century

Thomas Elyot's *Bibliotheca* of 1545 records "Allegoria" as being "a *figure* or inversion of wordes, where it is one in woordes, and an other in sentence or meaninge" (sig. C2$^r$, my emphasis). Towards the end of the sixteenth century Puttenham's *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589) sets out this definition of allegory:

> *Allegoria* is when we do speake in sense translative and wrested from the owne signification, nevertheesse applied to another not altogether contrary, but having much conveniencie with it as before we said of the metaphore. (155)

He continues:

> such inversion of sense in one single worde is by the figure *Metaphore*…, and this manner of inversion extending to whole and large speaches, it maketh the figure *allegorie* to be called a long and perpetuall Metaphore. (156)

Puttenham and Elyot's definition of allegory is based upon its use by Cicero, who applied the Greek word *allēgoria* in *De Oratore* and who gave it, at times, the sense of a continued series of metaphors. Quintillian used the word in the same way in his *Institutio Oratoria* in the first century AD: "[A] continued *metaphor* develops into *allegory*" (*Institutio Oratoria* IX, ii 401).[33]

This association of allegory with metaphor creates a powerful imagistic medium, since metaphors evoke pictures within readers' minds. Puttenham pays much attention to the relationship between allegory and the visual in English poetry. Describing the "Ornament Poeticall," Puttenham states:

> This ornament we speak of is given to it by *figures* and *figurative* speeches, which be the flowers as it were and colours that the poet setteth upon his language by arte, as the embroderer doth his stone and pearle, or passements of gold upon the stuffe of a Princely garment, or as th' excellent painter bestoweth the rich Orient colours upon his table of portraite. (115, my emphasis)

Poetry is so enveloped with visual detail as to render it an image in one's mind, a gloriously detailed picture, a form composed of metaphors. Philip Sidney defines poetry as a "speaking picture" in *The Defence of Poesy*:

> Poesy therefore is an art of imitation, for so Aristotle termeth it in his word *mimesis*, that is to say, a representing, counterfeiting, or figuring forth – to speak metaphorically, a speaking picture – with this end, to teach and delight. (86)

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[33] This extract has been translated by Butler from the Latin: "ut, quemadmodum *άλληγορίαν* facit continua *μεταφορά*" (*Institutio Oratoria* IX ii 400).

Sidney highlights poetry's capacity for didacticism, but also its association with representation, imitation, the presentation of fictional scenes and figures to the reader. Thus, Spenser uses visual metaphors to convey Acrasia "Vpon a bed of Roses," perspiring "through languor of her late sweet toyle," drops of sweat "like pure Orient perles" trickle down her "alablaster" "snowy brest" (*FQ* 2.12.77-78). The powerful rhetorical description of the Bower of Bliss captures the reader's senses, especially the visual senses, enticing the reader as the scene progresses:

> A place pickt out by choyce of best alyue,
> That natures worke by art can imitate:
> In which what euer in this worldly state
> Is sweete, and pleasing vnto liuing sence,
> Or that may dayntest fanasy aggrate
> Was poured forth with plentifull dispence,
> And made there to abound with lauish affluence. (*FQ* 2.12.42)

Sidney goes as far as to say that poetry counterfeits, presenting something false or fictional as true to the mind of the reader. This is suggested also by Spenser in his depiction of the Bower, a place where art is used to imitate "natures worke." As well as being an imitation, Sidney's words raise the possibility that poetry may be deliberately misleading in presenting a fictional scene or a false notion as true.

Spenser plays upon the concept of the visual and its potential for alignment with the false or unnatural in his depiction of the Bower of Bliss.

> And ouer all, of purest gold was spred,
> A trayle of yuie in his natiue hew:
> For the rich metal was so coloured,
> That wight, who did not well auis'd it vew,

Would surely deeme it to bee yuie trew. (*FQ* 2.12.61)

Spenser is highly aware of the fact that poetry creates a visual "picture" before the reader. The reader's sight or "vew" is therefore implicated in order to ascertain whether the scene is false or "trew." Visuality imparted by allegorical metaphors is crucial when deciding what is "true" or "counterfeit." The description of the Bower highlights the extent to which readers of Spenser's era were potentially vulnerable to the deception of the "speaking picture," while his critics were aware of its "counterfeiting" semblances. Here Spenser, like Sidney, highlights poetry's art of imitation, while suggesting that it can be an aid to learning for students who are fully aware of the workings of its fiction. Like an emblem, Spenser's Bower is a test of careful reading and viewing. All good readers will recognise that the "yuie" is not "trew," while the "wight" who is unaccustomed must learn to discriminate between what is false and what is true. Spenser is defending his verse from critics who seek to condemn what they do not understand or have not observed with due consideration. To an extent all good poetry counterfeits, and yet the notion of the figurative, the overly ornate and the potentially false was regarded with suspicion, especially during the latter quarter of the sixteenth century.[34] Spenser therefore uses the visual elements of his verse to present messages which say one thing and mean another; to portray beauty and yet to caution against it, to test the reader to recognise the difference between "seeming" righteousness and true goodness. Allegory is vital to this process, its self-consciousness inherently defending Spenser's text against any criticism of its visual representations.

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[34] Javitch argues that as the reputation of the court declined in the late sixteenth century, the notion of dissembling was seen as less graceful and increasingly suspicious. He argues that as values of courtliness were emulated in poetry, the notion of dissimulation shifted from implying wit and beauty to becoming potentially sinister. See 15-16, 127-40.

As Elyot, Sidney and Puttenham's comments assert, allegory is a linguistic "figure" tied to language, and therefore to poetry. Yet, figurative notions were viewed with caution during this era (Kibbey 2-10).[35] Spenser defends his construction of the Bower of Bliss precisely by emphasising its artificiality to the reader. Puttenham is aware of allegory's potential for figurative and literal deceit. He outlines allegory as: "The Courtly figure *Allegoria*, which is when we speake one thing and think another, and our wordes and our meanings meete not" (155). He associates allegory with the flattering and manipulating mannerisms of the nobility at court who were often motivated by ambition and self advancement.[36] He is "the figure of false semblant or dissimulation" (Puttenham 155). Allegory is presented as a Machiavellian form, praising and flattering while focusing on the advancement there is to be gained.[37] Spenser himself may be guilty of this stance. He dedicated *The Faerie Queene* to Elizabeth I – "Mirrour of grace and Maiestie diuine" (*FQ* 1.Proem.4) – as a means of gaining favour, working towards his aim of being a national poet (Helgerson 65-66; Rambuss 63-64).

Yet, the association of "figure" with allegory during this period reaches deeper than this. The figurative is by definition emblematic and representational. When linked with allegory, it conveys double or multiple meanings. This aspect of multiplicity worried religious reformers and moralists of the sixteenth century. Early Protestants associated allegory with the ornamentation and linguistic convolutions of the medieval church, designed to mislead rather than convey the "literall sence" of

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[35] Kibbey notes that *figura* or "figure" was a complex term during the Renaissance, with various meanings (3). See Auerbach, "Figura," in *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature* 11-68.

[36] For more on the culture of courtly advancement and its relation to poetry, see: Marotti, "'Love is not Love': Elizabethan Sonnet Sequences and the Social Order" 396-428; and Mueller, "'Infinite Desire': Spenser's Arthur and the Representation of Courtly Ambition" 747-71.

[37] Javitch argues differently. He states that at court, until the 1590s, dissimulation was a courtly art, one knowingly practiced with wit and skill. He notes that Puttenham was likening poetry to this practice as a means of highlighting its beauty and complexity rather than discrediting it. While Javitch's argument is persuasive, Puttenham's *Arte* was published in 1589, by which time a suspicious stance towards acts of dissimulation was widely shared. See Javitch, 30-46, 50-68.

Christ's teaching (Luxon ix, 21). Instead of a single denotation, allegory offered a mixture of ambivalent, paradoxical meanings that were difficult and confusing, perhaps frightening. "There is but one literal sense and meaning of every Scripture: So should men have but one sense and meaning in their minds, and not a double meaning, as the equivocating Jesuites have" (Weemes 183).

Typology had long been used to interpret stories of the Old Testament as prefiguring those of the New Testament in order to make sense of certain passages (Rivers 140-41). Indeed, St Paul himself offers typological readings of the Old Testament. But the early Christian Fathers formulated typological interpretations much more elaborate than any found in the New Testament (Rivers 141). Typology, as they practiced it, strained into allegory, already established as an interpretive practice by Philo (an Alexandrian Jew living at the time of Christ) in his reading of the Pentateuch. Allegory was found by the Church Fathers to be particularly useful for reading the erotic Song of Songs, allegorised as the yearning of the soul for God or of the Church for Christ (Rivers 142). Such reading practices were formalized as the fourfold exegetical method, which was used in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and which dominated the interpretation of the Bible until the Reformation. The four senses in which the Bible could be understood were: the literal sense (a historical narrative of events); the allegorical sense (which included typology); the moral or tropological sense (concerned with the inner life of each Christian); and the anagogical sense (concerned with each Christian's hope of eternity) (Rivers 142-43). Each event within the Bible could be read as susceptible to these four interpretive levels: as a historical narrative, as an episode prefiguring the life of Christ, as a reflection of the moral struggle of each Christian, and as an expression of the prospect of that Christian's salvation. Protestant reformers rejected this Alexandrian method of allegory and the medieval tradition of fourfold interpretation. They valued the typological interpretation of the Bible as a way of interpreting and explaining passages, but they denied that this involved a system of multiple meanings (Rivers 143). Instead, typology took precedence over allegory as a way of limiting figurative interpretations. William Tyndale declared in 1528 that:

> Tropologicall and anagogical are termes of their [the Catholic church's] awne faynynge and all together vnnecessary. For they are but allegories both two of the[m] and this worde allegorie comprehendeth them both and is ynough… And allegory is as moch to saye as straunge speakyngne or borrowed speach … Thou shalt vndersto[n]de therfore yˆ the scripture hath but one sence which is ye literall sence. (*Obedience of a Christian Man* sig. R1$^{V}$)

Despite what seems to be Tyndale's clear rejection of allegory, it can be difficult in practice to differentiate typology from allegory, especially when the Bible resists the "literall sence." In some cases allegory was necessary, such as for biblical references which, if taken literally, would imply that God has a physical body (Suttie, *Self-Interpretation* 18). God's "arm" is seen instead as being figurative of his power and divine intervention. In other instances, both a literal and allegorical (or typological) reading can be supported by the text. Jerusalem is both a city on earth and a place which signifies the heavenly Jerusalem. Moses was a man who lived and a figure interpreted as prefiguring the deeds of Christ. The text supports both literal or literal and figurative readings. Suttie calls these different ways of reading "this *for* that" and "this *and* that" allegory respectively (*Self-Interpretation* 21-22). When the text required a literal reading only, "this *for* that" allegory could be used. When a passage allowed for both literal and figurative meaning, "this *and* that" allegory was appropriated. Typological and allegorical elements are bound together, depending on the intention and meaning of the text, or the critic's intended viewpoint. This allows for the presence of allegory and the figurative within biblical exegesis, as a useful means of controlling the interpretation of the text. Despite protestations to the contrary, reformers did use figurative allegory to further their political and religious message. Glosses in the Geneva Bible (1560), identify "the woman … araied in purple & skarlat" (Rev 17.4) as "the great citie, which reigneth over [th]e Kings of the earth" (Rev 17.18), while the translator's annotation states that the woman "signifieth … Rome which is the Papistre, whose crueltie and blood sheding is declared by skarlat" (Rev 17.3 gloss) (qtd. in Suttie, *Self-Interpretation* 7). The marginal gloss imposes a Reformation reading on a late-antique text in an instance which could be regarded as the deliberate use of allegory to read against the manifest meaning of the passage, a distortion of the text's intended meaning (Suttie, *Self-Interpretation* 7).[38] Despite the Reformers' apparent rejection of the use of figurative allegory in favour of "literall" or simplified readings of the Bible, it was not possible, nor was it useful, completely to discard the former.[39]

However, if allegory enables the creation of "counterfeit" or false "speaking pictures" in poetry and prose, as seen in Spenser's Bower of Bliss, its potential to mislead through material images is even greater. Henry Ainsworth's *An Arrow Against Idolatrie* (1611) is notable for liturgical railing against any form of representation:

> For every man is forbidden to make unto himself, any *forme*, *shape*, or *resemblance*, of things in the heavens earth or waters; of any *similitude*, *shew* or

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[38] The use and manipulation of allegory for political effect in censorship and propaganda is discussed further in chapter two.

[39] Luxon argues that despite attempts to remove traces of allegory and allegorical interpretation from liturgical documents, it was "impossible … to square with the insistently allegorical metaphysics of Christianity" (38). Luxon bases his argument on the fact that religion has an inherent basis in allegory or allegorical representation. The fact that Spenser and Blake's work is so interrelated with knowledge of the Bible perhaps reinforces the allegorical elements within their verse.

> *likeness*, any *frame*, *figure*, *edifice*, or *structure*, of man or beast, fowl or fish or any creeping thing, any *image*, *type* or *shadowed representation*; any *imagined-picture*, *fabrick* or *shape*…So that it is not possible for the wit or hand of man to devise or make any image or representation whatsoever, which cometh not within compasse of the words and things forwarned by God. (9-10)

During the Reformation the condemnation of idols was followed by orders to remove images and sculptures from churches and private homes (Duffy 381-84; Gilman 1). In 1538 there was an attack upon the memory and cult of Thomas Becket. His shrine at Canterbury was pillaged and his bones scattered. His images and pictures were ordered to be pulled down and removed from every place of worship. His name was even scratched out from liturgical books (Duffy 412). The struggle over material images radiated into figural aspects of language, highlighting the extent to which words and images are related. Allegory was stigmatised as being a means by which the Word could be manipulated.

Puttenham stresses the need for caution when using allegory in relation to any medium. His words reflect the extent to which allegory was seen to twist and distort meaning, highlighting the degree to which its "doublenesse" required handling with care.

> As figures be the instruments of ornament in every language, so be they also in a sorte abuse or rather trespasses in speech, 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 certain doublenesse, whereby our talke is the more guileful and abusing, for what els is your *Metaphor* but an inversion of sense by transport; your *allegorie* by a

> duplicatie of meaning or dissimulation under covert and darke intendments. (128)

All words are liable to misreading, but in Puttenham there is a sense that allegory deliberately deceives and that its practices must be sought out and made well known to readers. He refers to allegory's "covert and darke intendments." While signifying duplicity, his words also refer to legitimate uses of allegory. As suggested by Daniel Javitch, there was a culture for the legitimate use of knowing dissimulation at court (56-63). Dissembling was seen as a skill of art, wit and beauty, the courtly audience always aware of the dissimulation taking place. Allegory was often used as a teaching aid during the Renaissance, as highlighted by the collections of emblem books and allegorical fables used to instruct morals and help children learn to read and write (Pentergast 133). They were popular in homes as well as at school, the elaborate combination of pictorial and rhetorical riddles or enigmas, a source of fascination and intrigue (Bath 31). While allegory was seen as a mode of didacticism and teaching, it also had a heritage associated with the concealment of knowledge. The gap between what was spoken and what was meant was important to scholars who wished to hide information, biblical truths and messages from certain people. Scholars used allegory as a means of wrapping up divine truths, shrouding them within layers of meaning, far removed from the eyes of the common or vulgar. It was regarded as a specific code designed to prevent the "unlearned" from ascertaining "truth" reserved only for the elite (Adams, "Reynolds" 5-6; Tannenbaum 25-32). Thus, allegory is a complex mode, discredited in religious and political discourses, but used, even by those who wanted to condemn it. "Plainness and simplicitie" was woven into a deliberate "doublenesse" by theologians, such as the annotator to the Geneva Bible, who dispensed with the Scripture's literal meaning whenever it was inconsistent with church doctrine (Suttie, *Self-Interpretation* 17-18). Augustine sanctioned the use of figurative allegorical or typological discourse by advising that “anything in the divine discourse that cannot be related either to good morals or to the true faith should be taken as figurative” (“On Church Doctrine” 147). Allegory, as we will see in chapter two, was used and dispensed with as long as it suited those in authority.

However, allegory’s self-conscious style merely *suggests*, subtly allowing readers to work out meanings, rather than being force-fed arguments. Therefore, scholars and elitists aside, its “doublenesse” evoked the criticism which many levied against allegory: that its meanings were obscure and could lead readers far from the right paths of reading, and into the depths of genuinely “darke” and dangerous forms of interpretation. The potential for allegory’s use, or abuse, was felt profoundly throughout the sixteenth century: it was a medium that could be used for “darke intendments” both in the minds of those who wrote it and in the heads of those who interpreted it.

### Spenser’s allegorical *Faerie Queene*

Placing Spenser within this religious and political context makes highly pertinent his decision to write *The Faerie Queene* as an allegory. On an aesthetic level, Spenser’s use of allegory was a means of bringing a traditional medieval mode back to the foreground and rejuvenating it. Allegory was a mode associated with a bygone age and it is apt that Spenser used it to convey his tale of chivalry and medieval adventure. Yet his choice of allegory is more pointed than this. His poetry does not work towards a single meaning. Rather, his use of allegory enables and encourages multiple ways of seeing. Allegory is a mode rather than a form. It associates itself with often contrary genres in order to survive and evolve (Kelley 2-

3). Spenser was aware of this fact and relied upon the mixing and modification of genres in attempts to harmonise competing social, religious and political elements (King, *Spenser's Poetry* 5-6). He discovered that allegory was a flexible tool, allowing him to say many things at once, thus enabling him to praise and critique, to articulate personal and political concerns while conveying a dense encyclopaedic world of epic detail. He uses allegory to encourage further ways of perceiving scenes within the text. He uses it to demand reader engagement and to prompt readers to judge the text for themselves to decide what is right and wrong, true and false. The open-ended nature of his allegory does not allow for clear and transparent answers. Readers must trust in the poet to point the way and, like Redcross and Guyon, be ever conscious of the language and the landscape before them. *The Faerie Queene* highlights the many ways in which allegory may be used: as a didactic form, as a mode advocating morals and virtues, as an implicit expression of political and personal concerns, and as a traditional, nostalgic epic associated with the chivalric literature of a lost medieval era. Spenser's allegory reflects his conscious use of a medium that was connected with images, multiplicity and the propounding of fictions – modes that were vilified within his own Protestant culture.

There is a provocative edge in Spenser's choosing to use a "dubious" linguistic tool while making it uphold and even glorify the status quo. *The Faerie Queene* parades the virtues of the woman at its centre: the Elizabethan Queen, and yet the more the reader probes the text, the more these virtues are critiqued. Spenser is subtle yet sharp in his perceptions. He seems iconoclastic and yet he uses icons (Gilman 66, 73-74; Gross, *Spenserian* 27-77; King, *Spenser's Poetry* 56), as seen in the depiction of Arthur's shield, which is at once beautiful and yet blinding (*FQ* 1.7.29-35). He seemingly presents the firmly Protestant ideal of England betrothed to the True Church through the union of St George (Redcross) with Una (*FQ* 1.12), who are betrothed at the end of Book One. Yet the "knitting of loues band" is only half complete as the marriage has yet to be consummated, suggesting the delicate and precarious position of this idealised image. It is fragile, and liable to be broken. Redcross is called away to the court of the Faery Queene and we hear no more of his return to Una (*FQ* 1.12.40-42). Spenser's use of allegory is highly political. He utilises the allegorical gaps and disruptions in the polished ideological veneer to suggest the limitations, struggles and doubts that existed beneath Elizabethan courtly fictions of power, grace and majesty.[40]

Spenser's justification for his use of allegory is outlined in the "Letter to Sir Walter Raleigh" which prefaces *The Faerie Queene*. This letter, which started life as an appendage to the poem in 1590, has since come to be regarded as an essential part of the *Faerie Queene*. Only the most radical modern editor of the poem would seriously contemplate leaving it out (Suttie, *Self-Interpretation* 5). This fact speaks as much for our modern attitude toward allegory as it does for Spenser's. It reflects on the need for support and guidance when reading allegory, on the fact that Spenser needed to explain himself and his text to his readers even in the 1590s.

> Sir knowing how doubtfully all Allegories may be construed, and this booke of mine, which I haue entituled the Faery Queene, being a continued Allegory, or darke conceit, I haue thought good aswell for auoyding of gealous opinions and misconstructions. (*FQ* 714)

Within the first sentence of this letter, Spenser informs the reader of his awareness of the ambiguous nature of allegory, and the way it is used as a "darke conceit," stating one thing while meaning another. His use of the term "darke" recalls Puttenham's

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[40] I will return to this theme in chapter three.

"darke intendments" and allegory's reputation for duplicity. Interestingly, Spenser sets out the letter in order to avoid "gealous opinions and misconstructions." Surely allegory, associated with ambiguity, is not a choice method for avoiding misconstructions? Spenser, however, is presenting a new form of allegory, one in which misreading is necessary to the process of learning. Further misreading may be avoided by learning from mistakes and through the continual awareness of the *processes* of viewing and understanding, which in turn leads to an awareness of reformed reading. Allegory is a didactic mode which challenges readers to look carefully at both sides of the equivocation, to see all sides of an argument in order to form their own opinions and judge the scene for themselves.

Spenser's letter is his first allegorical test of his readers. Paul Suttie notes that the letter massages the various parts of *The Faerie Queene* into an appearance of a more regular narrative structure than is found in the poem itself (*Self-Interpretation* 8). The reader, in turn, insists on making total sense of the poem, as directed by the letter. Attempting a simplistic and totalising meaning, both the letter and the reader are reading against the poem's manifest intention. Yet this mis-reading, far from being a wilful misinterpretation on the reader's part, paradoxically continues the text's own "internal" work of misreading the intentions of its own constituent parts (Suttie, *Self-Interpretation* 8). In other words, Spenser's letter invites this process of misreading, of which readers must become aware in order to pause, re-read and then reform their reading. The most important aspect of re-reading is an awareness of the self-consciousness produced by the text about the process of linguistic construction, alerting the reader to the fact that there is not necessarily a “right” way of reading (Suttie, *Self-Interpretation* 9).[41]

There may be a plausible reason for Spenser’s misrepresentation in his “Letter to Raleigh.” He may have regularised the plot in order to appeal to readers and make the poem appear less threatening to the authorities from whom permission had to be gained for printing (Suttie, *Self-Interpretation* 9). However, Spenser continues the process of systematic misrepresentation in the four-line Arguments which begin and summarise each canto. Again, these seemingly straightforward narratives sometimes contradict the convoluted plots of the main poem, causing the reader to pause and consciously assess the meaning of the verse and the interpretative process as a whole. As well as prompting and educating his readers, Spenser, I believe, was using allegory to make implicit and explicit political points.

There are idealistic and moralistic reasons for Spenser’s choice of the “darke conceit.” His poem is indebted to allegory’s medieval heritage and its association with human virtues and the chivalric worlds of romance. Traditional morality plays performed moralistic battles between a host of virtues and vices, of which we can see traces in the association of each knight with a particular virtue. Spenser combined this moralistic overview with the romance genre which strongly influenced the structure of *The Faerie Queene* and remained popular into the sixteenth century (Steadman 81-83). His poem labours “to pourtraict … Arthure” (*FQ* 715), the legendary king of Britain and a popular subject for chivalric poems and tales. During the medieval era, allegories were often used to outline religious virtues and convey moralistic stories, as represented by Gawain, a knight at the court of Arthur in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Gawain’s quest to find the Green Knight ultimately proves that it is not his courage that is tested but his spiritual and chivalrous conduct as a human being. Likewise, questing knights from Redcross to Calidore learn that it is their personal journey as much as the quest they pursue that is central to the meaning of each book. What each character (or reader) initially takes for granted is often the most important aspect of each tale. Thus, although Redcross kills Error early on in Book One, he still remains in error's ugly snare. It is only when he eventually comes to a realisation of his own pride and weak spirituality that, with the help of Una, he can amend his mistakes. Here again Spenser is unsettling the reader. Just as we assume Redcross has learnt from his battle with Error, he wanders into the House of Pride. Spenser shows that his characters cannot necessarily read the meaning of the allegory, but we can. As Dolven says, "*we must read it at their expense*: …they suffer for our enlightenment. This is what it is to make an example of someone" (147) and we must learn from their mistakes and our own presumptions.

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[41] Gareth Roberts notes that *The Faerie Queene* incorporates many kinds of readers. “No genuine response to the poem is ever entirely wrong, only incomplete” (19).

Yet, despite Spenser's poem coinciding with a trend towards chivalry at the court of Elizabeth I, where traditional tournaments and jousts were held in her honour (Davis 80-81; Yates 88-111; Young 123, 136), his poem is as much a warning against the faults of chivalry as a nostalgic tribute to a world that has passed away. His political allegory praises and critiques those in authority. Depicting Arthur's genealogical links to Elizabeth in canto ten of Book Two, and the character's love for the elusive queen of Faery, Spenser uses his allegory to praise his monarch. However, Arthur's actions, and by association the actions of those in authority, are also called into question in unsettling ways. While Spenser's Letter to Raleigh insists that Arthur is virtuous, his incessant pursuit of Florimel in Book Three (*FQ* 3.1.18; 3.8.29) betrays a desire for her – he is motivated by "enuy and fell gealosy" – which is not virtuous or noble, but menacing and aggressive (Suttie, *Self-Interpretation* 12-13). In

Florimel’s eyes Arthur becomes yet another male seemingly intent upon her virginity. In this case, Florimel has a point: appearances are deceptive and the integrity of even the most magnificent must be checked and questioned. No principle may be simply accepted. The text has to be read and read again. Meaning is built cumulatively. As the reader progresses, significance is gradually revealed, often through the act of pausing and rereading (Roberts 14-23; Quilligan, *Language* 33-36; MacCaffrey, *Spenser’s Allegory* 38, 45-46). Spenser’s use of allegory not only questions the nobility of those in power, he uses it to reassess assumptions about traditional virtues, calling for sharper definitions and a more critical awareness of what it means to uphold principles such as holiness, temperance, chastity, justice and courtesy. Spenser attempts to alter his reader’s processes of reading; he seeks to “fashion” his readers “in virtuous and gentle discipline” (*FQ* 714). By means of reformed reading, his text may in turn reform his readers and encourage them to judge the actions of political figures for themselves.

Yet, while attempting to promote self enlightenment in the reader, Spenser’s “darke conceit” is consciously aware of the potential of words to misconstruction or misunderstanding. Allegories are “doubtfully” construed, as are most arbitrary linguistic constructions. Spenser’s choice of allegory highlights the limitations of the written word and the extent to which all forms of language are subject to multiple interpretations. Una’s warning to Redcross, “I read beware” (*FQ* 1.1.13), is a signal to readers to be cautious in their assessment of the cantos before them and the characters they depict. Spenser constantly insists on the connection between viewing and re-reading. The processes of viewing a scene and reading are merged. As Carol Kaske (in a lecture given in 1980) notes, he relentlessly readjusts his depictions, as if striving for a better means of describing his scenes, constantly correcting and re-correcting (qtd. in Gilman 81). Acrasia is described as being “arrayd, or rather disarrayd,” as if being herself conscious of the way she looks in her attempt to be most alluring to her victim (*FQ* 2.12.77). Canto corrects canto and book corrects book (Kaske qtd. in Gilman 81), highlighting the agonising self-awareness of a pictorial poet writing in the climate of the Reformation (Gilman 81; King, *Spenser's Poetry* 65-66). Once it has been beautifully described, the Bower of Bliss is immediately torn down. The delicate and detailed tapestries and objects in Busirane’s palace are tainted and made despicable by the evil that takes place there. As soon as Spenser creates, he scores out or erases, highlighting the transience of ideals and the arbitrary nature of the potentially ambiguous word.[42]

Finally, Spenser’s “conceit” is powerful in using these alternative ways of reading precisely to cloak and disguise subversive undercurrents running beneath the surface of the text. One has to look carefully to find elements of subversion. Why is the Queene of Faery so elusive? Why do we never get to see her? Her presence is always deferred, as if to suggest not her greatness, but her tentative recourse to power, the extent to which she is ineffectual and incapable of taking command or making decisions (Hadfield, *Literature* 192). Elizabeth increasingly came under criticism for her policies in Ireland, and for her constant deferral in the handling of the threat posed by Mary Queen of Scots (Loades 55; Doran 78). Here Spenser’s allegory is a tool, enabling him precisely to say and yet not say. It could be argued that he is the “Courtly figure” described by Puttenham in *The Arte of English Poesie*, his *Faerie Queene* at once flattering his Queen in hopes for advancement, while subtly critiquing her methods and undermining her glorious depictions with hints of their insubstantiality.

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[42] Blake also scores out and erases, as highlighted by Los in *The Book of Urizen* who uses his hammer to beat out the world, paralleling Blake’s chipping at metal in order to produce words and images on copper plates – “the hammer/ Incessant beat” (*BU* 10.16-17). In many texts words are erased or inked over as Blake saw fit. See Keynes, “New Lines from *Jerusalem*” 115-21. Blake, like Spenser, re-reads, reorders and redrafts his texts. See Erdman, *The Illuminated Blake* 11, 268-79. Note how there are differing illuminated images for the title page of *The Gates of Paradise* (1793), and how this text was later reworked into *For the Sexes: The Gates of Paradise* (1818).

## The space in between: the seventeenth century

Commentaries and reactions to Spenser's work since the publication of *The Faerie Queene* suggest that he was not neglected within literary circles in the early modern period.[43] Spenser was noted for his contribution to English poetry and the English language.

> With the publication of the first three books of the *Faerie Queene*, Spenser became a national figure; London poetasters celebrated his fame and craved his acknowledgement; by the time of his death, well over a hundred references to Spenser or imitations of his work had appeared. (Radcliffe 8)

The quantity of Spenserian verse diminished rapidly after his death: "Spenser has always enjoyed more fame than popularity" (Radcliffe 11). One of the most charming and perceptive reactions to Spenser's verse comes from Sir Kenelm Digby, written around 1628.

> Spenser in what he saith hath a way of expression peculiar to him selfe; he bringeth downe the highest and deepest misteries that are contained in human learning, to an easy and gentle form of delivery: *which* sheweth he is Master of what he treateth of; he can wield it as he pleaseth: And this he hath done soe cunningly, that if one heed him not *with* great attention, rare and wonderful conceptions will unperceived slide by him that readeth his works, and he will think he hath mett *with* nothing but familiar and easy discourses but let one

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[43] For information on the reputation of earlier Renaissance writers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, see Wasserman, *Elizabethan Poetry in the Eighteenth Century* (1947); Lynch, *The Age of Elizabeth in the Age of Johnson* (2003). For a more detailed overview of Spenser's reputation in particular, see Radcliffe, *Edmund Spenser: A Reception History* (1996) and Cummings, *Spenser: The Critical Heritage* (1971).

> dwell a while upon them and he shall feele a straunge fulnesse and roundnesse in all he saith. (*A discourse concerning Edmund Spenser* qtd. in Cummings 150)

Digby notes a particular delicacy unique to Spenser, which I feel Blake also possesses. Spenser and Blake's verse is founded upon an awareness of the breadth of perception from illuminated spiritual insight to the dark depths of human misery and dejection. The allegorical processes by which these aspects of life are conveyed require concentrated interpretive reader engagement. "[I]f one heed him not *with* great attention, rare and wonderful conceptions will unperceived slide by." Spenser's allegory teaches us to look beyond the aesthetics to see the mechanics of its workings. Allegory forces us to recognise the artificiality of its construction in order to appreciate the fundamental aspects upon which life is based: our senses, our awareness of self and others, our hopes, our desires, our fears, the spirituality of the human soul and its capacity for love. Allegory also reflects on the limitation of our modes of linguistic communication. We can only grasp at how we feel and what we see through words, a medium often insufficient to do our feelings justice.[44] Therefore, instead of being a mode of indirect representation or false imitation, allegory seeks to come as close to the "true," "lived" and "felt" as possible. The disjunctions or spaces between words are shown to be closer to the "true" than the words themselves. It is through the unrepresentable that we gain a notion of the "true" for which no words have been constructed. Blake's verse works in a similar way, as I will show.[45]

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[44] For more on the complex relationship between human perception and the word see Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, especially 7-10.

[45] A representation of Blake's awareness of the mechanisms of allegory and its pull on the fundamental aspects of human existence can be seen in his energetic poem "The Tyger" (*SE*). The poem seeks to plunge through the darkness to investigate mysteries, to show the forged mechanisms and sinewy nerves usually hidden from view, to strip away the symmetrical falsities upon which assumptions are made and fictional veneers of society sustained, an example being the harsh factory life upon which the Industrial Revolution, social prosperity and the Empire relied. See Makdisi, *Impossible* 126-31.

While poets imitated Spenser in lyric verse, as seen by Blake's youthful experimentation, no major writer attempted to imitate a complete epic in Spenserian style. Phineas Fletcher wrote *The Purple Island*, published in 1633 (Radcliffe 16): and a *Faerie King* (c.1655) and a *Faerie Leveller* (1648) proved that Spenser's verse was used in political and theological debates (Radcliffe 18; Gerrard 167). However, there were no grand epics. Radcliffe notes this to be "a more telling criticism than any overt complaint about the diction, design, or stanza of the *Faerie Queene*" (21). This lack of imitation is perhaps testament to the fact that seventeenth-century readers found his diction and his verse difficult to read and understand. Jack Lynch makes a pertinent point about Spenser in the eighteenth century, which could just as well be applied to the century before:

> Somewhere between medieval rudeness and modern civilization, Spenser perversely refused to let go of what appeared to be vulgar errors, and could not be reconciled with progressive critical bromides. (Lynch 124)

In other words, like Blake, Spenser refused to fit any assumed and arranged critical parameters. His verse is part medieval and part modern, part rude and part civilised, apparently simple and yet profoundly dense and difficult. As with the definition of allegory, we find that Spenser is met with an ambivalent reaction. While John Dryden (1631-1700) did not imitate his verse, he is said to have returned to Spenser's poetry again and again (as did Milton). Shortly before his death Dryden wrote, "I must acknowledge that Virgil in Latin, and Spencer in English, have been my masters" (qtd. in Cummings 302).[46] It was a compliment to the complexity of Spenser's verse that no one undertook another *Faerie Queene*.

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[46] See Quilligan, *Milton's Spenser: The Politics of Reading* (1983), especially 41-42. *Paradise Lost* is not an allegorical epic; if anything the text explicitly rejects Spenser's style of allegory. Perhaps Dryden, then, is emulating Milton in stating that Spenser was his "master."

What of allegory during this period? The civil war and the explosion of pamphlets it produced emphasised more than ever the importance of the word and the extent to which language could be twisted and manipulated to further an argument.[47] The spread of Puritanism stressed the need for simple language, devoid of potentially "dark" meaning. After the Restoration and from the other side of the political spectrum, the Royal Society produced a document promoting a simplified English language in an attempt to control meanings and prevent misunderstanding and the intrusion of ambivalent expressions. John Wilkins (1614-74), one of the founders of the Royal Society, published *An Essay Towards a Real Character and a Philosophical Language* (1668). In it he complains of the "great swelling words" and "the many impostures and cheats that are put upon men, under the disguise of affected insignificant Phrases" (1). Wilkins distrusted words and their potential to "swell" with meaning. His essay attempts to police language by stripping it of metaphor and playfulness.

> And though the varieties of Phrases in Language may seem to contribute to the elegance and ornament of Speech; yet like other affected ornaments, they prejudice the native simplicity of it, and contribute to the disguising of it with false appearances. (18)

In Wilkins's lines we can hear repeated the same concerns regarding "ornamentation" that Puttenham warns against in *The Arte of English Poesie*. Such a protective and rigorous approach to language attempts to dismiss ambivalence, contradiction and multiplicity, thus the very function of allegory itself.

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[47] For more on this topic see Peacey, *Politicians and Pamphleteers: Propaganda During the English Civil Wars and Interregnum*; Raymond, *Pamphlets and Pamphleteering in Early Modern Britain* as well as Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety 1550-1640.*

Between Digby's appreciation of Spenser's subtlety and Wilkins's insistence on the plain simplicity of language there seems to be a fluctuation in the interpretation of allegory.[48] William Temple (1628-1699), discussing Spenser's poem, states that 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 Pill was Gilded, but so thin, that the Colour and the Taste were too easily discovered. (*Miscellanea* 325)

This criticism had been made before by Henry Reynolds in *Mythomystes* (1632). Reynolds and Temple's approach reveals a new attitude towards allegory: that it is now seen as too simple and transparent rather than dense, challenging and complicated. Instead of being accused of having too thick an ornamentation, Spenser's verse is suddenly too thin in its gilding.

Temple's account introduces a tone of contempt. Rather than being feared as an instrument of duplicity or utilised as a didactic and ideological tool, allegory is reduced to a little gilded "Pill." Its potency is punctured. It is no longer a literary force but a rather tired mode. Richard Blackmore, in his Preface to *Prince Arthur* (1695), attempted, as Theresa Kelley puts it, to write allegory's "epitaph" (2).

> Ariosto and Spenser … 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. This way of writing mightily offends in this Age, and 'tis a wonder how it came to please in any. (sig. A9$^r$)

On the eve of the eighteenth century, with its impending interest in realism and scientific empiricism, Blackmore asserts that the tools of allegory and "Fancy" are no longer an appropriate means of describing the world, associating allegory with nothing more than aestheticism. His account makes Spenser appear childish and his readers immature. This attitude is reinforced with evidence from Joseph Addison's (1672-1719) condescending remarks in "An Account of the Greatest English Poets" (1694):

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[48] This fluctuation or ambivalence is further discussed by Luxon, *Literal Figures* 6-109 and Lewalski, *Protestant Poetics* 4-8. These studies look at the struggles to reconcile the rigours of Puritanism with figurative language during the seventeenth century.

> Old Spencer next, warm'd with Poetick Rage,
> In Antick Tales amus'd a Barb'rous Age;
> An Age that yet uncultivate and rude,
> Where-e're the Poet's Fancy led, persu'd
> Through pathless Fields, and unfrequented Woods,
> To Dens of Dragons, and Enchanted Woods.
> But now the Mystick Tale, that pleas'd of Yore,
> Can Charm an understanding Age no more;
> The long-spun Allegories fulsome grow,
> While the dull Moral lyes too plain below. (*Miscellaneous Works* 35)

By the end of the century allegory is seen as a transparent play-thing for children (Lynch 125), rather than a serious tool for thought and conceptual debate.

### Allegory in the eighteenth century

Quilligan notes that "the presence or absence of allegory in a given period is directly correlated to that period's attitude towards language" (*Language* 155). Comparing sixteenth- with seventeenth-century views on allegory, we can see how this shift is beginning to happen. However, allegory never completely disappears, but continually reforms and re-models itself in relation to the dominant trends and concepts of a particular era (Kelley 2-3). Blake's understanding of the term "allegory" is different from that of Spenser's. While not using the term "allegory" of his own work, Blake's verse makes use of an allegorical *style* very similar to that of Spenser.

How did "allegory" alter in Blake's era? Eighteenth-century dictionaries give an insight into the ways in which the term was variously conceptualised during this period. Samuel Johnson's *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1755), lists "Allegory" as "A figurative discourse, in which something other is intended, than is contained in the words literally taken" (sig. Q2$^{\text{v}}$). In *The New Royal and Universal English Dictionary* by J. Johnson, printed in 1763, "Allegoric" and "Allegorical" are stated as being "after the manner of an allegory: not real; not literal," "mystical" (sig. E4$^{\text{r}}$). By 1795, *Johnson's Dictionary of the English Language in Miniature* notes that allegory is "in rhetorick a figurative manner of speech, by which instruction or information is meant to be conveyed" (8). The 1755 definition is akin to sixteenth-century notions of allegory; it says one thing while meaning another. The 1763 entry regards allegory as being completely fictional, associated with myth or the supernatural. The 1795 entry suggests that allegory conveys instruction and information. This final definition could relate to allegory's didacticism, but I feel it refers to allegory's transparency rather than its complexity. Instead of "darke," even duplicitous connotations, allegory is associated with openness of meaning, the clarity of one-to-one, or as Suttie notes, "this *for* that" equations (*Self-Interpretation* 24-27). These entries incorporate attitudes towards allegory that had been emerging during the seventeenth century: its alliance with "unnatural," or palpable unrealism, its association with transparent or obvious meanings, whereby "the dull Moral lyes too plain below."

Eighteenth-century allegory was confused with personification. Reductive forces had been applied to transform its ambivalent complexities into something simple: easy one-to-one equations (Maresca 34). "Allegory" came to be identified with the prettying over of what was regarded as the essence of language (Adams, "Reynolds" 18). It was defined in opposition to emerging realist novels as being fantastical and "mystical" and its moral instructions were seen as overly transparent. Allegory's original "duplicity" or difficulty had been removed to leave a thin gilding and a "dull Moral." This eighteenth-century interpretation reinforces Spenser's awareness of the extent to which all forms, including allegory, can be mis-represented and mis-read.

John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* is partly responsible for this view of allegory. Bunyan clearly thought he was writing an allegory as his "Apology" states: he "Fell suddenly into an Allegory" (*PP* 3) in which he writes "dark" and "feigning" words (*PP* 5). Bunyan's "Apology" is designed, like Spenser's "Letter to Raleigh," to excuse his choice of medium, to present it as a fiction and therefore acknowledge to literalists that his poem is indeed a fabricated tale – "feigning words as dark as mine" (*PP* 5). However, when one reads *Pilgrim's Progress*, meaning can be seen to occupy a very literal level. Christian flees the City of Destruction for the Celestial City. This is not a metaphor but an accurate assertion describing the plot of the fiction. The statement does not figure anything apart from what it says (Maresca 24). All characters signify what their names suggest: Talkative is talkative: he is all words and little else. He constitutes a figurative warning to Christian and his companions to be less chatty themselves and contemplate the purpose of their journey. Hopeful and Faithful, Mr Mony-love, By-ends, Save-all and Evangelical are exactly described, their names fitting their depictions.

Where is the necessary darkness, the sense of being lost in the text, of grasping to understand the significance of various events and scenes that is so typical of allegory? Where are the “dark” and “feigning” words Bunyan makes so much of? They are not present in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. The text is filled with scriptural references. Perhaps Bunyan is being true to the allegoric or parabolic nature of the Bible in recording its figurative language. The Bible is allegorical in its demand to be interpreted. Scholars often regard this demand as being typological rather than allegorical (Frye, *Great* 85; Suttie, *Self-Interpretation* 8, 18-19). However, as suggested above in discussions on the figurative nature of allegory, typology interacts with allegory in furthering metaphoric reading practices. The Bible is so diverse in its suggestiveness (due to its composite nature) that interpretation is always the source of profound disagreement (Auerbach, *Mimesis* 11-12). When it comes to analysing the Bible, allegory, typology and allegoresis are very closely related and are all important aspects of the reading process.[49] It is surprising, at first glance, that Bunyan, a dissenting puritanical preacher who was imprisoned for twelve years for circulating and preaching radical concepts during the 1660s, would call his text an allegory. However, he clearly means something specific and arguably diminished by the term “allegory.” Bunyan’s text reveals an allegory which is informed by typology and personification to convey straightforward didactic meanings to his readers, much as an emblem book does.

To associate allegory with personification is in fact to turn it into the inverse of its sixteenth-century position. Bunyan’s “dark” allegory is anything but ambiguous and elusive. It does not say one thing and mean another. It is not indirect. In fact, indirection is the last thing Bunyan would have been hoping to achieve. He was interested in the pure, simple and singular meanings of the text and conveying its message to wider audiences through publication. Personification works in the opposite way to allegory; it defines, makes precise and explicit. As Maresca says, its directed explicitness accounts for our inability, in reading *The Pilgrim's Progress*, to pinpoint the darkness Bunyan claims (25).

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[49] Allegoresis is the process whereby a text is *interpreted* allegorically. An example may be the marginal annotations to the Geneva Bible which explain the “meanings” of prominent scenes, objects and images. In this sense, allegoresis is also closely related to typology, especially in its drive to explain biblical passages. See *Encyclopaedia of Allegorical Literature*, ed. D.A. Leeming & K. Morgan Drowne, 14; and *Allegoresis: The Craft of Allegory in the Medieval World,* ed. J.S. Russell, xi-xii.

> A successful personification grounds and makes concrete the abstract in such a way that there can be no question about its meaning: it always means exactly what it says. Conversely, allegory is rooted in the concrete and works toward multiplicity of meaning: this is where dark and shadowy figuration genuinely comes into play – none of which we see in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress.* (Maresca 27-8)

The 1795 dictionary entry on "allegory" falls into place in relation to *Pilgrim's Progress.*

By the eighteenth century, allegory rather than being mysterious was increasingly associated with reductive and simplified metaphors, figures that signified something easily read and understood. John Hughes (1677-1720), Spenser's first editor and author of the "Essay on Allegorical Poetry" (1715), noted that, unlike other modes, very few rules have been laid down with which to determine allegory's meanings.

> There is no doubt but men of critical learning, if they had thought fit, might have given us rules about Allegorical writing, as they have done about epick, and other kinds of poetry; but they have rather chosen to let this forest remain wild, as if they thought there was something in the nature of the soil which could not be so well restrained and cultivated in enclosures. (Hughes 20-21)

Hughes's observation is pertinent and highlights the ongoing struggle to grasp the nature of allegory. Its independence of form implies a necessary reader response. Hughes was among the first to formulate an aesthetic different from the classical inheritance by suggesting that classical standards may be inadequate for measuring Spenser (Lynch 128) and allegory itself. He concludes his essay by noting Spenser's superior mastery of the allegorical mode.

> After what has been said, it must be confessed that, excepting Spenser, there are few extraordinary instances of this kind of writing among the Moderns. The great mines of invention have been opened long ago, and little new ore seems to have been discovered or brought to light by latter ages. With us the art of framing fables, apologues, and allegories, which was so frequent among the writers of antiquity, seems to be, like the art of painting on glass, but little practiced, and in a great measure lost. (27-28)

Hughes is keenly aware of the shift in use and attitudes towards allegory. What was once remarked upon for its wealth of ornamentation, depth and meaning is in large part lost to readers of the eighteenth century.

## Spenser in the eighteenth century

Although not widely received initially, Hughes's 1715 edition of Spenser's work initiated critical interest which peaked in the mid-century. The decade of 1750-60 was extraordinary in its production of Spenser criticism.[50] Hughes's edition was reissued in 1750 and excerpted in 1758; editions of *The Faerie Queene* then appeared edited by Birch (1751), Church (1758) and Upton (1758), along with Thomas Warton's *Observations on the Faerie Queene of Spenser* (1754) (Radcliffe 52). While this output was small when compared to contemporary editions of Shakespeare, Milton, Dryden or Pope, it set a precedent for Spenser criticism, Upton's philological issues preoccupying critics for the next two centuries (Radcliffe 52).

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[50] For information on Spenser's influence during this period see Richard Frushell, "Imitations and Adaptations 1660-1800" in the *Spenser Encyclopaedia* (396-403).

Lynch comments upon the high esteem in which Spenser was held by Samuel Johnson (109). Despite censoring *The Shepheards Calender* as a piece of "studied barbarity," Johnson admired much of Spenser's work, although he attempted to ignore the allegorical aspects of Spenser as much as possible (Lynch 132, 134). He believed that the Renaissance was the era when the English language reached its zenith. He used examples from Shakespeare, Milton, Bacon and Spenser, among prominent others, to illuminate his *Dictionary*. Johnson admitted only "writers of the first reputation" to illustrate his definitions and Spenser appears nearly 3,000 times (Lynch 132). Johnson's fascination with Spenser was life-long. He expressed a wish to write a *Life of Spenser*, only abandoning the project for want of new material (Lynch 131). Another attempted work by Johnson, listed by Boswell, is "The Palace of Sloth, A Vision," an allegorical romance, clearly inspired by Spenser's verse (Lynch 131). Johnson's interest in Spenser provides a brief glimpse of the extent to which his poetry pervaded the literary and linguistic culture of the eighteenth century, in turn influencing Blake.

Spenser's work also resonated on a political level throughout the century. During the intense oppositional conflicts of the last years of Anne's reign, both Whigs and Tories appropriated Spenser for their own political agendas (Gerrard 167). Matthew Prior, Tory poet and Secretary of State, initiated the revival with *An Ode. Humbly Inscrib'd to the Queen* (1706). The poem was a barely disguised piece of Stuart dynastic glorification celebrating Anne as Elizabeth and mythologizing the Stuart bloodline (Gerrard 167). This led to a Whig counterblast, but it also encouraged audiences to read Spenser once again (Gerrard 167-68). Whigs turned their Spenserian-inspired words into vehicles of their Hanoverian loyalty. In 1714, Samuel Croxall used Prior's *Ode to the Queen* as a model for his Hanoverian panegyric *Ode to the King*, as well as crafting *Original Cantos of Spenser*, a poem depicting Britain's Protestant warlike spirit as Spenser's Britomart, bound by wily political opponents in the form of Archimago (Gerrard 168). Spenserian undertones were also present in Queen Caroline's elaborate garden grotto, Merlin's Cave, erected in Richmond Gardens in the 1730s (Gerrard 169). Wax characters inside the grotto corresponded to Merlin,[51] Britomart and possibly her nurse, Glauce. Just as Queen Caroline was securing a marriage deal for her discontented son and heir, Frederick, so the Cave displays the moment in *The Faerie Queene* when Merlin predicts Britomart's marriage to Artegall (*FQ* 3.3.26). The Cave reflects Queen Caroline's wealth and status as well as her all-powerful and prophetic decision making, just as Britomart also learns of her own heritage and glimpses the powerful ruler that she will one day become.

Inspired by Croxall's *Original Cantos*, Gilbert West's 1739 satire *A Canto of the Fairy Queen* attacked the apparent luxury of Hanoverian Britain and the Walpolian government (Gerrard 177-78). West's poem was one of several poetic oppositions to Walpole despite the fact that his Spenserian style was so convincing that later critics often did not detect the poem's satirical design (Gerrard 179). However, James Thomson's well-known Spenserian allegory, *The Castle of Indolence* (1748), marks a shift in the use of Spenser from the oppositional nit-picking of party-political allegory to a more reflective stance on the civic and moral principles of

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[51] Merlin was a popular figure from the seventeenth century. He was often seen in fairgrounds and puppet shows as a necromancer and fortune-teller. He graced pamphlets detailing historical prophecies, issuing dire warnings of Papist uprisings or reflecting on Protestant martyrs (Gerrard 171). Merlin's Cave inspired further work on the wizard. He was the subject of *Merlin: A Poem*, by Jane Hughes Brereton, and play, *Merlin: Or the British Inchanter*, by William Griffard (Gerrard 172-73).

Britain as a whole (Gerrard 184). By the late 1740s Walpole had fallen and with him went the rich vein of satirical writing. Thomson's poem tells of a Circe-like wizard who lures travellers into his enchanted castle where they enjoy a life of hedonistic and increasingly degenerate pleasure. They are eventually rescued by the Knight of Arts and Industry accompanied by his Druid. The poem reflects many Spenserian scenes of excess: the Cave of Mammon, Lucifera's House of Pride, Busirane's Palace and the Bower of Bliss. On a political level, the Castle is Walpolian Britain. However, the poem seeks to make readers conscious of the moral decline of the country, inspiring them to public service rather than passive self-indulgence (Gerrad 183). In many ways the poem prefigures Blake's poetic and political drive for active, energetic readers and the rejection of quiet passivity. It can be seen as a critical turning point in eighteenth-century literature as the poem asks for individuals to think self-consciously and to judge for themselves rather than to focus on playing one powerful political figure against another. Spenser had gone from being associated with the "barbarity" of an uncivilised age to being a principle instructor for leading an upstanding civic life.[52]

Thomson's *Castle of Indolence* began to yield new "Gothick" and romantic glories to receptive readers (Gerrard 184), indicating a shift in tone and style in poetic aesthetics and sensibilities. I would take this further to suggest that Spenser's verse can be seen to have contributed to the shaping of new Romantic beliefs and practices. This may have been inspired in part by Spenser's "irregularities":

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[52] Richard Hurd, believing in the value of feudal culture, looked to the apparent stability of the sixteenth century as a means of overcoming the instability of the eighteenth century in *Moral and Political Dialogues* (1759) and *Letters on Chivalry and Romance* (1762) (Kramnick 169-70). Hurd saw elements of feudal culture in Spenser's work, praising it while rejecting the industrial and capitalist elements of his era (Kramnick 175-76). Blake likewise appreciated the pre-industrial era of the sixteenth century, which was certainly a source of nostalgia and inspiration. However, Blake's poetry is filled with tyrants, such as Urizen, Hyle or Hand, who can be interpreted as feudal lords or modern industrialists. It is therefore difficult to determine the extent to which Blake would have identified Spenser's poetry as being specifically related to feudalism, or associated with a moral drive for a more upstanding, ethical community.

> it was not until the middle of the eighteenth century that a reverence for Spenser led poets, editors and critics to study attentively the peculiarities of his allegory, design, and diction, discovering in their very irregularity the basis for a new kind of regularity, a *gothick* poetics. (Radcliffe 56)

Spenser openly challenged rules and conventions. His poem could not be easily categorised, and with allegory apparently being a "wild" and uncultivated terrain, many revelled in the imaginative freedom licensed by the poem. This new way of viewing Spenser initiated the beginnings of Romanticism in Britain, a self-conscious way of looking at culture and one's place within it. Spenser's imaginative allegory was a vital element in this romantic rejuvenation.

> With the passing of Renaissance humanism, 'fiction' lost its original connection with rule-governed imitation; in post-romantic criticism contemporaneous with more modern nationalisms, poetry is generally thought to originate less from a disciplined and repetitive *making* imposed upon previously existing models than from an untrammelled and unprecedented *seeing*: genius is understood as a kind of creative autonomy. (Radcliffe 6-7)

This "creative autonomy" is one of the fundamental principles of Romanticism, a movement which celebrated new ways of interpreting the world and individual achievements and attitudes.[53] However, it was the self-conscious mechanisms of allegory in its drive for readers to engage with the text, and thereby recognise the importance of "seeing" and interpreting that further propelled a move towards recognisably modern attitudes in poetry.

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[53] I am wary of labelling Blake at all, and I do not necessarily think he can be classed a "Romantic." However, his belief in creative freedom and profound individual perceptions is similar to views held in the poetry of Wordsworth and Coleridge. For a couple of studies on Blake in relation to romantic sensibilities see Laura Quinney, "Escape from Repetition: Blake versus Locke and Wordsworth" 64-78; and Paul Cantor, *Creature and Creator: Myth-Making and English Romanticism* 3-74.

Ironically, while romantic notions took flight, "allegory" as eighteenth-century theorists recognised it remained marginalized. William Hazlitt famously said of those objecting to allegory: "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" (qtd. in Wasserman 129). Blake's contemporaries William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge were keen to do just this and attempted to avoid any use of allegory in their poetry. De Man notes that "[a]llegory appears as dryly rational and dogmatic" by the late eighteenth-century (*Blindness*, 189). Wordsworth declines to mention the mode in his Preface to the 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, preferring instead the "personification of abstract ideas" (xx), and in a lecture Coleridge states that allegory

> is incapable of exciting any lively interest for any length of time, for if the allegoric personage be strongly individualised so as to interest us, it had better be away. The dullest and most defective parts of Spenser are those in which we are compelled to think of his agents as allegories. (*Miscellaneous Criticism* 31)

## Allegory and the symbol

Following in the footsteps of the German philosopher Schelling and the poet and dramatist Goethe, Coleridge condemns allegory in favour of the symbol.[54] Allegory is obsolete but symbolism, he argues, in sermons from "The Statesman's Manual" (1816-17), is *the* mode of great poetical expression in modern literature. However, Coleridge has difficulty in making his case. It seems that the distinctions between "symbol" and "allegory" are troublesome.

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[54] For further information on the debate concerning allegory and the symbol, see Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* 161-235; Fletcher, *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode*, particularly 14-23; Kelley, *Reinventing Allegory* 120-34; Culler, "Literary History, Allegory, Semiology" 259-70; de Man, *Blindness and Insight*, chapter 10; and *Enlightening Allegory*, edited by Kevin Cope, in which several essays are relevant to the topic.

> Now an Allegory is but a translation of abstract notions into a picture-language which is itself nothing but an abstraction from objects of the senses; the principle being more worthless even than its phantom proxy, both alike insubstantial, and the former shapeless to boot. On the other hand a Symbol … is characterised by a translucence of the Special in the Individual or of the General in the Especial or of the Universal in the General. Above all by the translucence of the Eternal through and in the Temporal. It always partakes of the Reality which it renders intelligible; and while it enunciates the whole, abides itself as a living part in that Unity, of which it is the representative. The other are but empty echoes which the fancy arbitrarily associates with apparitions of matter. (*Coleridge's Poetry and Prose* 360)

Coleridge associates allegory with the abstract and arbitrary, while the symbol is both "Eternal" and "Temporal." However, defining the symbol as "the Special in the Individual" or "the Universal in the General" is confusing. While these terms suggest a range of symbolic scope, the reader cannot comprehend the symbol through any means other than figurative, "abstract" or metaphorical representations. This definition renders the "Symbol" as "insubstantial" as the "Allegory" Coleridge seeks to condemn. What exactly does Coleridge mean by stating that the symbol is "characterised by a translucence of the Special in the Individual"? What is "a translucence"? We might think of "Translucence" as the awareness of a fine veil which differentiates symbol from allegory in terms of its suggestion of "the Eternal in the Temporal" (giving the symbol Neoplatonic tones [Hodgeson 278]). Perhaps the symbol's "translucence" can be seen to be akin to allegory's structure: a thin veil or shimmering "Temporal" surface within which readers perceive "Special" and at times "Eternal" meanings. Or, put another way, allegory, like the symbol, is a means of guiding the reader to see the "Especial" in the "General" and "Universal." While Coleridge strives to disassociate allegory from symbol, his vague use of terminology only serves to reinforce the similarities between the two modes. He is in danger of showing the symbol working in ways almost identical to allegory – as a form of representation, pointing beyond itself to other forms of significance.

Coleridge adjusted and reworked his distinction between allegory and symbol, showing the difficulty he had with this project. Frye illuminates Coleridge's problem most pertinently by summing up allegory's paradoxical drive towards meaning and interpretation. "While there is a debased allegory against which there is a reasonable and well founded prejudice, there is also a genuine allegory without which no art can be fully understood. It is of course confusing that the same word is used in both senses" (*Fearful Symmetry* 18). Coleridge's criticism is longstanding and at the fore of the nineteenth century's distaste for allegory as a medium, an aversion that critics reflect upon today. If allegory was seen as increasingly reductive, empty and abstract in Blake's era, it comes as little surprise that Blake himself was suspicious of it and wary of using the mode. While rejecting "allegory" as his contemporaries defined it, Blake went on to promote a form of allegory more akin to "vision" – and more akin to Spenser's use of allegory.

## Blake's "four-fold vision"

Blake would have been aware of Spenser's poetry and of the relative unpopularity of allegory as a poetic style. It may be for this very reason that Blake was attracted to the mode. It was marginalized, associated with old and lost cultures, with different ways of seeing and perceiving, linked to the fourfold medieval structure of religious conceptualisation rejected during the Reformation. Like Spenser, Blake's notion of allegory is set out in a letter to a friend who is familiar with his work and his verse. In November 1802, Blake wrote from Felpham to Thomas Butts, a patron in London. He expresses his reverence and fear that "you are offended with me" for the length of time it has taken to complete and send some portraits (E 718). Blake had undertaken various commissions for William Hayley and therefore had less time to devote to work for Butts. In a postscript detailing the number of paintings still outstanding, Blake includes a poem "Composed … a twelvemonth ago" while walking to Lavant (E 720). The poem seems to express what Blake cannot articulate in prose. He describes seeing his dead brothers and his father "hovering upon the wind" and a "frowning Thistle" blocking his path. "If thou goest back the thistle said / Thou art to endless woe betrayd" (E 721). As with allegory, the thistle is a figure for many things. It represents Hayley's demand that Blake stay in Kent working solely for him; it stands for the dread of poverty and rejection feared by Blake if he were to return to London; its thorns are figurative of the physical and emotional hardships of life; it stands for the difficult decisions and conflicts continually faced by Blake in his bid to appease both his patrons. It represents all that is forbidding, painful and constraining.

> Must the duties of life each other cross
> Must every joy be dung & dross
> Must my dear Butts feel cold neglect
> Because I give Hayley his due respect (E 720)

Through the words we glimpse Blake's mindset and realise why he admits in his letter that "I have been very Unhappy" (E 720). The dimensions in which he sees his brothers and in which he interprets the thistle are multiple. He reads from many perspectives: "a double vision is always with me" (E 721). Yet, double vision is not enough to see beyond hardship and unhappiness. It is not enough completely to stamp away the thorns of the thistle. It is a way of describing a pain that struggles to be transcended. Instead, the mind's capacities must be engaged and receptive in order to perceive on all dimensions. One must see with "fourfold vision" to appreciate the world in an enlightened way. Before concluding his letter, Blake assures Butts that "I am again Emerged into the light of Day," noting that "I have traveld thro Perils & Darkness" but "My Enthusiasm is … only Enlarged and confirmed" (E 720). Blake reflects this shift in tone at the end of the poem to Butts:

> Now I a fourfold vision see
> And a fourfold vision is given to me
> Tis fourfold in my supreme delight
> And three fold in soft Beulahs night
> And twofold Always. May God us keep
> From Single vision & Newtons sleep (E722)

The allegorical implication in Blake's use of "fourfold vision" is manifest in the poem, and evokes medieval exegetical practice (Rivers 142-43).[55] He calls to mind this medieval practice of interpretation, along with his own Dissenting tradition, which tends to privilege apocalyptic sections of the Bible, which are primarily Ezekiel and the Book of Revelation. Blake's concept of "fourfold vision" evokes both Ezekiel's vision of the four living creatures, each having four faces, that of man, lion, ox and eagle (Ezek. 1.5-10; 10.14), and the four beasts sitting before the throne of God in Revelation (Rev. 4.6-7). Blake transforms the Reformation notion of typology into an allegorical form of revolutionary polemic with its own distinct history and epistemology (Tannenbaum 99). He employs abstracted typology or allegory, in order to present the means by which the human mind creatively transforms reality (Tannenbaum 99).

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[55] In Blake's time, "type" and typology was used loosely and interchangeably with "prophecy," "emblem," "symbol," "hieroglyph," "allegory" and "figure" (Tannenbaum 88).

This is a powerful indication of the way in which Blake wanted his work to be read. He uses this traditional framework, informed by the dissenting custom of using emblem books and the Bible, to develop uniquely textured allegorical work which includes words and images in the multi-perspective generation of meaning. “Fourfold vision” asks for a powerful process of readerly engagement which puts Blake’s work on a par with the Bible in terms of its demand to be interpreted and understood (Tannenbaum 23-24, 44-46). This is graphically portrayed through the creation of the books of *Urizen*, *Los* and *Ahania*, and *The Song of Los*, evocative of books of the Bible (Mee 14-18). Blake intensifies this process through the incorporation of images which accompany, and often combine with, the words on the page. This form of presentation is not confined to Blake’s prophetic poems. It can be seen in every aspect of Blake’s work, from his early verse to the tiniest drawings along the borders of his illuminated poems. Differences in detail, colour and the ordering of plates work against conventional notions of the authoritative text (Mee 16), encouraging readers to look again and compare plates, pages and poems. His use of “fourfold vision” encourages a dedicated and disciplined way of studying the text, prompting readers to appreciate its variety and richness. It demands that readers pause, take their time, and grapple with textual difficulties in order to make connections and gain enlightenment.[56] Its deliberate difficulty is important. Blake uses typology and allegory in order to challenge his readers, to support them to make connections in times of darkness and dread, when plain speaking could not be licensed. Not only did this process allow Blake to communicate political, social or religious undertones, it inspired readers to become absorbed in the text and indeed transported by it. It allowed Blake to use his own unique system of words and images to convey visionary and semi-prophetic messages which directly challenge the established structures and forms of his society. In so doing, he cultivated energy, hope and the freedom required for readers to escape from conventional mindsets, giving them the confidence to express their own opinions and desires.

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[56] Foster Damon embellishes this concept of “fourfold vision” by focusing on the Four Zoas which appear throughout Blake’s prophetic poems. The “Zoa” or “beasts” relate to the four beasts with different faces as seen in Ezekiel and Revelation (Foster Damon, *Blake Dictionary* 458). The Zoas represent the fourfold nature of man. Tharmas is associated with the body and the west, Urizen is tied to reason and the south, Luvah with emotions and the east, and Urthona with human imagination and the north (*Blake Dictionary* 458). The Four Zoas represent the fundamental principles of human perception: sensation as felt through the body, the creative faculties of the mind in imagination, the tempered or objective in reason, and the emotional or passionate. For a table listing the various components of the Four Zoas, see Ostriker, *William Blake: The Complete Poems* 1048.

Blake rarely terms his vision "allegory" due to the fact that the debased notion of eighteenth-century allegory bears little resemblance to the traditional "fourfold" processes he puts into practice. However, upon completing *Milton*, Blake wrote a letter to Butts in July 1803, jubilantly stating that this poem is

> a sublime Allegory which is now perfectly completed into a grand Poem… I consider it as the Grandest Poem that this World Contains. Allegory addressd to the Intellectual powers while it is altogether hidden from the Corporeal Understanding is My Definition of the Most Sublime Poetry. (Bentley, *Stranger* 243; E 730)

Blake associates allegory with "Intellectual powers," the realms of vision and elevated thoughts. He connects it with the fundamental aspects of his poetry: vision and imagination. However in 1810, discussing the motivation behind "A Vision of The Last Judgement," he states: "The Last Judgement is not Fable or Allegory but Vision. Fable or Allegory are a totally distinct and inferior kind of Poetry" (E 554). Like Coleridge, Blake is in danger of confusing his own distinctions. Within the same passage he concedes "that Fable or Allegory is Seldom without some Vision." There is a dramatic difference between equating allegory with the most sublime "Intellectual powers" and rating it as an "inferior kind" of poetry. Given the criticisms levelled against allegory during this period, Blake's condemnation is understandable. As Hughes has noted, the eighteenth century had lost touch with the complex ambivalence, the challenging obscurity, of genuine allegory, and its movement toward vision. Within this context Blake is right to condemn the mode. Yet this does not mean that he was not allegorical. Allegory in the sense the term had for Spenser and generations of poets before him was inscribed across the eighteenth century, but because they did not call it that, we have not looked for it (Adams, "Reynolds" 34). While Coleridge advanced the dominance of the "symbol," Blake never used this term. Instead he preferred the word "vision" (Adams, "Reynolds" 18) and used it to forge his own unique allegorical notion of the visionary.

His poem to Butts conveys the allegorical potential of Blake's verse. These processes need to be explored in more detail in order to see exactly how Blake engages the reader and encourages multiple and self-conscious ways of seeing. Both Spenser and Blake use words and images which recur within the verse, building upon meaning cumulatively as the reader progresses (Quilligan, *Language* 33-36; MacCaffrey, *Spenser's Allegory* 38, 45-46; Makdisi, *Impossible* 163; Snart 62; Erdman, *Illuminated Blake* 88). Blake's visual illuminations take this didactic process a step further through the deliberate repetition of certain graphic images. It is often problematical for a student of Blake to gain an impression of the rich manuscript-like colour and density of his verse due to the fact that most of his poems are printed without his illustrations (Snart 118). It has only been over the last decade or so, with the advent of advanced techniques in laser printing and reproduction, that his images have been more efficiently captured and presented to the reader.[57] This is perhaps why, despite a vast bank of information and criticism on Blake, investigations particularly into his illuminated verse have been rather few.[58] Easily available colour reproductions of his shorter poems, such as *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, and *The Book of Urizen*, are invaluable to students of Blake.[59] The reproduction of these works in their entirety highlights the extent to which colour and illustration feature so prominently in his work. To separate Blake's words from his illuminations is to fail to convey a prominent part of his verse as a whole: its call to be interpreted allegorically in multiple ways, literally, metaphorically, graphically and imaginatively.

Some readers may be forgiven for assuming that the illustrations remove the need for reader interpretation and engagement. This would be entirely to misunderstand Blake's intention. He is careful to ensure that everything is "put into its fit place" (*J* 3.51). Nothing is insubstantial and all illustrations bring meaning to the text. Blake makes his reader work doubly hard. As well as interpreting and understanding the text, the viewer must also strive to comprehend the language conveyed by the illustrations that accompany it. Several critics have noted the seeming incongruity between the text and its accompanying image (Frye, "Poetry and Design" 36-37; Erdman, *Illuminated Blake*13; Makdisi, *Impossible* 163). Harold Bloom in *Blake's Apocalypse* remarks on the visual discrepancies in Blake's verse, arguing that they challenge the reader to re-read the passage and look more closely at the relation between images and text (137-57). Bloom's argument is important for appreciating and understanding the allegorical processes that accompany Blake's use of the visual. Like Spenser, Blake sought to disrupt and dislocate the viewer's assumptions by presenting scenes that challenge traditional modes of comprehension and provide other ways of seeing. Erdman himself notes in his commentary on Blake's illuminations: "Blake's pictures are never full translations of the text" (*Illuminated Blake* 14). The reader has to work using information gleaned from both the text and the illustrations in order to engage with his verse and draw inspiration and meaning from it. Makdisi notes that we have to accept that "our reading necessarily takes place in the gaps between words and images" (*Impossible* 163). Blake's visual allegory encourages "turning back and forth through the plates, tracing and retracing different interpretative paths" (*Impossible* 163). Snart states, "Blake's approach to the visual and the verbal as one that persistently seems to rethink the interplay of textuality and graphicality is usefully identified … as dialectic" (64). I would argue that it is not just dialectic, but (as allegory itself consciously dictates) his process is unconventionally didactic.

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[57] For a brief discussion of earlier attempts to reproduce Blake's work in colour see Frye, "Poetry and Design in William Blake" 42.

[58] Snart notes that illustrations have often been ignored in Blake's work. However, the increasing availability of the William Blake Archive is changing this (60). While the internet has improved the store of images accessible to students, I believe it is important, especially with regard to Blake's illuminated verse, to view these images in relation to the text in which they were originally set.

[59] I recommend students look at Bindman's *William Blake: The Complete Illuminated Books* (2000), for good copies of Blake's illuminated verse in full size and in colour. For explanations to the prints, Erdman's *The Illuminated Blake* (1974) is detailed and insightful.

Theresa Kelley highlights Blake's equivocal stance towards allegory through the figure of Los: "Los tests critical preconceptions about what allegory is or can be…Los is an 'allegorical anti-allegorist'" (98). This is akin to Spenser's awareness of the potentially idolatrous flaws within the mode and the extent to which it can be misinterpreted and misread. In the same way, Spenser too can be read as an "allegorical anti-allegorist" or an "idolatrous anti-idol maker."[60] Both poets were aware of the processes of their texts, the demands they make upon the reader. Both poets suggest, self-consciously, through characters such as Los, their frustration with how their texts may be perceived and misread. Blake's texts struggle against any form of "system," any means by which structures and hierarchies are imposed. Los in *Jerusalem* "must Create a System, or be enslav'd by another Mans" (*J* 10.20). Blake's anti-systematic impulse is as much a part of his material practice as it is part of his poetic vision (Snart 79). Critics have attempted to make sense of Blake's "system" in order to make his work more accessible. Both Frye in *Fearful Symmetry* and S. Foster Damon in *A Blake Dictionary* have tried to explain Blake as being a consistent and coherent poet in order to prove his sanity (Snart 68). Yet, despite Foster Damon's attempts, disjunctions continually appear within Blake's work.[61] Like Spenser's, Blake's discontinuity is his one constant. Allegory is a living form. Attempting to rationalise and confine the text leads to dead ends, misconceptions and false readings. What if Blake (and Spenser) meant to create a text, a space for the reader, which makes contradiction possible (Snart 68)? What if contradiction and difficulty are the conditions for reading? Both Spenser and Blake deliberately break apart the nets and "mind-forg'd" manacles prescribed by those in authority, in order to challenge the reader to accept the difficulty of the text and begin to form new ways of looking and perceiving.

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[60] This is seen in Spenser's cautious, overly determined depiction of any type of ornamentation, enough almost to mar or "score" its impact, as seen in the depiction of Arthur's shield, Mammon's Cave and the overly "arrayd" details of the Bower of Bliss. On Spenser's iconoclastic iconoclasm see King, *Spenser's Poetry* 56, 65-66 and Gilman 66-90. Gilman states that with "the semantic congruence between word and image no longer guaranteed, artists attempting to yoke the two would have to

## Allegory in the twentieth century and beyond

Over the last one hundred years, allegory has undergone multiple transformations in critical opinion. The early twentieth century inherited from

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reconceive the relationship between them …[A]s a response to this need, Blake's illuminated books complicate the emblem tradition in an art of dazzling improvisatory juxtapositions" (115).

[61] Snart notes that in his *Dictionary*, Foster Damon states that "gold" signifies "intelligence," but three lines later he writes, "Blake's symbols are not mechanical or inflexible" (*Blake Dictionary* xii, x, xi). Foster Damon seeks to smooth contradictions, but they continually escape his control.

Coleridge the assumption that allegory was an inferior sub-literary form, rightly rejected and replaced by the concept of the "symbol." Gay Clifford states that readers had come to "expect accessibility" from the realist imaginative literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, therefore "the unfashionability of allegory is a legacy of much Romantic and post-Romantic criticism." It was associated with "crude and wilful limitations upon emotional and archetypal significance" (Clifford 3-4). Allied with dreary personifications and medieval morality plays, allegory was seen as having no place in modern literary or critical circles.

Yet, in the first three decades of the twentieth century, more was written about Spenser than in the previous three hundred years (Radcliffe 157). Radcliffe notes that it was the founding of the research university that had the most profound impact upon Spenser criticism. This transformation particularly took place in America, following a desire to root American identity in the English language through the study of English literature, culture and history (157). Spenser with his extensive etymological and encyclopaedic complexity was a perfect candidate for scrutiny. As multiple essays addressing every aspect of his work began to emerge, there were renewed explorations of his allegory.

Within this context, the chapter on Spenser in C.S. Lewis's *Allegory of Love* (1936) has had a profound impact upon later criticism. Lewis was an Oxford Spenserian of conservative views (Radcliffe 167). He rejected pretensions to scientific objectivity in history and criticism, preferring to read *The Faerie Queene* in its own terms and within its historical context. Lewis argues that Spenser reconciles "Pleasure" and "Virtue" in an ideal of wedded love undervalued by Victorians and modernists. His study notes that the growth in the sentiment of courtly love was increasingly expressing itself through allegory (Lewis, *Allegory* 44). Radcliffe comments that “Lewis’s chapter makes more original observations about the *Faerie Queene* – sources, prosody, philosophy, and design – than all of the nineteenth-century criticism laid end to end” (Radcliffe 168).

> We have long looked for the origins of *The Faerie Queene* in Renaissance palaces and Platonic academies, and forgotten that it has humbler origins of at least equal importance in the Lord Mayer’s show, the chap-book, the bedtime story, the family Bible, and the village church. What lies beneath the surface of Spenser’s poem is the world of popular imagination: almost, a popular mythology. (Lewis, *Allegory* 312)

Lewis makes original observations upon Spenserian poetry, which allows for allegory to be looked at anew.

Yet there were prejudices against Spenser and his seemingly moralistic use of allegory. Virginia Woolf in the posthumously published essay entitled “The Faery Queen” (1947) makes Spenser seem coldly puritanical. Addressing the reader, she asks:

> Dare we then at this time of day come out with the remark that *The Faery Queen* is a great poem? So one might say early rising, cold bathing, abstention from wine and tobacco are good; and if one said it, a blank look would steal over the company as they made haste to agree and then to lower the tone of the conversation. (*The Moment and Other Essays* 25)

Woolf emphasises the general attitude many felt towards both Spenser and allegory in the early twentieth century, much fed by allegory’s waning reputation. There were, however, critics who were prepared to attack modernist prejudices against Spenser, and they were increasingly incorporating modern methods of literary criticism into their own scholarship (Radcliffe 174).

Rosemond Tuve was one such scholar who, in the middle years of the twentieth century, was renowned for her knowledge of Renaissance imagery. She focused on the importance of historical scholarship rather than on analysing the text from a modern viewpoint. Tuve explains in *Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery* (1947): "Modern poets fled with Yeats from painted symbolic object to symbol; modern criticism fled from Spenser as the painter of the poets to Donne. We have been given the same reason for both flights, with how much justice I am not entirely sure" (6). Tuve's work is directly related to allegory as she focuses upon the organic and fulfilling wealth and breadth of Renaissance imagery. Her close historical detail and knowledge in tracing medieval allegorical and rhetorical influences on Renaissance verse provides a new analytical approach to imagery and verse. She notes:

> the more we tend simply to assume in earlier poems purposes which now happen to be congenial to us, the more we shall overlook in the rest of the poem those subtler indications of purpose which explain why the imagery is as it is. The more wilfully we misread earlier imagery, the fewer fields of poetic pleasure we leave open to ourselves. (*Elizabethan* 21)

As readers, we have to learn to re-read and explore the motivations of the poem rather than of our own imaginings. Tuve is correct in noting that it is often the reader's (rather than the poet's) fault that we do not get more from the text. Tuve sets new critical standards for literary historians.

The beginnings of a genuine reassessment of allegory came during the 1950s and 1960s with the work of a new breed of theorists who turned away from the formal analysis of the New Critics. Northrop Frye (*Anatomy of Criticism,* 1953) and Angus Fletcher (*Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode*, 1964) cut across historical and genre boundaries to give new perspectives on allegory, along with poet Edwin Honig (*Dark Conceit*, 1959) and deconstructionalist literary critic Paul de Man ("The Rhetoric of Temporality" in *Interpretation: Theory and Practice,* 1969). These critics were prepared to engage with the obscurity and difficulty of allegory. Fletcher states that "we must be ready to discern in almost any work at least a small degree of allegory" (8). Frye notes that all forms of literature and literary interpretation could be construed as "allegorical" (32). The same argument is stated in *Fearful Symmetry* (1947), a study of William Blake's work, and suggests the degree to which Frye felt literature was structured upon an allegorical premise. Frye comments on the allegorical conundrum: "there has been confusion in modern criticism, largely because the term 'allegory' is very loosely employed for a great variety of literary phenomena" (*Anatomy* 82). He goes on to pinpoint modern criticism's difficulty with allegory. "The commenting critic is often prejudiced against allegory without knowing the real reason which is that continuous allegory prescribes the direction of his commentary and so restricts its freedom" (*Anatomy* 90). Fletcher also notes that readers have "trouble" with allegory due to "psychological and linguistic uncertainty as to what is going on when language is used figuratively" (9). There are "no simple formulas" in order to simplify allegory and make its meanings more accessible (Fletcher 9). Allegory is difficult in the way it calls the reader actively to engage with the verse. It is uncomfortable in requiring the reader to decipher conflicting meanings while following the flow of the verse. Readers do not have full interpretive freedom. They have to be patient and learn from the text in order to gain insights into its workings. This "re-discovery" of allegory shows that "far from being easy and spontaneous, [it] implies instead the discontinuity of a renunciation, even of a sacrifice" (de Man, *Blindness* 205). Frye and Fletcher unearth a fundamental problem with allegory today: people do not want to read something that is awkward, long, difficult, and that will not necessarily yield answers. Readers want snappy responses and fast resolutions. Thus, for the impatient reader, allegory will always remain a mystery.

Honig sees allegory as a mode manifesting itself in many different literary forms, in turn creating new forms and thus new ways of perceiving the world (93-6). His study is philosophical, arguing that allegory is a shield against the incomprehensibility of life (50). Allegory gives power to the irrational by means of "domesticating" the irregular and the potentially destructive (53). Honig concludes his book by quoting Wallace Stevens in saying that allegory may be a "name for something that could never be named" other than the "inconceivable idea" existing "in the difficulty of what it is to be" (183). Honig initiates a new form of discourse in describing allegory. His study conveys allegory's powerfully pervasive presence, the extent to which it expands viewpoints and perspectives whereby readers may attempt to assess what was previously indescribable and unmentionable. Described in this way, Blake's notion of allegory as "vision" may be fully recognised. The form came to the attention of structuralist theorists from the 1960s, perhaps due to this elusive otherness, its capacity for doublings – inner and outer, dark and light, surface and depth. Derrida sees allegory as being the logocentric genre par excellence (Teskey, *Allegory* 3). It became a fashionable mode of discourse in structuralist and post-structuralist methods of reading (Quilligan, "Allegory, Allegoresis" 163). Yet, attempting to subject allegory to structural analysis has its hazards. It is dangerous to seek to over-simplify a mode that exists upon complexity. Critics attempted to clarify discussions of allegory using words such as "vehicle" and "tenor," "cortex" and "kernel" to describe manifest and latent meanings (Steadman 72). These expressions impart a mechanical rigidity to allegory, another layering which confuses rather than enlightens. In *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode* Fletcher looks at allegory in terms of the relation between “synecdoche” and “metonymy,” which together contain the “full range of allegorical part-whole relationships, the former allowing us to label the *static* relations of classification, while the latter allows us to label *dynamic* interactions between part and whole” (85-7). Allegory itself is such a fluid mode that it tends to escape systematic conceptualisation. However, these theories laid the groundwork for late twentieth- and twenty-first-century scholars, specialising in Renaissance, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century criticism, poetry, and genre studies. Spenserian academics, Gordon Teskey and Louise Gilbert Freeman, regard allegory as a discontinuous flow, varying between stasis and motion (Gilbert Freeman 318).[62] Their work illustrates the continual but disjointed movements which allow for allegory’s “difficulty,” or as Teskey terms it, “violence.”

Teskey, Louise Gilbert Freeman, Kenneth Borris and Theresa Kelley see allegory as a mobile Proteus, a dynamic mode, taking on the characteristics and assuming the structures of multiple literary modes, enabling it to evolve and survive as a shifting and ever-present method (Borris 55-8; Kelley 2-3). In *Allegory and Violence* (1996), Teskey argues, like Honig, that allegory is dependent on its not having a very precise meaning, allowing it to do psychological work of which we are hardly aware (2). He conceives of allegory as an aggressive, violent form that evokes a rift or schism between two things while attempting to mask this rift. The body of the other must be annihilated by the one devouring it. This theory attests to the corporeal expression of the symmetrical otherness we note in allegory (8). Allegory is equated to a brutal dictator, sustaining ideological order, enforcing a regime while suppressing divisions. At any hint of disorder, the veil of order is raised (19). This is a highly psychological depiction of allegory, but one that runs to the heart of its otherness and explains its disjunctions or gaps. Instead of suggesting that allegory looks for our involvement in order to learn and unravel or reveal a mystery, Teskey argues that allegory seeks to suppress the truth, to hide the horrors deep within layers, horrors of reality perhaps too brutal to be seen with readers' eyes.[63] Teskey's argument offers new ways of thinking about allegory, but it is not one with which I am wholly sympathetic. Teskey overly stresses allegory's "violent" drive to conceal rather than reveal meaning. I believe that the opposite is the case – allegory as a mode demands reader attention and therefore consciously seeks readers who are able to reveal its many significations.

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[62] L. Gilbert Freeman terms this movement “fixity and flux,” and defines it as the tension between opposites within the poem which cause disjunctions of meaning; see especially 323-28. See her article “The Metamorphosis of Malbecco” 308-30 (2000) for her argument and its relation to Teskey’s *Allegory and Violence* (1996).

This is not to say that "violence" does not occur within the pages of *The Faerie Queene*. However, the violence of represented warfare has to be separated from Teskey's notion of metaphorical or allegorical violence as outlined above. So much horror takes place that the reader becomes almost immune to it. Knights maim and hack at each other in battle, unspeakable monsters spew books and bile, Amoret sustains a gushing chest wound in the House of Busirane, Talus metes out tough justice to those who contest Artegall's laws, the Blatant Beast's bites infect his victims and cause "ranckling wounds" (*FQ* 6.6.2). Perhaps all this aggression takes place to uphold a veil of order. Talus feels no guilt in chopping off Lady Munera's hands and feet as she kneels before him begging for mercy (*FQ* 5.2.26). He throws her, "loud crying," from the castle wall to drown in the muddy ditch below (*FQ*

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[63] Gilbert Freeman gives us an example of the seemingly "horrific" workings of allegory in the transformation of Malbecco (*FQ* 3.10) from man into "*Gelosy*" (*FQ* 3.10.60). "In creating a figure so resonantly human and then abstracting and renaming him, the poet brazenly reveals how violent is the operation of allegory, how dark its origins, how overreaching its hunger" (319). Her ideas are conveyed with Teskey's arguments in mind.

5.2.27). This extreme brutality pricks the reader. Lady Munera is guilty of the materialistic love of gold. Yet the whole scene is unsettling. Does her punishment outweigh her crime? Perhaps the violence of the allegory is meant to disturb our conscience. Perhaps allegory is working to bludgeon the reader into accepting the tale by the full force of its cruelty. We feel the troubling dis-association between the image, its intended message, our reaction and the possibilities of getting to the "truth" that Teskey's study strives so successfully to highlight.

This allegorical violence is not confined to Spenser. Blake's texts are filled with human horrors too. *The Book of Urizen*, like the growing foetus in a womb, is composed of a mass of globules of blood, sinews, muscle, and wide screaming, terrified mouths – "Fibres of blood, milk and tears" (*BU* 18.4). Blake's verse is preoccupied with human existence, its pain, its labour, its entrapment, its joy, its strength. Kenneth Gross, in an essay on "The Postures on Allegory" (2000), sees the scream of Blake's allegorical figures as indicative of their textual imprisonment, stating that the mute silence surrounding Spenser's characters is far more shocking as they cannot even express their confinement (179). The artificial masks the real. The grasp of allegory attempts to be absolute. "Allegory empties things out, rather than filling them up with meaning, veiling that emptiness at the same time" (173). Gross's depiction is suggestive of the calm exterior of allegory which thinly covers the chaos below. Both Teskey and Gross focus upon the violent darkness beneath the seemingly ideologically ordered surface of allegory, calling us to see allegory's polysemous rather than its supposedly hierarchical layering. Allegory is representative of the human struggle for expression within the confining "prison-house" of language, the struggle for truth and enlightenment, the fixed state of the text on paper and the authorial voice lost in interpretation. To perceive the truth, to be aware of the possibility of enlightenment and authorial intent, we have to embrace a state of unknowing, a state of confusion and darkness, in order to learn a new vocabulary, a new way of understanding.

Teskey and Gross's arguments are enlightening and useful to the study of allegory. However, I find their standpoint on allegory's absolute "darkness" to be overstated. Their work has provided a valuable contribution to the study of allegory in emphasising that allegory divides itself against itself in such a way as to defy any clear and coherent summary (Suttie, *Self-Interpretation* 9). In this sense, allegory can indeed be seen as attempting to conceal its true purpose. Yet the mode's multiplicity surely stresses a desire for communication. Despite complicating and attempting to conceal and hide meaning, allegory ultimately seeks to reveal, as seen by the abundant "horrors" that escape both Blake and Spenser's texts to sit uncomfortably with the reader. These horrors crave readerly attention. However, revelation is not easy. It comes at a price. It is not allegory which is the brutal dictator, it is the assumptions we bring to the text, namely, that everything should be easily read and understood. Allegory teaches reformed reading by showing the reader that all is not what it seems. The unsettling disassociations described by Teskey and Gross attest to this theory: allegory deliberately unsettles in order to prompt the reader to work to question *why* we feel unsettled. Lady Munera perhaps expresses Spenser's own personal and immediate experiences of the practice of government in Ireland, his frustrations and anger at its limited workings.[64] Book Five articulates the situation in Ireland through the progress of Artegall, striving to reveal (to those who wish to hear) submerged and repressed voices. It provides us with a glimpse of Ireland's tragic struggle and England's vicious attempts to control and colonise a Catholic and therefore an "other" and "heathen" landscape. Rather than being stifled, Munera's "loud crying" haunts us.

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[64] For opinions on Spenser's relation to Ireland see Hadfield, chapter six in *Literature, Politics and National Identity* and *Shakespeare, Spenser and The Matter of Britain* 8-42; Highley, *Shakespeare, Spenser and the Crisis in Ireland*; Lethbridge, "Spenser's Last Days: Ireland, Career, Mutability, Allegory" 302-336; Willy Maley, *Nation, State and Empire in English Renaissance Literature* 67-91; Patterson, chapter four in *Reading between the Lines*. See also *A View of the State of Ireland*, edited by Hadfield and Maley.

As do the cries of Blake's characters: the tiny chimney sweeps calling in the streets, the harlot's cry, Oothoon weeping and calling to Theotormon, Jerusalem to Albion, Urizen and Los's howls of despair. Like Spenser, Blake's allegory seeks to reveal rather than to smother meaning. Blake, like Spenser, uses allegory to urge readers to see in a different way. He uses the mode not to limit readings, but to expand them. Saree Makdisi, specialising in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British literature, sums up Blake's allegorical attitudes well when describing his poetry in relation to modernisation.

> In his illuminated books, Blake disrupts the basic conceptual and ideological building blocks of modernisation, rewriting the conceptual language of modernisation for alternative political and aesthetic purposes.

Makdisi continues,

> If Blake's illuminated books do not conform to our understanding of history, it is not because they are apolitical (let alone ahistorical), but rather because they pose a fundamental challenge to our understanding of history and modernity itself. (*Impossible* 9-10)

Blake uses allegory to test his readers conceptually and linguistically. When we are made to look at things differently, we see from other viewpoints. Makdisi argues that Blake forces his readers to look "between" discourses in order to see new concepts and thus new perspectives (Makdisi, *Impossible* 83). Part of the nature of allegory is that it operates between discourses. It is neither completely one thing nor another.

Both Spenser and Blake wish their readers to see and learn. Allegory is the means by which they may achieve this. Learning is as difficult as it is rewarding. In order to see profoundly the student must look at what reading is and what it involves. The reader must accept that she or he will make mistakes along the path to greater illumination. With patience and reformed reading, students will be able to engage with this complicated discourse that continually seeks to reveal.

This brings me to the final point of this chapter. It is one that we have already begun to explore: that of the necessity of learning in the process of reading. Maureen Quilligan analyses this concept in *The Language of Allegory: Defining a Genre* (1979), arguing that allegory is a legitimate critical category - in other words, a genre (14). Her work is powerful in highlighting the didactic nature of allegory and its call to be interpreted. Instead of being read vertically, in terms of surface and depth, allegory should be read horizontally in order to gain the full flow of meaning. Reading in such a way, Quilligan argues, avoids mistaking allegory for allegoresis (an allegorical *interpretation* of a text rather than the allegory itself). It also prevents a rigid hierarchical stance being taken in relation to allegory's "layers" (Makdisi, *Impossible* 162-67). Quilligan notes that allegory operates by gradual revelation in a reader who does not previously know the answers. Readers only gain sophistication as they follow the narrative, discovering the answers through a process of un-learning and relearning. Quilligan's work has been one of the most influential in defining allegory and its workings over the last thirty years, and although some critics take issue with her argument that allegory is a genre of its own,[65] her book is groundbreaking in introducing new approaches to allegory, especially in terms of its didactic appeal.

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[65] Vogler argues that allegory is not a genre to itself in "The Allegory of Allegory: Unlocking Blake's 'Crystal Cabinet'" 99; Borris sees allegory as a "metadiscourse," beyond the limits of rhetorical definition (55-60). Due to its malleable nature and the way in which it may attach itself to many linguistic forms, I see allegory as a "mode" rather than a "genre." Its very flexibility allows for allegory's presence within many different genres from epic verse, such as *The Faerie Queene*, to short contemporary novellas, such as Kafka's "The Fly," or Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*.

The most recent critical theory in relation to allegory builds on the work of Maureen Quilligan and looks at allegory's self-conscious and didactic principles. We recognise that allegory is elusive and will not render complete, straightforward or "correct" answers. What is important is how *we* as readers interpret the allegory. Paul Suttie's *Self-Interpretation in* The Faerie Queene (2006) focuses upon the ways in which the poem has been allegorically interpreted and mis-interpreted in the past. In so doing, he insists that reader interpretation – a careful and alert study of the text – is vital to understanding and learning from Spenser's work. He notes that the poem (or the poet) deliberately misleads readers in order to encourage them to make judgements. Suttie argues that the text

> renders visible the dilemma of inhabiting a world in which interpretation is never from an Archimedean point of view outside the world interpreted, and in which, therefore, there is no uniquely privileged point from which the moral ordering of the world may begin. In such a world … every act of interpretation must instead begin from within a historical milieu of contestable grounds, and so must always be, in that interminably problematic sense, an act of *self*-interpretation. (*Self-Interpretation* 212)

We cannot be wholly right or wrong when reading allegory. We can only attempt to read more carefully and more closely, bearing in mind that we, as readers, are an essential factor in the process of interpretation. Likewise, Jeff Dolven explores Spenser's didactic strategies in *Scenes of Instruction in Renaissance Romance* (2007). He argues that by deliberately misleading his readers, Spenser is teaching through experience. Only when readers recognise that they have made the wrong assumption do they retrace their pages and learn from the experience of the mistake.

Jane Grogan's study, *Exemplary Spenser: Visual and Poetic Pedagogy in The Faerie Queene* (2009), argues that Spenser's didactic concerns were a central part of his work. Grogan explores the "complex poetic and rhetorical strategies devised by Spenser to serve these didactic ends, especially visually-perceived strategies energised by the most prominent and troubling cultural concerns of his day" (3). Grogan's work highlights the importance of Spenser's use of the visual (an area which has received little critical attention in recent years) and analyses his method of using poetic images, narratives and personifications in order to enlighten readers. However, her study rejects allegory as a method of didactic visual perception, arguing that the mode works against the effect Spenser was trying to achieve: "Spenser's promotion of allegory … poses difficulties for his commitments to narrative and to moral instruction" (106). Grogan's work is a welcome addition to the current debate on Spenser's pedagogy and adds much to his use of the visual. However, I believe that allegory lies at the heart of Spenser's method and is foremost in encouraging instruction and enlightenment through active engagement with the text.

Similar themes on didacticism and reading are explored within Blake's work in Saree Makdisi's *William Blake and the Impossible History of the 1790s* (2003) and in Jason Allen Snart's *The Torn Book* (2006).[66] Makdisi argues that reading takes place in the spaces between words and images, or between alternative discourses (164). Snart notes likewise that Blake teaches us to read "with difficulty instead of with ease" (69). Makdisi emphasises that we must look with renewed eyes and disconnect our culturally coded assumptions in order to make sense of Blake's texts. He says:

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[66] Hazard Adams takes issue with Snart's study which includes the subtitle, *Unreading William Blake's Marginalia*, arguing that Snart misses the point by not addressing the context in which the annotations were written (5). My topic does not focus specifically on Blake's annotations. However, for more on the subject see Adams, *Blake's Margins: An Interpretive Study of the Annotations* (2009).

> Our very "learning" is what stands in the way of our reading his [Blake's] work with all the freshness of a child. We must embrace – rather than trying to normalise – those aspects of his work that make it special and unusual. (*Impossible* 162-63)

Dolven and Suttie, Snart and Makdisi, have realised Spenser and Blake's capacity for teaching their readers a new visionary language, a way of reading and perceiving taught, I believe, through the process of allegory. This process will be demonstrated in greater detail in the next two chapters. Chapter two focuses upon Blake and Spenser's conscious use of words in relation to allegory, looking more closely at the texture of the text, and chapter three explains how allegory licenses both poets' potentially subversive use of language.

# Chapter Two: Allegory and Language

> Allegorical literature … is in essence a form of writing that anticipates being *interpreted* allegorically, and that tries to govern the direction interpretations take by giving would-be commentators a framework of self-interpretation on which to build. The question is with what authority that self-interpretation is made. (Suttie, *Self-Interpretation* 4)

Allegory requires an active response from the reader in order to generate meaning. To explore the concept of readerly response, so vital to the allegory of Spenser and Blake's verse, we must look more closely at language and its relation to both the reader and the text. The meaning of allegory is conveyed by language, yet language problematises meaning (de Saussure 65-76). In fact, allegory exaggerates this aspect of language by emphasising linguistic uncertainty. Allegory insists on the extent to which language requires interpretation in order to arrive at meaning. This chapter explores the relationship between allegory and language, or what I term "allegorical language" in the poetry of Spenser and Blake, and is split into two halves. The first part details Spenser's relation to allegorical language through an analysis of the linguistic necessities and restrictions of the sixteenth century, before going on to explore Spenser's depiction of the process of allegorical reading. The second section looks at Blake's relation to allegorical language in his era.

The chapter begins by considering the relation between allegory and language in terms of their use as forms of "censorship" and as a means of "propaganda," specifically in the role of "moralising" classical texts. These conditioning tools emphasise the danger inherent in language: its capacity for "other" interpretations. From here, I go on to focus upon Spenser and Blake's self-conscious attitudes to language through their portrayal of the process of reading. I will explore this topic specifically to suggest that both poets are aware of linguistic constructions and the extent to which language, while being useful, is also untrustworthy and divisive. Tending towards a multiplicity of meaning, allegory is expansive and therefore encourages polysemic interpretation. However, this variety of potential meaning can give way to suggestions that allegory, like language in general, is a seed bed for misreading and misinterpretation. Spenser and Blake display a tentative, diachronic awareness of the imaginative creativity of language and its flip side: the potential for destructive misreading and imaginative imprisonment. Both poets demonstrate that because language and allegory have the capacity to shift, altering in meaning over time, the reader must be prepared to re-read and re-learn in order to understand.

## Censorship, propaganda and interpretation

It may come as a surprise that allegory was used (albeit not exclusively) in attempts to censor texts in the early modern period. However, as we will see, even this notion is complicated by allegory's expansive interpretational potential. The mode's capacity for polysemic interpretation allows for it flexibly to mould and adapt textual meaning. In this sense, allegory can be appropriated for political ends. To use Henry Reynold's words, allegory was a sugar-coated pill used to gild less palatable sections of a text. Maureen Quilligan notes the extent to which such uses for allegory were passed down to the Renaissance by early Christian cultures seeking to reconcile Homer's epics with Christianity, or at least to play down their paganism (Quilligan, *Language* 20-31). This is displayed in the seventeenth-century translation of Ovid's *Metamorphosis* (1628) by George Sandys. Despite the magical transformations of Apollo, Jove and Hermes, Sandys slants his translation, indicating that these gods are forms that parody God's creation – "new Monsters" created from the "quickening

Earth" (1). Allegory was imposed upon non-allegorical classical texts, and its characteristics classed by the *distance* between literal and underlying meanings (Quilligan, *Language* 20-31). Athene, for example, was associated with "Wisdom." Yet, as Whitman notes, correspondences were stretched to breaking point to explain as "wisdom" Athene's pulling a man's hair and raging in battle (Whitman 3-4). Renaissance scholars "patched" Greek pagan texts with an allegorical "plaster." Zeus the king of Gods was remodelled as a figure for the Christian God. Aphrodite was presented as a symbol of love in "Christianised" readings, distorting her Greek role as Zeus's daughter, the goddess of sexual attraction. Her affair with Ares while married to Hephaestus highlights her less than moral standing within an early modern context (*Odyssey* 8:266-366). If a text was immoral, outmoded, or "wrong" in relation to society's moral and ethical code, allegory could license the reader to correct it with the "hidden" meanings he or she preferred (Quilligan, *Language* 29-30). Hence, it is proper to speak of allegory's role in censorship: allegory itself is controlled and contained in order to control and contain meanings.

Interpretation according to social and cultural contexts is vital to understanding this manipulation of classical texts and points towards the way that language by its nature gradually alters over time. Homer and Ovid's poems were "moralised," that is, given an allegorical veneer which channelled readings consonant with the views of those who would uphold sixteenth- and seventeenth-century social ideals and conventions.[67] For teachers and scholars of early Christian societies it could not be suggested that paganism was altogether admirable. The moral virtue of "Wisdom" was selected and "allegorically" paraded to counter Athene's rather

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[67] For analysis on the relation between ancient cultures and allegory see Murrin, *The Allegorical Epic: Essays in its Rise and Decline* 3-24, 87-88, 153-73; Steadman, *The Lamb and the Elephant* 72-96; Stuck, *The Birth of the Symbol: Ancient Readers and the Limits of Their Texts*, especially the introduction and chapters one and two; Whitman, *Allegory: The Dynamics of an Ancient and Medieval Technique* 1-72, 122-31, 249-262.

"immoral" characteristics. Classical gods did not share Christian morals and values and therefore Christian scholars had to give these "gods" other names. The application of allegorical meanings to these ancient manuscripts is evidence of relativism – the imposition of Christian elements on pagan texts in order to allow for their circulation and consumption in a now Christianised England. It also reflected the importance of these works. They could not be forgotten or condemned for being heathen, especially within the Renaissance context of the revival of classical learning which involved retracing ancient manuscripts in order to recover forms of "originality."[68] Therefore textual "allegorisation" licensed their transformation, incorporating classical tales into early modern social systems. Pagan gods were taken to represent allegorised aspects of Christianity and Christian virtue, even though their actions sometimes remained difficult to rationalise within the Christianised allegoresis that overlays the text. This thin allegorical layer acts as a form of censorship, a means of controlling the word and channelling its interpretation.

It seems ironic, given the Renaissance impulse toward more "original" forms of learning through the exploration of classical texts, that aspects of ancient ways of life were deliberately smothered by an early modern philosophy threatened with potentially un-Christian practices. However, as James Nohrnberg notes, Spenser's readers would have been comfortable and familiar with a mixture of tales both classical and Christian (150).[69] This observation highlights the extent to which classical influences were incorporated into early modern texts, but also the way in which allegoresis neutralised their pagan elements. These classical allusions were seen to embellish texts through analogy. In *The Faerie Queene*, Venus, Proteus and

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[68] Ironically, the Renaissance concept of "enlightenment" worked upon the recognition that it was virtually impossible to return to the absolute "origin." Enlightenment is therefore subjective, based upon authors and their authority ("auctoritas") to argue and debate ("augere") (Guillory 26).

[69] Milton's *Paradise Lost* is the most prominent seventeenth-century text to incorporate Christian and classical elements in an epic describing the fall of humankind in the Garden of Eden.

Cupid happily sit upon the page with Prince Arthur and the Redcross Knight, who is later revealed to be St George. The seemingly sacred and the profane cohabit cordially. Thus, while Guyon's three-day trial in the Cave of Mammon lasts forty stanzas, and has been compared to Christ's temptation in the wilderness for forty days (*FQ* 214n; Kermode, "Cave of Mammon" 68), his journey towards the Bower of Bliss is deliberately paralleled to Odysseus's voyage in *The Odyssey*.[70] Guyon's endeavours to avoid the Gulf of Greedinesse and the hideous Rock (*FQ* 2.12.3-4) correspond to Odysseus' attempts to pass Charybdis and Scylla unscathed (*Odyssey* 12.73-100, 234-59) (*FQ* 270n). Just as Spenser constructs religious analogies within his poem, he also constructs classical ones. These examples highlight the fluidity with which poet and audience would have recognised both religious and classical contexts. While allegory certainly diffused the religious and ethical stigma of the "pagan" within classical texts, Spenser's work shows its creative capacity to fuse and inter-relate differing discourses. What began as a form of censorship may have resulted in greater scope for dialogue within early modern texts. However, this was not the only means by which allegory was used in relation to language and mechanisms of interpretational control within this period.

Allegories were often regarded as veiling mysteries or "truths" from the vulgar so that only the noble and the privileged were able to see beyond the surface and comprehend deeper meanings. In *Mythomystes* (c. 1632), which argues that the poetry of the ancient world is far superior to modern poetic works, Henry Reynolds states that the occult wisdom of the ancients was deliberately hidden from vulgar minds within allegories: "they held their knowledges in. Which appreares in the care they tooke to conceale them from the unworthy vulgar" (27). The allegorical truth hidden in a work was for Reynolds its body, while the exterior sense was but the external covering, clothing or bark (Adams, "Reynolds" 5). "[H]igh and Mysticall matters should by riddles and enigmaticall knots be kept inuiolate from the prophane Multitude" (Reynolds 29-30). This was especially true of biblical texts. Scholars often explained a particularly obscure or mysterious biblical parable as being allegorical and therefore only comprehensible to those of great mental capacities. Frank Kermode, discussing the extent to which biblical narrative is obscure, notes that the Greek term for parables may be translated "dark speeches" (*Genesis* 25), suggesting that these allegorical biblical riddles were deliberately irresolvable, designed to keep readers continually working to get at the narrative's message (Kermode, *Genesis* 27).

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[70] These examples highlight the extent to which allegory can be related to typology: something standing for or prefiguring something else. This use of allegory further emphasises its traditional fourfold nature, as described in the introduction and explained by Isabel Rivers (141-43).

> Allegory is the patristic way of dealing with inexhaustible hermeneutic potential …the notion that ancient myth as well as scripture concealed occult wisdom was as common during the European Renaissance as it was in the Hellenistic world. (Kermode, *Genesis* 44)

If a text is too difficult, it is easy to suggest that the reader is not worthy of being able to understand it. Here again allegory is licensed, but this time it is to justify a text's opaque density. It is as if scholars have concluded that because the text is complex, it must be allegorical. As we have seen, difficulty is one aspect of allegorical reading. The association of scripture with allegory is profound, especially in light of both the Bible's and the mode's interpretational possibilities, Kermode's "inexhaustible hermeneutic potential." His study demonstrates that while allegory may have been regarded as concealing and obscuring meaning, its constructions also reflect upon the nature of reading and language itself. Narrative can be challenging, as passages of the Bible reveal. These passages have to be read carefully. The same can be said for Spenser and Blake's verse. Indeed, Spenser and Blake may well have derived this allegorical technique from close studies of the Bible.[71] As much as allegory can be said to obscure and conceal knowledge, its very obscurity and interpretational potential draws reader attention and demands reader interaction.

However, allegory was not simply called on to be a mechanism of concealment in religious texts. Paradoxically, its "four-fold" flexibility allowed for it to be used to dispel obscurity and forge accessible meanings from scripture.[72] In response to the Bible's density of meaning, the Geneva Bible, as we discussed above, occasionally resorted to allegoresis. Thus, in the 1560 Geneva Bible, the "sharpe two edged sworde" in Revelation 1.16 is glossed as signifying "his [God's] worde and the vertue thereof." The marginal gloss imposes Reformation readings on a late-antique text, much as medieval commentators imposed Christian meanings on Ovid (Suttie, *Self-Interpretation* 6-7). Movement is towards revelation rather than concealment. Editors strove for the Bible to be interpreted, but in strictly defined ways. Control over the interpretation of the Bible was political and highly contested. The Established Church claimed the right to determine interpretation, largely achieved through homilies and the prayer book. The King James Bible of 1611 did not include marginal commentary and therefore did not encourage readerly interpretation of the Bible. The Geneva Bible of 1560, however, with its many glosses (revised with dramatically altered New Testament notes in 1602), was popular into the seventeenth century as it was seen to encourage reader engagement and interpretation. Here, as with the texts of Homer, allegory potentially acts as a form of cultural codification. Suttie notes that allegory's permeable fluidity allows it to straddle various discourses, making it suitable for use in manipulating and structuring narratives (*Self-Interpretation* 5-7). He argues that allegorical commentators can massage texts such as the Geneva Bible into the apparent semblance of a totally coherent self-commentary, as Spenser does in the Letter to Raleigh which appears to make complete sense of *The Faerie Queene* (8).[73] However, as much as allegory can be seen to manipulate and control certain meanings, its very flexibility allows for it to be re-incorporated into other ways of viewing and reading. Meanings can escape preordained constructs. Awareness of this fluidity made attempts to control language with its "inexhaustible hermeneutic potential" especially fraught in the early modern period.

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[71] Spenser and Blake use techniques similar to those which appear in the Bible: a narrative not necessarily bound by time or place, images and figures consistent with representations in the Bible (such as *Revelation*), and a narrative structure which requires active reader participation and interpretation in order for meaning to be generated. In relation to this last point, see Auerbach, *Mimesis*, chapter one. For more on the relation of the Bible to western literature, see Frye, *Great Code* 3-27. For Blake's relation to the Bible see Tannenbaum, *Biblical Tradition in Blake's Early Prophecies*; Morton, *The Everlasting Gospel*; and Mee, *Dangerous Enthusiasm*. For Spenser's relation, see Hume, *Edmund Spenser: Protestant Poet*; Luxon, *Literal Figures*; Norbrook, *Poetry and Politics in the English Renaissance*; and King, *Spenser's Poetry and the Reformation Tradition*.

[72] The personal reading of the Bible was a recent phenomenon following the Reformation and had an important influence upon textural interpretation. The focus upon vernacular Bibles produced an awareness of grammar and how language was taught and disseminated. While people were given the tools to read and understand for themselves, there was anxiety concerning how words were used and the ways in which they could be variously interpreted. See Pendergast, *Religion, Allegory and Literacy in Early Modern England*; and Luxon, *Literal Figures: Puritan Allegory and the Reformation Crisis in Representation.*

Ironically, despite being used as a tool to control and stabilise meaning, allegory has the potential to complicate it further. Nohrnberg notes that the relation between what is said and what is meant may be subversive, and that linguistic arbitrariness parallels allegory, which by its nature presents one thing by means of another. The relation between what is said and what is meant therefore has the capacity to change (100). Theresa Kelley reinforces Nohrnberg's argument, stating that the

> definition of allegory as an extended figure or metaphor conveys its potentially *endless* emplotment of figure such that its interpretation might go on, turn back,

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[73] Spenser's Letter to Raleigh has generated much debate in its distorted relation to the rest of *The Faerie Queene*. See Kouwenhoven, *Apparent Narrative As Thematic Metaphor*, who attempts to use Spenser's Letter to work the poem into a thematic whole. Erickson's article in *Spenser Studies* (1989), establishes the context in which Spenser wrote the Letter, and suggests that its conceptualisation of the poem was a means by which to limit subversive content. For more on subversion in allegory, see chapter three.

> and go up in all the registers made available by medieval (and Blakean) fourfold vision. This possibility makes allegory both attractive and risky. (24)

In order to counter the potential inherent in language and allegory, authorities required other ways of reinforcing superiority and maintaining authoritative control: we may call this propaganda.

Whoever controls the dissemination and interpretation of words wields power. Northrop Frye comments that words themselves were seen to hold a kind of magical energy in the medieval and early modern periods. He notes that puns and popular etymologies involved in the naming of people and places (ubiquitous within *The Faerie Queene*) affect the character of whatever thing or person is given the name (*Great Code* 6).[74] Words were thought to open up hidden knowledge, to reveal truths about people and objects (Ferry 12). Anne Ferry notes that the alphabet was originally called a "Christcross" or "crisscross," and was often displayed in parish churches, reflecting upon the divinity of God's Word (as seen in the creation and the naming of Adam, Eve, and all creatures in Genesis). The divine Word was thought to instil a form of creative, religious power or truth within letters and words (Ferry 128-34). However, stabilised meanings associated with letters of the alphabet dissolved during the Reformation. Frye argues that the problem of defining truth from illusion became central by the sixteenth century (*Great Code* 14). "It was no longer possible to separate the observer from what he observes: the observer had to become an observed object too" (Frye, *Great Code* 14). Words were no longer stable but open to a range of discourses and interpretations, propelling anxieties about "right" reading and "right" writing. Such anxieties are apparent in the work of Spenser and Blake and in succeeding generations of poets and readers. Readers may ask: am I reading this text correctly? Is there more to be seen? Have I grasped the deeper significances? Poets may question: is this writing terrible or of good quality? Who will judge me? Are they right?

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[74] See M. Craig's article on puns and etymologies in *The Faerie Queene*, "The Secret Wit of Spenser's Language," 313-33. See also Quilligan, *The Language of Allegory* 33-41. Words are embedded in the meaning and personality of the Spenserian figure. For example, the name of the giant Orgoglio is derived from the Greek root of the word meaning "to be swollen with lust." He is associated with wind and earth, revealing himself to be a parody of man's creation by the breath of life (*FQ* 93n). Craig notes that he is born of "Gea," earth, a symbol of pride. Orgoglio suggests the Greek, "orgaein": to swell, to teem, and "orgé": wrath, passion, as well as the Italian "orgoglio," meaning pride (323).

In answer to this, propaganda attempted to replace the lost transcendental powers of the word. It is a form that creates an image of visual and linguistic certainty and domination. Propaganda promotes certain discourses, enabling and also limiting what can be said, spoken or interpreted. However, as with censorship, its manipulations are not immune from reinterpretation. Because it bases its potency in the seemingly "semi-magical" value of the word, any damage it receives through linguistic and interpretational deformation is felt more strongly. Official treaties, portraits and state proclamations detailed who was in power and the powers they could wield. Each of the portraits of Elizabeth I was a form of ideology, visually and symbolically powerful and carefully constructed.[75] Her Rainbow Portrait (c.1600-03, possibly by Marcus Gheeraerts or Isaac Oliver) now hanging at Hatfield House (Fischlin 175-76) is a fine example of Elizabethan propaganda (see fig. 9). Elizabeth is depicted in regal finery; her gown of eyes and ears announces that she sees and hears everything. She grasps the rainbow's beams, an image of her goddess-like power and brilliance. Just as a rainbow was sent as an image of God's forgiveness following the flood in Genesis, so Elizabeth's handling of the rainbow proves her divinity and her peaceful control of all secular and spiritual elements within her

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[75] I touch on the visual elements of allegory frequently in this chapter. The visual is highly important to allegorical imaging. A more thorough exploration of allegory and the visual takes place in chapter five.

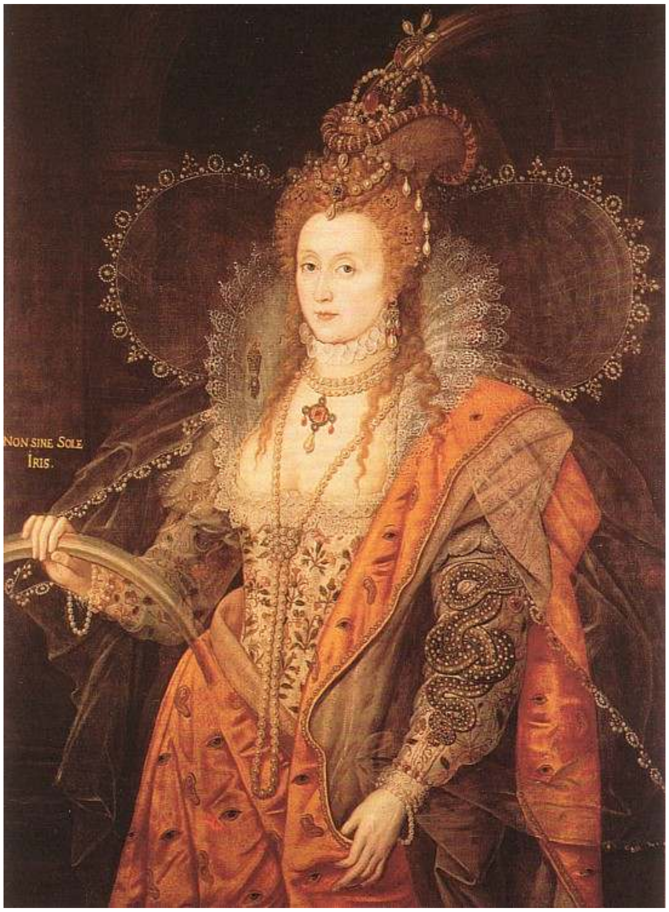

Fig. 9 *The Rainbow Portrait*, by Marcus Gheeraerts or Isaac Oliver
Hatfield House. Reproduction is by courtesy of the Marquess of Salisbury

kingdom.[76] All symbols – jewels, silks, the ears and eyes upon her gown, her eternal beauty and the rainbow – serve to reinforce her omnipotence and divinely appointed power (Fischlin 180-86, 193-96). The inscription to her portrait reads *Non sine sole iris* ("There is no rainbow without the sun"). This motto serves to reinforce the political and ideological messages within the painting, like that of an emblem (Bath 10). Without Elizabeth's divine light or guidance, there is no rainbow, no harmony and beauty. She is the point upon which all eyes are fixed, and towards which all things grow and revolve. The combination of picture and word makes this propaganda even more powerful, while also being akin to the "figurative" workings of allegory. Layers of meaning have been overlaid, creating a textured pattern of compounded signification that is visually and mentally arresting.[77] This is meant to be so. Elizabeth makes an allegory of herself.[78] Through her visual presentation she gives her subjects a taste of her overarching power. Such potent images were necessary to the Queen, holding the highest position of state. Her carefully selected allegorical images served as a bulwark against the threat of slippery linguistic and imagistic shape-shifting.[79]

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[76] For more on Elizabeth's self-promotion and self representation see Strong, *The Cult of Elizabeth*; A.L. Montrose's articles on Elizabeth I, especially "Idols of the Queen" and "The Elizabethan Subject and the Spenserian Text"; and Cain, *Praise in The Faerie Queene*.

As much as Elizabeth's powerful portraits enthral the viewer, they imply an earnest tension concerning the meaning of images and words. Louis Adrian Montrose's research describes the climate of anxiety and surveillance in which Elizabeth conducted her self-promotion. Her regime sought to make all visual representations conform to approved models. Woodcuts deemed too unskilful to do justice to her features were suppressed. In 1596 a proclamation was ordered for the collection and destruction of unofficial likenesses that might be objectionable to the Queen's person (Montrose, "Idols" 108-09). Elizabeth's status as monarch endowed words and images with semi-divine eminence. Yet this social standing required continual cultivation and defence. Anything construed as an attack was strictly punished. Montrose writes that an assault or defacement of the Queen's picture and royal arms was not merely a gesture of hostility towards the established church and person of the Queen, but "it epitomised an assault against the entire existing socio-political fabric" (Montrose, "Idols" 113). It was seen to pose a threat to the very principle of hierarchical order for which perpetrators could face charges of treason

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[77] See Roberts on allegory in *The Faerie Queene* in his study of the same name 16-26, 73-74.
[78] For more on the notion that Elizabeth cultivates an allegorical aura see Mulcaster's account of her coronation and her speeches to parliament in *Elizabeth I Collected Works*, Marcus et al., 53-55, 59, 70-72, 325-26. See also Pendergast, *Religion, Allegory and Literacy* 136-37 and D.L. Miller, *The Poem's Two Bodies* 121-29.
[79] For more on the ideological and political threats to the Queen through word and image, see A.L. Montrose, "Idols of the Queen" 108-61; and Raymond, *Pamphlets and Pamphleteering* 47.

(Montrose, "Idols" 115). This atmosphere explains why Elizabeth's "Rainbow Portrait" is so visually arresting. She justifies and defends herself using images and words, overlaying detail after detail to create an over-determined representation of herself in order to reinforce her status. Making an allegory of herself, she expresses and transforms her literal powers into transcendental metaphors of greatness. Not only is she a woman, she is England, protector and guardian of the people. She is both human and divine, an ambassador for God and a goddess; she is maternal, a sexual creature and a virgin. This portrait and the previous textual examples I have discussed show that allegory has been appropriated to lead to certain readings. However, the more figures and presentations Elizabeth associates with herself, the more her image may be variously interpreted. Attempting to stabilise and cultivate the appearance of power using allegorical propaganda, the Queen also emphasises the extent to which allegorical images and connotations can shift and change.

Allegory is malleable. It does not promote fixed and stable meanings, but rather encourages a range of interpretation. Allegory may be exploited by those in power, and yet it can work to undermine authority. Spenser takes many of the Queen's representational images, placing them within *The Faerie Queene* in order seemingly to extol Elizabeth through likenesses to Gloriana, Belphoebe, Una and Britomart. His poem is a powerful text of praise which utilises the very allegorical discourses Elizabeth's government promoted.[80] However, as we shall see in chapter three, his allegorical interpretation of the Queen is as critical as it is complimentary.

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[80] See the following for examples of the many parallels drawn with, and praising, Elizabeth I: *FQ* Proem 1.4, 1.1.3, 1.7.30, 1.9.13-16, 1.12.21-23, Proem 2.4-5, 2.2.40-42, 2.3.22-43, 2.9.18-20, 2.10.76, Proem 3.5, 3.2.3. For a close study of reflections or representations of Elizabeth in *The Faerie Queene*, see Cain, *Praise in The Faerie Queene*. See also articles by: Bellamy, "The Vocative and the Vocational: The Unreadability of Elizabeth in *The Faerie Queene*" 1-30; J.M. Walker, "Spenser's Elizabeth Portrait and the Fiction of Dynastic Epic" 172-99; and P.J. Benson, "Rule Virginia: Protestant Theories of Female Regiment in *The Faerie Queene*" 277-92. We will look more at Spenser's handling and praise of Elizabeth in chapter three.

Spenser uses allegory's malleable dexterity to convey alternative reading of his monarch, undermining her carefully crafted discourses of power.

As seen in analysis of Elizabeth's portrait, methods of censorship and propaganda hinge upon interpretation. Suttie makes a pertinent point which highlights not only allegory's flexibility, but its close relation to readers' responses, which are themselves flexible and liable to shift:

> Allegorical literature … is in essence a form of writing that anticipates being *interpreted* allegorically, and that tries to govern the direction interpretations take by giving would-be commentators a framework of self-interpretation on which to build. The question is with what authority that self-interpretation is made. (*Self-Interpretation* 4)

Allegory has been used as a tool to manipulate the meaning of texts, moulding them into versions which accord with those in authority. However, Suttie's argument points to the issue of reader interpretation which lies at the heart not only of allegory but of language itself. No text, however authoritative, may be free from reinterpretation and counter-opinion. Jason Snart sums up the dynamic relationship between language, texts and their readers. "No text can assume full authority because it has to be read and interpreted by readers. For a text to assume authority, it must usurp the power of readerly interpretation" (49). Hence the Queen's strenuous, detailed and over-determined focus upon her self-promotion, and the many marginal glosses featured throughout the Geneva Bible which attempt to direct and contain even as it encourages individual interpretation under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Controls upon the written or spoken word can only be tentative and provisional. This notion of the fluidity of language and reader interpretation was not only felt by those in authority. It challenged the very concept of authorial control and the status of the text itself. The appropriation and appreciation of this mutability is characteristic of Spenser and Blake's verse and, most importantly, their construction and presentation of allegory.

## "Sharpen my dull tong": Spenser's allegory and the anxiety of interpretation

Many critics have noted Spenser's acute awareness of linguistic ambiguity. Language is used to name, to create, to define, and yet it is playful, unstable and evolving (Giamatti, *Double Senses* 106). Giamatti argues that Spenser saw a doubleness of meaning everywhere as words deform and reform, repair and impair, pair and divide, ruin and restore (*Double Senses* 107, 116).[81] As Frye comments, one of Spenser's overriding concerns was with the problem of distinguishing illusion from truth in a context in which deception and double images abound. Spenser highlights and problematises this concept through allegorical doublings of character: Una with her false counterpart in the first canto of Book One, Duessa; the true and false Florimells; Bonfort who by slip of a syllable becomes Malfort; and of course, the poet as image-maker and Archimago, the maker of false images.[82] Spenser alerts his reader to this final pairing through verbal parallels. In the proem to the first book, the poet/narrator announces himself, calling to the muse to "sharpen my dull tong" (*FQ* Proem 1.2) and enable him to convey his woven text of words. This phrase is later reiterated in relation to Archimago who "of pleasing wordes had store, / And well could file his tongue as smooth as glas" (*FQ* 1.1.35). The comparison highlights the extent to which uses of very similar meanings call for very different interpretations. While the poet/narrator appeals for inspiration to aid the telling of his tale, the image of Archimago filing his tongue is sinister and calls to mind the sharpening of a knife. Spenser thus prompts his readers to compare the poet with the magician. The former relies upon his readers' engagement for poetical magic to take place, while the latter's magic relies on actively deluding characters using demonic incarnations.[83] Archimago employs the same methods as the poet but for different purposes.[84] Both are arch-image makers, crafting "feigned" metaphors and parabolic doublings (Deneef 99). As I will explain later, even Spenser is guilty of deluding his readers in order to generate an active reader response which works towards enlightenment. Both the poet and the magician are culpable for creating imaginative fictions and both will be judged by their readers.

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[81] For other critics who comment on Spenser's self-conscious exploitation of the doubleness of language, see Norbrook, *Poetry and Politics* 111; Gregerson, *The Reformation of the Subject* 3.

[82] Etymologically *Una* means "one." Her name stands for truth or wholeness. She is named at *FQ* 1.1.45 only when her double appears (*FQ* 41n). Duessa stands for doubleness or duplicity, especially in relation to Una, and in her deceitful presentation to Redcross as "Fidessa" (*FQ* 1.2.26; *FQ* 48-49n).

Deneef argues that by producing his doubles, Spenser creates internal dialogues throughout his poem, fictional antagonists with whom he debates and through whom he defends himself and his texts (13). In an era when the word was seen to be shifting and potentially deceptive, Spenser doubts his own language and the reader's ability to "read rightly" (Deneef 13). Creating a parallel with Archimago, the poet highlights his own positive transforming powers by the illumination and denigration of Archimago's wicked ones (Deneef 99). The stripping of Duessa, Archimago's partner in witchcraft, reveals the extent to which her beauty is feigned. The reader is forced to see a disgusting form which has been well masked by magic. Instead of the gorgeously alluring woman who seduced Redcross, her "misshaped parts" are revealed: "A loathly, wrinckled hag, ill fauoured, old, / Whose secret filth good manners biddeth not be told" (*FQ* 1.8.46). This passage encourages a reassessment of Duessa, and the extent to which magical powers of linguistic description disguised her and led us to believe that she was beautiful. Yet, although Spenser reveals her hellish duplicity, we cannot see her "true" form. Duessa's witchcraft allows for readers to believe falsely that she is defeated, when in fact she returns at the end of Book One and later in books Four and Five (*FQ* 1.12.24-28, 4.1.17-18, 5.9.36-50). We are left uncertain as to her "true" appearance. Her ambiguous creation (as the "daughter of Deceipt and Shame" [*FQ* 1.5.26]) adds to our awareness of her illusory nature. She is one of many allegories in *The Faerie Queene* warning, somewhat ironically, against the supernatural power of words. As Deneef says, Spenser is drawing our attention to the fact that language shifts in shape, highlighting his and our need to attempt to control it through close analysis of the text.[85] However, this is easier said than done. Archimago, the most dangerous antagonist in the first books of the poem, continually escapes all confines. Spenser's characters cannot contain him despite binding him "hand and foote with yron chaines" and though they "with continual watch did warely keepe" (*FQ* 1.12.36). Archimago may be seen as an allegory of the reader's creative imagination, embodying the extent to which Spenser cannot control his reader's varied interpretations. In Archimago, the poet, the text and the reader are inextricably bound in the struggle to read, decipher, and control meaning in poetic allegorical language.

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[83] D. Douglas Waters in "Errour's Den and Archimago's Hermitage: Symbolic Lust and Symbolic Witchcraft," argues that Archimago has traditionally been interpreted as the hypocrisy of the Roman Catholic Church, which sixteenth-century English religious literature associated with the power and craft of the devil (280). This point is reiterated in Archimago's use of the forces of "deepe darknes dredd" to "forge true-seeming lyes" and create a "shamelesse" incarnation of Una, who beneath her black stole, hides "her bayted hooke" (*FQ* 1.1.38, 50, 49).

[84] Archimago's name is from Latin *archi* and *magus*, the first or chief magician, or the "great Enchaunter" (*FQ* 1.2 Arg) as he is frequently named; he is the architect or source of false images (*FQ* 41n). See "Archimago" in the *Spenser Encyclopaedia* 53-54 and in Nohrnberg, 103-30.

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[85] Carol Kaske in "Surprised by Puritanism" (Special Session 151 MLA 30 December 1980, 2) makes a pertinent point that Spenser attempts to control the interpretation of his text through a process she calls "correctio" – a means by which Spenser corrects and then re-corrects his text, countering or adjusting to ways in which his audience may view it. Acrasia "was arayd, or rather disarayd" in her alluring pose upon silks in the Bower of Bliss (*FQ* 2.12.77). Kaske's theory is important to understanding Spenser and his self-conscious and defensive attitude towards language (Gilman 81). Likewise, the Arguments summarising each canto are often shown to be inaccurate by the events that follow, as if the poem goes on to correct the summary written before. This process of re-correction is important to Spenser's allegorical text, showing it to be full of the energy of marring, effacing and scoring, principles that encourage the reader to look at the poem anew.

## The biting tongue of the Blatant Beast

Archimago is representative of Spenser's stance on allegory in the first books of *The Faerie Queene*. He is reflective of the difficulty of reading and the fact that, while misreading is inevitable, the truth may be reached eventually, with effort and patience. Words do make a difference and they hold their value and worth. This is expressly shown at the end of Book One, when Archimago, via a messenger bearing a letter containing "bitter byting wordes" (*FQ* 1.12.29), attempts to cast doubt on Redcross's reputation in front of Una's parents and their court (*FQ* 1.12.28-29). Redcross successfully defends himself, revealing that he was a victim of the magic and deceit of Archimago and his accomplice, Duessa. He goes on to marry Una, his reputation untainted. His case proves that despite slander and defamation, truth can prevail. This episode is characteristic of the tone of Spenser's allegory in these first three books. They retain a hopeful optimism. However, in the later books of the poem, the allegory alters and shifts, becoming darker in implication. Like Archimago in books One and Two, the Blatant Beast becomes the figure in books Five and Six for the slippery and potentially treacherous nature of allegorical language.[86] In these later books, however, Spenser represents the triumph rather than the overcoming of slander, as it destroys reputations and the distinction between truth and falsity. The implication is that however hard we work to interpret the text, we cannot be sure that we can discover the truth. The change in Spenser's allegory was undoubtedly due to the darkening religious and political outlook of the mid 1590s, the death of personal, political and religious allies, the ruin of reputations, and the realisation that religious reform was untenable (King, *Spenser's Poetry* 11-12; Rambuss 106-16). The result is a shift in Spenser's allegory towards a more cynical tone in books Five and Six, whereby quests are abandoned or left uncompleted and characters never recover from their rankling wounds. The Blatant Beast is figurative of the ruined integrity of the word.

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[86] The name Blatant Beast comes from Latin *blatero*, *blaterare*, meaning "to bable in vayne, to clatter out of measure"; or *bateratus* meaning "barking"; or from the English "blatter" meaning "to speak or prate volubly" (*FQ* 599n; *OED* s.v. blatant, def. 1.a).

The Beast is part of an internal dialogue that runs counter to the discourse of Justice and Courtesy. He and his compatriots can be seen to provide an alternative viewpoint, highlighting the limitations of Artegall and Calidore's objectives. At the end of Book Five, Enuie and Detraction curse Artegall,

> Saying, that he had with vnmanly guile,
> And foule abusion both his honour blent,
> And that bright sword, the sword of Iustice lent,
> Had stayned with reprochfull crueltie,
> In guiltless blood of many an innocent (*FQ* 5.12.40)

Instead of simply being slanderous, these pointed words may be true. Artegall's "unmanliness" may refer to his capture and imprisonment by Radigund, dressed in "womanishe attire" (*FQ* 5.7.37), requiring Britomart's rescue. It may also refer to the fact that he allows Talus to carry out all forms of punishment on his behalf, or that he lets go of his shield when fighting Grandtorto in order to prevent defeat (*FQ* 5.12.22). His "reprochfull crueltie" is revealed throughout the book in Talus's unmerciful wielding of justice. The "crueltie" shown towards the "guiltless blood of many an innocent" (reminiscent of the Reformation martyrs) is perhaps the most pertinent revelation when one regards Book Five as an allegory of English colonisation and enforced reformation in sixteenth-century Ireland. What Artegall believes is slander of the highest order is another voice interpreting his actions within the poem. This form of outspoken dialogue highlights the extent to which allegories promote multiple interpretive possibilities. Spenser's verse builds in the awareness that a reader's response cannot be completely contained and controlled, and therefore must be educated by allegorical examples. The Blatant Beast finally becomes the most prominent enemy within the poem, reflecting the poet's awareness – and perhaps fear – of the extremes to which words can be taken and meaning distorted and deformed.

The Beast's "thousand tongues" pierce and ruin reputations (*FQ* 6.1.9). He is a roving allegory for the combined dangers of words and human spite. As Kenneth Gross says, he is a demon of slander (*Shakespeare's Noise* 34). Like Archimago and the poet, his power lies in his sharply pointed "tongue" or "tong." Words may be social weapons, tongues, sharply filed swords. The Beast's "grisly wound," "rankling" his victims, barely heals, being prone to weeping and re-opening (*FQ* 6.3.27, 6.4.9). "But that same Ladies hurts no herbe he found, / Which could redresse, for it was inwardly unsound" (*FQ* 6.4.16). His victims suffer without the hope of a definite cure. Their disease is defamation, the ravaging of their reputation by the spread of gossip and slurs. Reputations are built upon what is said, but what is said depends on unstable, shifting words. This is yet another example in Spenser's poem of the deforming/reforming nature of words. Like the blood which cannot be washed from Ruddymane's tiny hands, a tainted reputation struggles to recover. Spenser's Beast likes to babble, destroying with "his vile tongue … many causelesse caused to be blamed" as he propels himself through the poem (*FQ* 6.12.38). Like Archimago, he slips through Calidore's grasp: he "broke his yron chaine, / And got into the world at liberty againe" (*FQ* 6.12.38). Spenser notes that he is now free to cause more "mischiefe" and "scath" (*FQ* 6.12.39):

> He growen is so great and strong of late,
>
> . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
>
> Ne spareth he most learned wits to rate,

> Ne spareth he the gentle Poets rime,
> But rends without regard of person or of time. (*FQ* 6.12.40)

The Beast escapes from his captors to roam, we feel, in the world itself. The implication is that he has made it into our world. His flight is a warning to readers of the potential deceit abounding within allegorical language. The reference to "gentle Poets" reflects Spenser's acute awareness of the ways in which his poem may be read and the means by which he may be judged as poet. He had risen through government ranks in Ireland to accumulate substantial property and land,[87] and while he was recognised as the author of *The Shepheards Calender* and the 1590 *Faerie Queene*, Spenser knew that his comparative fame would leave him open to the sharp tongues of critics and readers.

The last few stanzas of Book Six reveal that Spenser felt the threat of the Blatant Beast very strongly. He uses the Beast as another means to highlight the deformation of language in society while attempting to warn readers against it. The only way to escape slander is through the banishment of words, the loss of language.[88] Yet language is an innate part of human life. We cannot ban speaking and writing, and therefore the Beast remains at large. Despite censorship and propaganda, language and its many "thousand tongues" continue to babble. Kenneth Gross states that if "the interest in slander becomes so heightened in the Renaissance, it is because the nature of our human attachment to 'name and fame' itself becomes more urgent and vexed at this moment" (*Shakespeare's Noise* 41). The more fame or power one has, the more one is vulnerable to slander. Hence Elizabeth's carefully cultivated and guarded self-presentation.

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[87] Spenser acquired the Kilcolman estate and 3000 acres of land in 1589 through his work in Ireland. He became an established planter and gentleman (*FQ* xv; Kaske 210; Oram 25).

[88] Neither the Salvage nor the Hermit speaks a comprehensible language in the poem and yet they are the ones caring for figures bitten by the Beast. It seems that they are immune to taints of defamation and slander as they cannot comprehend or speak the language. These characters show nobility despite their poverty, perhaps reflecting Spenser's frustration with circles of rank and power in the English court who appear corrupt, as seen by their susceptibility both to defame and to be defamed by slander.

Spenser recognised the importance of guarding both his personal and his poetical reputation. The Blatant Beast's biting of Timias is Spenser's allegorical reflection of the workings of slander upon a personal friend within the Elizabethan court. Timias, Prince Arthur's squire, is generally held to represent Sir Walter Raleigh. The squire's pining love for Belphoebe (another figuration for the Queen) in Book Three, canto five, parallels poetry written by Walter (nicknamed "Water") to the Queen, as seen in his poem *The Ocean to Cynthia* (c. 1592) (Berry 146-50). Aiding Timias, Belphoebe finds "Tobacco" to heal his wounds (*FQ* 3.5.32).[89] Later, Timias's biting by the Blatant Beast with "tooth impure" (*FQ* 6.5.16) leaves a wound that "rankling inward," "festred priuily" (*FQ* 6.6.5). Timias's sores allegorically reflect Raleigh's fall in 1592, after he secretly married Elizabeth Throckmorton, maid of honour to Elizabeth I, without the Queen's permission. Factions at court, among them Raleigh's rival for Elizabeth's affection, Robert Devereux the second Earl of Essex, delighted in spreading rumours of the scandal in hopes of filling the gap left by his downfall. Despite being allowed to conduct further voyages in the search for "El – Dorado" in the later 1590s, Raleigh's reputation never completely recovered (Nicholls, *ODNB*). His "ranckling" wounds were cut deeper by the Queen's jealousy, his public humiliation, and the fact that he had served his monarch loyally in all but his personal desire. The Beast had got the better of him. Not only were his private affairs made public in the form of "scandal," but his social standing was poisoned through the spread of rumour and gossip that followed his banishment. Spenser, who knew Raleigh and travelled with him from Ireland to London and was grateful to him for advice on his poetry and an invitation to court in 1590, would have been saddened and troubled by his friend's fall.[90] Spenser implies that the powers of the Beast are everywhere. All those who are open to rumour, who delight in scurrility, who use their ears and mouths to bend and twist words in manipulative ways – all these are blatant beasts (Gross, *Shakespeare's Noise* 36, 41). His poem portrays the Blatant Beast as bringing out the beast in human beings: tongues, words, ears and eyes are their currency and their biting poison. All truth is lost in the babbling mayhem.

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[89] This detail, of course, links Timias to Raleigh as he first brought tobacco to England following his voyages to the New World in 1585 and 1587, making the practice of smoking popular at court (Nicholls, *ODNB*; *FQ* 336-7n).

Yet, as we have seen in Detraction's comments to Artegall, defamation is not merely about reputation, it is closely bound to the interpretation of words and texts. Raleigh's fate lay at the mercy of his Queen, but Spenser's work lies in the hands of his readers: "*bon* that once had written bin / Was raced out, and *Mal* was now put in" (*FQ* 5.9.26). One syllable makes all the difference. Spenser is aware that what was good may now be viewed as bad. It is as if he is predicting the way his poetry will be received by future readers. Reputation was important to Spenser, as his conscious awareness of allegorical language shows. However, interpretation is of the highest priority, and this is where the reformation of reading may take place. Although I agree with much of Deneef's study, Spenser's greatest defence against misreading is not his self-protective stance towards language. Rather it is his encouragement of active interpretation, and the awareness that misreading may be a creative process of learning.

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[90] See Erickson, "Spenser's Letter to Ralegh and the Literary Politics of *The Faerie Queene*'s 1590 Publication." Erickson argues that Raleigh and Spenser spent time together in Ireland in the summer of 1589. Raleigh then returned to court "with Spenser in [the] fall." He was "a fellow poet who perhaps knew more about *The Faerie Queene* in 1589 than anyone except the author" (143-45).

### “Be bolde … but not too bolde”: allegorical re-reading as relearning

Spenser does more than consciously defend his text and his arguments. He tests his readers with his textured allegorical figures, doublings and continued scoring, erasing and correcting of cantos and scenes (King, *Spenser’s Poetry* 68; Gilman 81).[91] Using these methods, he highlights the malleability of the text and its confusing mixture of truth and illusions. His doubles deliberately problematise the reading process (Norbrook 111). He seeks to prompt his readers towards a closer scrutiny of words and allegorical language. Spenser realises that he cannot control reader interpretation, but he can work towards educating it through the experience of misreading and the encouragement of active reader engagement. He wants readers to misinterpret in order to relearn and come towards reformed and thereby more enlightened readings of the poem. Both Spenser and Blake’s allegory is focused upon the processes of reading and re-reading. We need to pause and ask what it meant to “read” in Spenser’s era, and what reading constitutes.

The Blatant Beast, Archimago and the poet associate words with “tongues” or “tongs,” suggesting that the verb “*to read*” in the sixteenth century, an era in which fewer people were literate, was more commonly associated with spoken rather than written practices. As with Spenser’s spelling of “tong” or “tongue,” the verb “*to read*” had many spelling variants: *reede*, *reade*, *read*, *reed*, *rede* and *red* (Ferry 9). The verb comes from the Old English *raedan*, meaning to advise or explain (*OED* s.v. read, def. 1.a.; Ferry 10). According to definitions available in Spenser’s era, the verb’s meanings incorporated many different acts of comprehending, including: to consider, interpret, discern, guess, make out, see, distinguish, take for something, or discover the meaning of (Ferry 10).[92] Spenser exploits the possibilities inherent in this verb in *The Faerie Queene*, highlighting the word's importance to the workings of the text and the processes of reader-understanding and engagement. Una jolts the reader's attention with her cry, "I read beware" (*FQ* 1.1.13), and the text prompts both Britomart and the reader with the words: "*Be bolde*, *be bolde*, and euery where *Be bold*," yet "*Be not too bold*" (*FQ* 3.11.54). The reader must be both assertive and cautious when deciphering the text. Anne Ferry notes that there are over one hundred occurrences of the verb "*to read*" in the poem, but only a small number have the word's modern meaning, the comprehension of writing (12). By means of this verb, Spenser gives priority to the spoken and heard, rather than to the written language. He is paying reverence to the older meanings of this word, and yet he is also attempting to make his readers read more thoroughly and actively. Deneef notes that Spenser uses the verb "*to read*" when most of the actions he describes could be rendered more literally by the verb "*to see*" (147). Yet Spenser's usage is deliberate in highlighting his text's allegorical purpose. As we shall see with Blake, Spenser is challenging his readers to use the full scope of reading. He prompts the reader imaginatively to engage all levels of cognitive perception in understanding his text. He invites his readers to listen patiently to the words and to think carefully about what the words are communicating before speaking back. Spenser's verb "*to read*" is a metaphor for his use of allegory, as all observations are metaphorical acts of reading. Reading here means discerning, and demonstrates by narrative analogy a method of reading the allegory of the text itself (Deneef 147). In focusing upon the process of reading, Spenser wants the reader to read the text anew.

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[91] This is a process known as “correctio,” and attributed to Carol Kaske. The Garden of Adonis may be read as a scene which corrects the Bower of Bliss, the House of Holiness may correct the House of Pride, and so on. This process of scoring the text calls to mind Blake’s literal scoring as he purposefully engraves his illuminated poems. Like Spenser, he often erases words and images, as seen by gaps in the final text which indicate where words once were. See the Frontispiece to *Jerusalem* (Fig 15). This plate originally contained inscriptions on the wall and archway, which were subsequently deleted or “walled up” and lines of engraving cut into the shapes of bricks or stones (Erdman, *Illuminated* 280).

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[92] Spenser was one of the first to initiate many meanings of the verb "to read," according to the *OED*. See *OED* s.v. read, v., def. 1.b., def. 1.c., def. 2.b., def. 4.a.

This renewed sense of reading, while possibly suggesting an anxiety for the ways in which texts are read, acknowledges that there is no such thing as a "pure" or "correct" interpretation of any text. Suttie notes that there can be no "right" reading of an allegorical manuscript: "The self-interpreting work actually divides itself against itself in such a way as to render its meaning impossible to totalise" (*Self-Interpretation* 9). Like Blake's, Spenser's work resists neat and fixed critical summaries (Deneef 175-76). Since the verbal medium opposes tight control, his work must be viewed in terms of being an ongoing allegorical process of sustained and careful creating and recreating by both the poet and the reader. Spenser's allegory tests us, and we in turn must discover its revelations. Spenser's greatest lesson to his reader is not automatically to trust our first reaction to the word. It is best to begin with caution and to work through the text slowly and perceptively in order to see and decipher its guiding images.[93] Nothing is sure that grows on earthly ground. The reader must be resigned to being a student, forever learning the dramatic potential of language.

Only by attending closely to the question of what "really" happens in the experience of *The Faerie Queene*'s characters can we understand the way the poem works as allegory (Suttie, *Self-Interpretation* 38). Yet comprehending the literal action of the poem can be difficult. Arthur and Timias's erotic lesions (*FQ* 1.9.7; 3.5.42) are mixtures of bodily and metaphorical wounding (*FQ* 3.5.48-49). Likewise, Cupid is both metaphorical (*FQ* 3.2.26ff) and a character in a fiction (*FQ* 3.12.21-22).

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[93] Roberts's study of *The Faerie Queene* highlights the extent to which readers potentially make false assumptions. We assume when first meeting Redcross that his armour is his own, when in fact it is borrowed (13-14). Although Redcross "seemd" a "Full iolly knight," a close study of the language reveals that this is the first time he has worn the armour, despite the dented and "cruel" marks of battle it bears (*FQ* 1.1.1).

Suttie notes that these instances are challenging to interpret allegorically because it is highly difficult to be clear about what is happening in them on a "literal level" (*Self-Interpretation* 37). Reading *The Faerie Queene*, Spenser's student must be aware of the fact that language is being used in multiple ways, figuratively, literally and metaphorically. This method challenges the reader to analyse and interpret flexibly, being open to textual shifts and realignments. As we shall see with Blake, Spenser is encouraging readers to interpret with minds open to the possibilities of textual transformation.

Suttie's study of self-interpretation in *The Faerie Queene* focuses particularly on Book One as highlighting the extent to which both Redcross and the reader potentially misread. The last six cantos of the book convey a much more negative depiction of the knight, undermining the first six cantos, and problematising the text's moral significance so that the book as a whole divides itself against itself (Suttie, *Self-Interpretation* 58). Redcross initially vanquishes Error and defeats Sansfoy, suggesting that he has overcome the faults of error and faithlessness. However, having done this, he wanders from Una, displaying his increasing infidelity towards her while erroneously succumbing to the wiles of Duessa. Just as Redcross believes himself to be forging a path for "right" (*FQ* 1.5.8-9), he is shown to be taking wrong turns. He ends up caught in Despaire's snare, a "fraile, feeble, fleshly wight," having erred both in his self-belief and in the faith he owes to God (*FQ* 1.9.53). The narrative is difficult and runs exactly contrary to our assumptions, reinforced by its wilfully self-misinterpreting protagonist (Roberts 14). A passive reader may well accept the tale without questioning Redcross's actions, and therefore, like him, be led down error's path. However, perceptive and actively engaged readers will recognise that the book's apparent coherence as a moral narrative completely depends on ignoring the contrary evidence which the knight himself overlooks in choosing his course of action (Suttie, *Self-Interpretation* 65). Spenser is again using his allegorical characters to test his reader's capacity for reformed reading.

We can even see this technique in the case of Una, a character whom we may assume can do no wrong. Suttie carefully notes that she is not only deluded by Archimago in accepting his hospitality (*FQ* 1.1.32-33), she also believes his impersonation of Redcross to be true (*FQ* 1.3.30) (*Self-Interpretation* 69). Again, Spenser is emphasising to his readers the danger of appearances and their potential falsity. If Una can be caught out than anyone can. Only much later in the book, after recognising Duessa's falsehood, does Una start to behave in ways more compatible with her own allegorical association with "Truth" (Suttie, *Self-Interpretation* 69). Una is a figure warning against our own assumption that truth will automatically be self-evident within the text. Instead, like her, we have actively to seek it. Throughout Book One, she is unwaveringly true to her knight and this is where her truth stands out most prominently. Despite his abandonment of her, she continually comes to Redcross's aid. She does not even blame him for running away from her, but instead accuses Duessa of bewitching him (*FQ* 1.7.50). Una is completely loyal to her knight, even if the justifications of her faith in him border on being wrong. However, readers must learn from her example that no signification is automatically given and fixed. Rather the opposite. Spenser's allegory uses common assumptions in order to work against them. Although allegory has been associated with personification and seemingly one-to-one equations, Spenser's allegorical method works against this supposition. Instead of “this *for* that” allegory, *The Faerie Queene* (and the texts of Blake, as we shall see) work towards a “this *and* that” interpretation.[94]

Jeff Dolven builds upon Suttie’s work, emphasising that reader experience is important to the didactic capacity of the text and the correction of misreading. He argues that Spenser’s text is a self-conscious commentary on ways and means of reading. However, Dolven argues for Spenser’s distrust of conventional sixteenth-century didactic modes, such as learning from memory, experience, punishment and example.[95] He argues that Spenser refuses to teach in a conventional way, but does so by “staging and sabotaging a wide variety of didactic protocols” (Dolven 234). I class Spenser’s seeming distrust of the practices of learning with his cautious treatment of language as a whole. Spenser, like Blake, distrusted all forms which appealed to an authoritative and totalising view of the world. Therefore, I would agree with Dolven that Spenser is cautious about methods of teaching and learning, but by problematising these methods, he aims towards new ways of viewing and experiencing the text. This, even Dolven admits, is a form of teaching by means of the “un-learning” of conventional viewpoints and assumptions.[96] Like Suttie, Dolven highlights the extent to which Redcross struggles to learn from his textual experiences, which in turn prompts the reader to attempt to do so. When escaping from the House of Pride, Redcross flees using a “privy Posterne” (*FQ* 1.5.52-53).

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[94] Suttie works with these phrases to highlight shifting uses and attitudes towards allegory from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries. The phrases also play upon the expansive nature of Spenser’s verse, which, as Suttie shows, is far from static and fixed in meaning but rather, encourages self-interpretation (*Self-Interpretation* 14-29).

[95] Dolven argues that from the 1560s onwards there was a rising tide of dissatisfaction with the methods of humanist teaching, and especially with the methods by which students where taught to read (8). This observation adds weight to Spenser’s distrust of words. Perhaps it is best to conclude that shifting etymological perspectives during the sixteenth century were disrupting previously known and trusted beliefs and assumptions. This was certainly the case for religion, and increasingly so in the study of the natural world, and later in social revolutions which overthrew the monarchy in the 1640s.

[96] See Dolven, 234. In forming a written and comprehensive text, it is almost impossible for Spenser’s poem not to teach. I argue that in deliberately problematising the reading process and misleading reader assumptions, Spenser is attempting a complete reassessment of the way in which we read and comprehend the written word.

Dolven notes his exit is “alimentary: it is as though Redcross were being shot out of the shameful end of the House of Pride” (146). Noting this, Dolven goes on:

> This indigestion goes directly to the question of what the knight has learned, for digestion is the favourite humanist trope for assimilating new knowledge. Here that trope is wilfully inverted. Not only does Redcross not digest what has been shown to him in this space, but the promise of his understanding is turned inside out, and he is discharged from his own experience as matter that is inassimilable, untransformable, and above all, oblivious. This scene is a perfect opposite, a perfect travesty of learning. (146)

But we, as readers, can learn from Redcross’s failure to learn. We have to recognise his misreading and through his error reform our own. Spenser recognises that providing a perfectly polished and faultless character would not necessarily aid learning. It is only through the characters’ and by implication, the readers’ potential faults and mistakes that learning may take place and wrongs be corrected. This in turn leads to re-reading. We may stray far from an intended interpretation in reading *The Faerie Queene*, but once we recognise that we are on the wrong path, we can go back, retrace our reading and thereby come to a renewed version of the text. This Spenser, through his rather difficult syntax and his many examples, encourages us to do: “*Be bolde*, *be bolde*,” yet “*Be not too bold*” (*FQ* 3.11.54).

Britomart’s struggle to comprehend the meaning of these words is clear. She reads them, “Yet could not find what sence it figured” (*FQ* 3.11.50, 54). Her re-reading parallels our own. She “backward cast her busie eye … oft and oft it ouer-red” (*FQ* 3.11.50). Yet she and Redcross cannot always completely interpret the meaning of the words, characters and images surrounding them: “she muz’d, yet could not construe it” (*FQ* 3.11.54). Throughout the poem Spenser consistently provides examples of characters who fail to grasp the significance of the scenes before them. Guyon's intemperate destruction of the Bower of Bliss (*FQ* 12.12.84) in the final stanzas of the last canto of Book Two leads readers to question the basis of his temperance. Contrary voices in Book Five, including those of the Giant, Envie and Detraction, question the foundation of Artegall's "justice" (*FQ* 5.2.30-44, 5.12.40), and call upon readers to think carefully about the social and moral implications of justice and punishment. Images of the Bower of Bliss are erased and replaced with the apparent goodliness of the Garden of Adonis. Revelations at the top of Mount Contemplation counter scenes in the Cave of Despaire. The castle of Busirane is contrasted with Britomart's visions at Isis Church, which in turn is countered by the Amazonian Radigund's capture of Artegall. The muses dancing for Colin Clout on Mount Acidale are contrasted by Pastorella's capture, false worship and torment at the hands of the Brigands, whose underground den can be likened to the lair in which Persephone was kept by Hades. Symbols of pagan idolatry parody places of idealised vision (King, *Spenser's Poetry* 81).[97] The text is scored and re-marked. The reader is left to determine true from false, as scene amends and corrects scene, and canto replaces canto. Britomart's hesitation at the doorway within the brightly adorned halls of the House of Busirane parallels our own when confronted with the textured encyclopaedic detail of Spenser's allegorical language. And yet, while characters struggle to read the allegory, the reader is prompted to do it for them. Like Britomart, we may well hesitate, misread and take the wrong doorway. However, we have the chance to learn from our mistakes, knowing that to transform our ways of seeing and viewing the text is to grasp the fundamental principles of Spenser's allegory.

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[97] The structure of contrasting episodes of pagan and idealised visions parallels the structure of Revelation and reinforces the notion that the Book of Revelation did more to inspire Spenser's construction and use of allegory than is perhaps initially realised. King notes that the Blatant Beast's escape at the end of Book Six parallels the end of Revelation (20.7-10), suggesting that such a demonic escape must precede the final resolution at the end of time (*Spenser's Poetry* 81).

While Spenser cautions the reader not to be too bold, his allegory is filled with textual elements which aid readers in the process of learning. As with the Letter to Raleigh, and the Proems and Arguments to each Book and beginning every canto, the reader is provided with a summary of the action which may read against the manifest intention of the poem. In other words, like the Letter, these short sections of poetry often encourage the reader to assume meanings which are not conveyed, creating tensions between expectation and interpretation. Thus, in the Argument to canto one of Book One, Redcross is depicted as "The Patrone of true Holinesse," when in fact he has yet to acquire a state of spiritual piety. His description as a "faithfull knight" in the Arguments to canto five and four read against his actions as he abandons his true lady for Duessa (Duplicity) and enters the House of Pride. These four- line summaries are designed to aid and encourage readers to interrogate the composition of the poem, reading beyond stanzas, cantos and books to ascertain the full meaning of the text. The reader is guided and prompted to see beyond the surface of the text and appreciate the deeper significance of every word.

Spenser also uses the technique of correctio in order to continue the plot as seen in the transition between the 1590 and the 1596 *Faerie Queene*. Instead of keeping the original ending to Book Three and beginning a new tale in Book Four, Spenser re-represents the ending of Britomart's book of Chastity. As in Blake's frontispiece to *Jerusalem*, words are scored out and erased to make way for a new set of meanings. The text has been rearranged and "corrected." The original ending to Book Three is altered and its tone reversed, seemingly to allow for the plot to continue into the newly created Book Four. Instead of being joyfully reunited with Scudamore in reciprocal and passionate love, Amoret escapes from Busirane's grasp only to learn that Scudamore, filled with doubt, is gone and has abandoned her.

Spenser chose to rewrite this ending, leaving his characters in despair rather than in harmony. He thus forewarns the reader of darker tones ahead. Doubt rather than confidence characterises the atmosphere of the next three books, reflecting the shift in his allegory. This dark tone mirrors Spenser's increasing disillusion with the religious and political situation of the nation.[98] This change in ending reinforces the importance of careful re-reading to the comprehension and understanding of his text and highlights the extent to which the poet guides and prepares the reader for what is to come.

Let us now turn to discuss Blake's presentation of the allegorical process of reading within his poetry. As the writer, engraver and printer of his own work, Blake has more control over the material texture of his poetry than Spenser. This control allows him to create devices which enable him to express a form of self-consciousness that surpasses that of Spenser. Blake takes the self-conscious principles conveyed in Spenser's verse and pushes them in new directions through his unique use of words and images, as I will show.

### "A book that all may read": Blake's allegorical re-reading

The practice of reading is an important allegorical theme which also dominates Blake's work. Like Spenser, Blake's words require due attention and vigilant consideration. The bard in *Milton* repeatedly calls for the reader to "Mark well my words!," stressing the necessity for readers to assess Blake's language carefully (*M* 2.25). Nelson Hilton notes that Blake is sensitive to the bearing of letter configuration within his work, and this in turn prompts the reader to acquire new sensitivities to literal as well as metaphoric graphic signifiers (2-3). “[E]very word and every letter is studied and put into its fit place” (*J* 3.50-1); “poetry admits not a Letter that is Insignificant” (*VLJ* E 550). The study of letters is highly relevant to Blake’s allegorical impulse.

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[98] King notes the sharp differences in tone may be due to the fact that by the 1590s many of those who celebrated the Protestantism Spenser believed in (such as Leicester and Walsingham) had died, leaving a power vacuum, uncertainty and tension over decisions concerning political and religious policies (*Spenser's Poetry* 11-12). This topic and its impact on Spenser's allegory will be discussed in greater detail in chapter three.

In Blake’s work, letters form paragraphs which lengthen into books. Images and references to books are scattered throughout his verse. He shows books to be associated with legitimate authority and teaching, which can be used as a tool for growth, as well as being a dangerous mode of control (Snart 17). The frontispiece to *America* illustrates multiple implications associated with reading (see fig. 5 on page 33). Between the words “AMERICA” and “PROPHECY” two figures, a woman and an older man, sit with backs towards each other, bent over tomes. They are assisted by youths who turn pages and point the way. These youths, while aiding the two illustrated readers, are in turn directing us through the text. The girl leaning against the female’s back points down towards the subtitle and the scene of a battlefield, as if directing us, rather than her, towards the content of the poem (Erdman, *Illuminated* 138). Likewise, the youth by the old man points to the title, while a girl leaping up to the right indicates for us to turn the page. These allegorical visual details give a mixed impression of the process of reading, so important to the understanding of Blake’s work. The readers, their eyes fixed on the books, are perhaps reading and seeing what we read. However, they may also be missing the directions pointed out by the youths. This presentation is an allegory of Blake’s allegory: we may not necessarily understand it initially, and therefore we must pay attention to the subtle gestures and guidance provided by the poet and represented by the pointing youths. Blake’s illustrations demonstrate that reading may be both expansive and limiting. His bent figures show that we have to be alert both to the words on the page and the greater significances they point to in order to gain understanding and enlightenment. We read in order to learn and understand, but these figures with their backs towards each other in rather solitary stances imply the extent to which books can limit, contain and isolate vision.

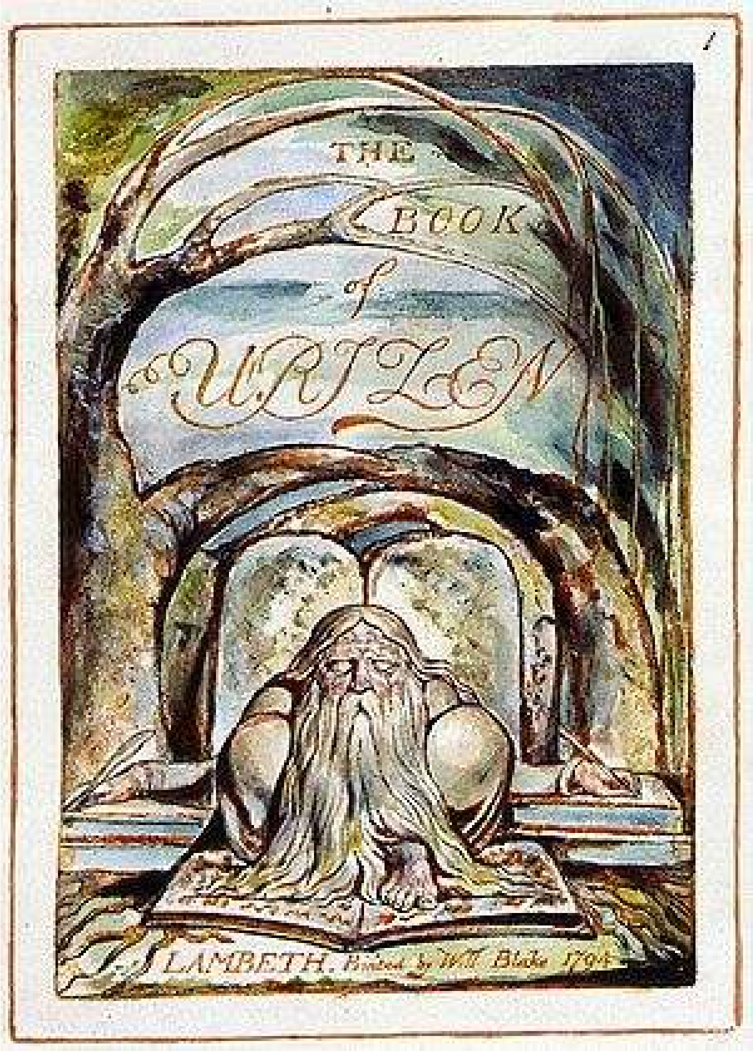
THE
BOOK
of
URIZEN
LAMBETH. Printed by Will Blake 1794

Fig. 10 Frontispiece to *The Book of Urizen*, by William Blake
British Museum, London. ©The Trustees of the British Museum

*The Book of Urizen* further highlights the extent to which vision may be curtailed. Books feature prominently in the frontispiece to this poem (see fig. 10). Like the figures in *America*, Urizen is hunched down over his work, his eyes focused downwards. His eyes are closed and he is seemingly reading or feeling the text in front of him with his feet. Behind him are two curved stone slabs, possibly indicating the Ten Commandments, or two gravestones. Above him arches the barren trunk of a tree, possibly the Tree of Mystery (Erdman, *Illustrated* 183). These ominous details create an oppressive tone. Erdman notes that the figure is "writing his own book with his left hand or his right (holding a quill) and illustrating it with the other (holding an etching needle or a 'pencil,' a brush for fine work)" (Erdman, *Illustrated* 183). Urizen's actions correspond to Blake's own: they are both composing texts that are written and illustrated. The ambidextrousness of Urizen parallels Blake's ability to write backwards as part of the engraving process (Snart 104). It seems that like Spenser, Blake was self-consciously aware of the extent to which this character's aims and actions correspond to his own. Both Urizen and the poet seek to convey tales, lessons and examples. The challenge is to determine which books encourage mental growth, and which are false and stagnate reading. Again, the interpretation of images and language is of the utmost importance. Blake's depiction of Urizen hard at work contains sinister implications. The stone commandments imply the harnessing of law for his own use and manipulation. His closed eyes betray a lack of vision, which is compounded by his reading through his feet. The text he "reads" is covered by his trailing beard and suggests he is reading according to his own interpretation rather than actually looking at and closely analysing the words on the page: he hides what he does not wish to see. Urizen is an allegorical image of Blake's "mind-forg'd manacles," a being that ensnares himself within his own narrow-minded opinions (*SE* "London").[99] He is reinterpreting according to his own strictly defined objectives, literally and physically bound to the text. In so doing, the implication is that his own book will confine the mind of his readers within codified strictures of law. Eyes and limbs are burdened and bent down when reading his large tome. Blake's image highlights the extent to which readers and reading can be manipulated and coerced into constrictive and restrictive patterns of interpretation.[100] As much as they are forms of potential learning, books can be authoritarian and directive, prescribing just what to think and do.

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[99] A closed mind will only see a dark and closed text, a text that conceals and represses. The reader's attitude towards the text is vital to its being regarded as a form of enlightenment or suppression. The reader can be guilty of restricting and censoring the text too.

Yet, in presenting Urizen this way, Blake is tarnishing himself with the same brush. If books are potentially harmful in limiting vision, how can Blake himself use this medium to convey his poems? Like Spenser using language to warn against the power of words, Blake is using books to warn against the debilitating nature of misreading. The "Introduction" to the *Songs of Innocence* describes the process by which thought becomes words and letters which are then written down. The Piper's piping tune is a reflection of his "merry chear" without need of language. It is an inspired expression in itself, a harmonious communication of thought and vision. This language is then formed into words: "Sing thy songs of happy chear." Finally, the song is set down on paper: "sit thee down and write / In a book that all may read." The poem takes us through the process by which thought is set down and turned into books, and yet there is a sense that something is lost when the words are inscribed upon paper. The Piper notes the child of inspiration "vanish'd from my sight." Blake is negotiating the complexity of words and book writing. In one instance, the child's encouragement means that the writer's thoughts are made available for all to read and enjoy in a miraculous process which converts personal thought into shared scenes and images. The poet's vision reaches beyond himself to touch his readers and they may share in his imagination. And yet the child's disappearance suggests the extent to which in marking them down on paper, the poet's thoughts are no longer his own. Not only are they limited and confined to the material boundaries of the book, they become the property of others and are thereby prone to distortion and misinterpretation. Blake displays ambivalence towards the processes of reading and writing. His allegorical presentation of books and reading attests to the complexity of a form which can both liberate and confine the mind. His presentation problematises books and the reading process, challenging his readers to look more carefully at the practice of reading itself. While the "Introduction" suggests the book is both communicative and limiting, it is also an "inescapable part of the artist's negotiation with the material world" (Snart 19).

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[100] This burdened and authoritarian tone is felt throughout *The Book of Urizen*. Characters are continually presented as confined and bound by both physical and mental constructs, "clos'd, unknown, / Brooding shut in the deep" (*BU* 3.23-24). "In chains of the mind locked up," "The eternal mind bounded…" "forging chains new & new / Numb'ring with links" (*BU* 10.25, 19, 17-18). *The Book of Urizen* could be an allegory for the dangers of narrow misreading and the extent to which authorities attempt to confine interpretation.

## "Tearing" the book

Just as Spenser was aware and distrustful of the multiplicity of possible interpretations, Blake was highly conscious of the processes and practices of the written word and its formulation within books. The illustrations and poems explored above reveal the complexity with which Blake regarded written texts and their capacity for both creative vision and debilitating darkness. Like Spenser, Blake seeks to use his unique texts to reform reading, thereby inspiring his readers towards renewed ways of looking at and understanding his verse. He does this through the creation of fundamentally different texts which destabilise traditional reading practices. Jason Allen Snart argues that Blake stamps upon and "tears" the comprehensive book, as envisaged by Orc in plate 10 of *America* (fig. 11):[101]

> That stony law I stamp to dust: and scatter religion abroad

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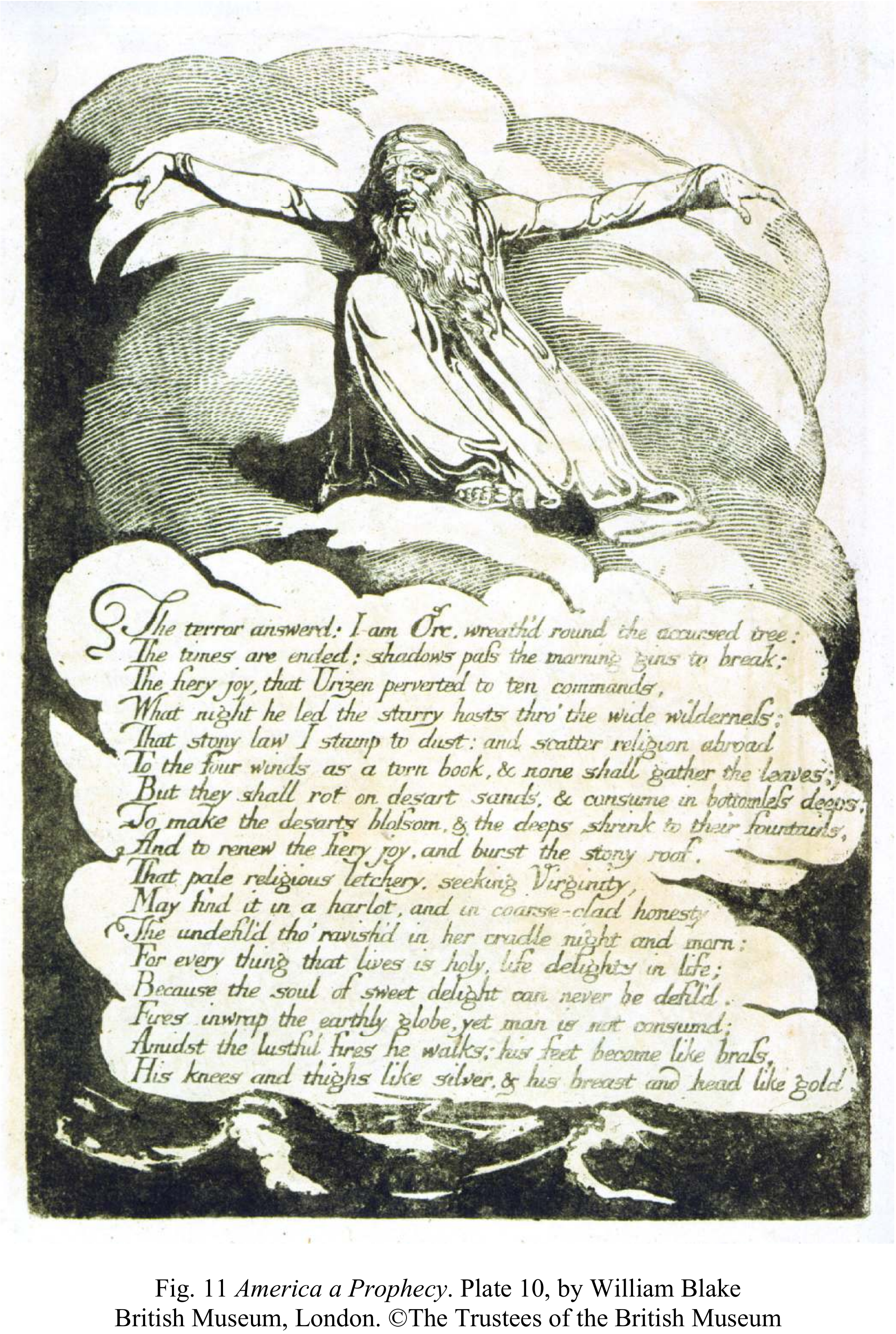
[101] The bearded figure crouching above the verse with outstretched arms can be seen to parallel the figure on the plate for the 1st Principle in *All Religions Are One* (see fig. 1 on page 27) in which Blake's notion of Poetic Genius relates to Spenser's relation of the human body and soul in the *Hymn to Beauty* 19 (*Shorter Poems* 712).

To the four winds as a torn book, & none shall gather the leaves (*A* 8.5-6)



The terror answerd: I am Orc, wreath'd round the accursed tree:
The times are ended; shadows paſs the morning gins to break;
The fiery joy, that Urizen perverted to ten commands,
What night he led the starry hosts thro' the wide wilderneſs:
That stony law I stamp to dust: and scatter religion abroad
To the four winds as a torn book, & none shall gather the leaves;
But they shall rot on desart sands, & consume in bottomleſs deeps;
To make the desarts bloſsom, & the deeps shrink to their fountains,
And to renew the fiery joy, and burst the stony roof.
That pale religious letchery, seeking Virginity,
May find it in a harlot, and in coarse-clad honesty
The undefil'd tho' ravish'd in her cradle night and morn:
For every thing that lives is holy, life delights in life;
Because the soul of sweet delight can never be defil'd.
Fires inwrap the earthly globe, yet man is not consum'd;
Amidst the lustful fires he walks: his feet become like braſs,
His knees and thighs like silver, & his breast and head like gold.

Fig. 11 *America a Prophecy*. Plate 10, by William Blake
British Museum, London. ©The Trustees of the British Museum

Snart comments:

> To tear a book is a deeply significant symbolic act since it imagines the destruction of what is on the one hand a mode of control, manifest throughout Blake's work as oppressive. Yet on the other hand the book is the very material vehicle through which Blake's own poetic vision is given substance. (19)

Blake does not just "tear" the book. His violent attack is reinforced by stamping upon it. Snart's argument is a reflection upon the extent to which Blake disrupts traditional principles associated with the book, thereby enabling new notions and ways of reading, viewing and writing. To stamp upon and tear a book in the eighteenth century would be to destroy a comparatively expensive product. Books were not cheap and those on modest incomes would not have owned many in their lifetime, if they could read at all.[102] As tools of knowledge, books were usually accorded respect and authority. Even today, something feels wrong about tearing leaves out of a book. Blake's willingness metaphorically to crush and to rip pages from books suggests the degree to which he sought to change reader perspectives and upset the conventional authority granted to books. He hoped to shock, to jolt readers into active engagement with the text. In tearing the book, Blake demonstrates that a book is not necessarily correct, "true" or all-powerful. He encourages the reader to "tear" the text as well, to open it out and debate its arguments, not to be afraid to disagree with its thoughts and principles, to freely stamp away imposed textual "manacles." Snart argues:

> To tear the book is to destabilise claims toward unequivocality – as un-equivocality, or not equal voices – that certain kinds of argument make upon the

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[102] See Keynes, "Blake's Library" 55-62. Keynes provides a modest list of twenty or so books which were known to have been in Blake's possession. Most were well thumbed and worn, suggesting that the books Blake had he often re-read. He was probably lent many texts of which we have little information.

> page, especially argument that takes its own textuality as transparent and that excludes the subjectively individuated reader and producer of the argument itself … The ‘torn book’ is the page revealed as a site for contestation, a site from which the voices silenced by singular authorship (and thereby authority) can re-emerge. (19)

The depiction of many different voices is one way by which Blake breaks open the text and undermines its traditional single voice of authorial control. Like Spenser’s Detraction and the Blatant Beast, many characters clamour to get their voices heard, and Blake provides textual space to allow the very lowliest, from little clods of clay, to flies, harlots, and children, a platform for expression. These multiple voices provide multiple perspectives and ways of seeing, conveying an allegorical cacophony of verbal expression which continually bubbles up through Blake’s verse, refuting any notion that the text strives to be completely sealed, controlled or dictatorial. Robert Essick goes as far as to say that Blake “may be our noisiest poet” (*Language of Adam* 173) as his figures howl, groan, sing, laugh and work with incessant labour. His texts are full of energy, often overwhelming the reader with alternating characters, scenes and perspectives. Like Spenser, Blake’s allegorical work deliberately focuses upon and problematises the reading process. The vast array of events and characters challenge reader comprehension, and encourage a form of lateral thought that crosses discourses.[103] Using his many characters, Blake seeks to present a vibrant, textured and complex world to the reader, one in which they may feel a part, and one that both encourages and demands close reader interpretation.

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[103] Makdisi notes that Blake’s concentrated use of anatomical language in *The Book of Urizen* and *The Book of Los* forces readers to move between and comprehend differing discourses simultaneously. This allowed Blake to construct concepts with a new form of language, enabling him more poetic and conceptual flexibility (*Impossible* 83-85). Blake was genuinely creating a new language and thus new ways of thinking and perceiving.

## “Me-tals”: letters testing the mind’s mettle

Contributing to the disruption of traditional processes of reading, Snart turns to the literal production of Blake’s texts to illustrate how he creates a new kind of space on the page which invites a different experience of reading, whereby textual instabilities function to produce new relationships between readers, writers and texts (23). One such instance is Blake’s lack of formal or mechanical typography (Snart 20). Instead of the conventional and stable letters of set type, Blake’s own fluid handwriting lends the poems a manuscript-like quality. By printing the poems on his own press, he, unlike Spenser, had complete control over its aesthetic and textual details. This visual difference makes readers look at the text anew and grapple with its textual surface in fresh ways. Likewise, Blake’s illustrations challenge the formal segregation of image from text, allowing for more flowing associations between words and images. The handwritten letters and the deeply coloured plates resist usual reproduction, rendering them completely exceptional. These methods, so unique to Blake’s illuminated poems, defy notions of being “read” in the conventional sense.

A prominent example of Blake’s attempt to retrain his reader’s eye is his splitting of words between lines of verse. Whereas Spenser often uses anachronisms or etymology to draw his reader’s attention, Blake gets his readers literally to focus upon the syllabic components of his poetry. He breaks words apart:

> Here alone I in books formd of me-
>
> tals
>
> Have written the secrets of wisdom (*BU* 4.24) (fig. 12)[104]

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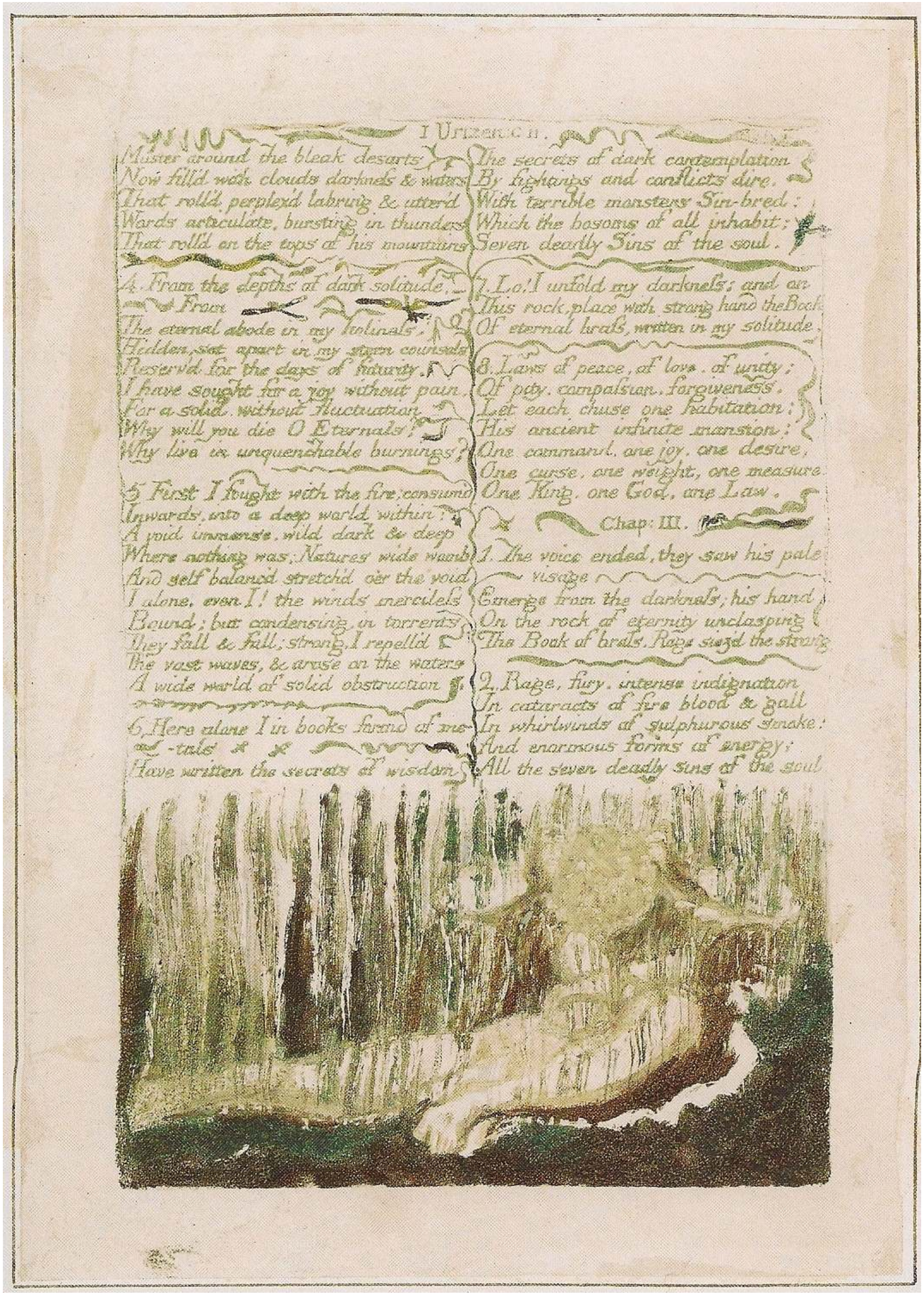
[104] It is rare to find plates which still show the split in the word “me-tals.” These line breaks can only be seen in some original copies of Blake’s text. Most modern copies re-merge the words Blake breaks. See Erdman, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, and the Penguin edition, *William Blake: The Complete Poems*, in which the line-breaks have been edited out. For an image of the divided “me-tals” see Erdman, *The Illuminated Blake* 186, and Bindman, *The Complete Illuminated Books* 229 (fig. 12).



I Urizen C II.

Muster around the bleak desarts
Now fill'd with clouds darkneſs & waters
That roll'd perplex'd labring & utter'd
Words articulate, bursting in thunders
That roll'd on the tops of his mountains

4. From the depths of dark solitude. From
The eternal abode in my holineſs,
Hidden set apart in my stern counsels
Reserv'd for the days of futurity.
I have sought for a joy without pain,
For a solid without fluctuation
Why will you die O Eternals?
Why live in unquenchable burnings?

5 First I fought with the fire; consum'd
Inwards, into a deep world within:
A void immense, wild dark & deep
Where nothing was; Natures wide womb
And self balanc'd stretch'd o'er the void
I alone, even I! the winds mercileſs
Bound; but condensing, in torrents
They fall & fall; strong I repell'd
The vast waves, & arose on the waters
A wide world of solid obstruction

6. Here alone I in books form'd of me-
-tals
Have written the secrets of wisdom
The secrets of dark contemplation
By fightings and conflicts dire,
With terrible monsters Sin-bred:
Which the bosoms of all inhabit;
Seven deadly Sins of the soul.

7. Lo! I unfold my darkneſs: and on
This rock, place with strong hand the Book
Of eternal braſs, written in my solitude.

8. Laws of peace, of love, of unity:
Of pity, compaſsion, forgiveneſs.
Let each chuse one habitation:
His ancient infinite mansion:
One command, one joy, one desire,
One curse, one weight, one measure
One King, one God, one Law.

Chap: III.

1. The voice ended, they saw his pale
visage
Emerge from the darkneſs; his hand
On the rock of eternity unclasping
The Book of braſs. Rage siez'd the strong

2. Rage, fury, intense indignation
In cataracts of fire blood & gall
In whirlwinds of sulphurous smoke:
And enormous forms of energy;
All the seven deadly sins of the soul

Fig. 12 *The Book of Urizen*. Plate 4a, by William Blake
British Museum, London. ©The Trustees of the British Museum

Blake forces his readers to confront the textuality of words as graphic marks upon the page (Snart 106). He is returning to the basic sounds and the very letters that make up these words.[105] "Metals" recalls the process of engraving, the biting of acid into copper, the purifying of the plate in order for raised metal letters to emerge (in much the same way as Spenser's iconoclastic iconoclasm purifies his text). As with Spenser, in his conscious use of the verb to "read," Blake is pushing his readers to recognise the imaginative capacity that goes into the generation and selection of these thoughts and letters, thereby expanding their own mental capacities.[106] "Me-tal" generates associations with "mental," evoking connections between rigid authoritarian ideologies and the way these ideologies are conveyed via texts. Blake's literal breaking of "me-tal" implies the force (or "mettle") with which he strives to shatter these hard-cast mental assumptions. It takes strength of mind to see beyond the dominant discourses of society. His focus upon the fractured parts of words distances his language from the assumptions and associations of the reader. In doing so, he encourages a new way of reading using new ways of looking, including encouraging the readers themselves to crack or "tear" the words in order to focus closely on the text and elicit meanings.

> Blake's printing, his expansive meter, his punctuation, and his syntax ensure his line will not be grasped at once. These conditions force the reader back to the

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[105] Blake's deliberate breaking of words may be compared to James Joyce's description of Bloom's "high grade ha[t]" in *Ulysses* (67). The "t" is left off the end of the word. Joyce is training us to see what is there rather than what we expect to see.

[106] Words are split and divided in the marginal commentary surrounding the main text of the Geneva Bible. Perhaps Blake was inspired by this, although we cannot be sure that Blake used the Geneva Bible. Keynes, in his essay on "Blake's Library" states that Fredrick Tatham refers to Blake's "Bible" as being "most thumbed," but declines to mention whether this Bible is the Geneva or the King James edition (157).

> original words and syntagms, breaking up the line so that it may be reconstituted out of our associations. (Hilton 4)[107]

Hilton states that it is not Blake's text that is strange, but rather that the reader is a stranger (2). This is an apt way of looking at Blake's poems and recalls the allegory of the illustrated readers and their potential helpers in the frontispiece to *America* (see fig. 5 on page 33). The text may well be difficult and strange, but we need to be alert to its guiding principles. As with Spenser, some readers will be put off by the unfamiliarity of Blake's style, while others will be intrigued, challenged and invigorated by it. Blake's visionary strangeness is deliberately difficult. We have to accept that we will not be able completely to grasp or understand his meanings, for to do so would be to stereotype and totalise a form that resists just such reductive readings.

To a certain extent, Blake's strangeness and difficulty means that his allegorical work is sealed and coded, available only to those reading persistently and imaginatively. The language, production and images of Blake's texts pull his poems from the mainstream, and yet, his unusual perceptions and difficult technique open him up to misunderstanding and criticism. Blake, like Spenser, was aware of the nature of verbal and written disparagement; its threat alone was felt in the self-consciousness of both poets' approach towards language and its interpretive complexity. As represented by the depiction of Urizen grappling through his feet with his eyes closed, reading is a subjective perceptual experience and readers' interpretations will vary (Snart 104). Blake was alert to this fact. Just as Spenser struggles in his parallels to Archimago, Blake was aware of being viewed as an Urizen-figure, imposing ideologies upon his readers. Like Spenser, his allegorical self-consciousness had to be subtly forceful in order to create textual transformations. This he did by prompting readers to re-read and re-conceptualise the reading process. Plate 15 of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* depicts "a Printing House in Hell" – "the method in which knowledge is transmitted from generation to generation" (*MHH* 15.1-3) (fig. 6 on page 49). The passage describes the printing process, and yet it seems more like the Cave of Mammon, a series of dark chambers and caves, inhabited by Vipers, a Dragon-Man, Eagles and Lions. What has this infernal depiction to do with printing and reading? Blake is deliberately challenging his reader's assumptions. The clearing and "hollowing" of the cave may parallel the use of clear sheets of copper (or paper) upon which to trace, engrave, or hollow out letters and designs.[108] "[A]dorning it with gold silver and precious stones" may refer to the embellishment of designs and detail which is eventually transferred from the copper to the paper – "cast the metals into the expanse" (*MHH* 15.9, 15).[109]

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[107] Spenser is similar to Blake in distancing his reader from his text. He uses meter, varied punctuation and archaic idioms to force the reader to analyse the verse closely and carefully. At times there is a melding of descriptions and character's speech, especially during scenes of fighting, which leave the reader confused as to who is being described or who is talking (*FQ* 1.2.15-19). Spenser's technique is deliberate. The knights seem to meld together, to become one, calling the reader to question the justification of some battles. The mechanism halts readers' progress and makes them go back and re-read the text. The "strangeness" of the text is a method designed to engage the reader and make him/her reflect upon what they are reading.

Through this printing press Blake provides his readers with a potted summary of traditional tales depicted in books, those to do with the dangerous and exotic, mythical humans and animals, precious metals and treasure, palaces, cliffs and the great "expanse" of the human imagination. And yet, in so doing, he is also reflecting upon the limitation and potential falsity of this "knowledge … transmitted from generation to generation." His Printing House reveals the extent to which books may misguide readers' imaginations, channelling and confining them within small "chambers" and "caves." The key word here is "knowledge." Blake's allegory illustrates the extent to which "knowledge" may deform and hinder. Gleckner notes that Blake is fairly consistent in condemning the Tree of Knowledge for its association with good and evil (*Blake and Spenser* 104). Using this allegory, Blake provides his readers with an image of their own suppositions about reading and texts while completely inverting them. The darkness with which he conveys his Printing House disturbs the viewer and asks us to reflect upon the way we think about texts and reading. Blake seeks to break these assumptions and prompt his readers to leave the "gold silver and precious stones" they may have collected from previous texts – all they assume to be treasured and important – and begin again by "clearing away the rubbish" and looking at his work with clear and open minds (*MHH* 15.4-5).

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[108] For information on Blake's methods of engraving and printing, see in particular Viscomi, *The Art of William Blake's Illuminated Prints* for a concise but detailed explanation. See also Hagstrum, *William Blake: The Painter at Work*; Eaves, Essick and Viscomi's introduction and commentary on *The Early Illuminated Books*; Hilton's *Literal Imagination*, and Snart, *The Torn Book* 77-79.

[109] Again we have a reference to "metals," suggesting that the word could be a figure for the metallic set type arranged for a printing press (Lewis, *Anatomy of Printing* 129-46), or for the raised metal words and images upon plates from which Blake will pull prints. In this sense "metals" literally and figuratively become words.

Blake's Printing House of Hell refers just as much to history and the inheritance of social assumptions as to the practice of book printing. In this sense, Makdisi notes that Blake's illuminated texts disrupt "basic conceptual and ideological building blocks" of thought, posing "a fundamental challenge to our understanding of history and modernity itself" (*Impossible* 9-10). In concentrating and reassessing processes of reading, Blake seeks to expose complex ideological and sociological thought patterns and disrupt them. His conscious focus upon the constructs and processes of reading is the starting point for his allegorical rejuvenation of his reader's perceptions.

### Endless work: impulsive vision within disciplined allegorical reading

On the title page to the *Songs of Innocence*, we see a nurse seated, holding open a book for two children to read. Snart notes that the positioning of the book between adult and child represents its ambiguous nature as being a slice of experience in a world of innocence: “the necessity of learning by reading, that is, being directed into a formal structure of knowledge, is perhaps one of the markers that signals our progression from innocence … to experience” (90). It is true that books have to agree with basic rules and structures. We have to begin at the beginning and read to the end of the narrative in order to understand it. The writing of a book may accord with an “experienced” notion of both linguistics and the world. However, I do not necessarily agree with Snart that books are automatically seen to be items of “experience” in Blake’s poetical world. If anything, Blake’s image shows the opposite. We have to begin with an open mind, devoid of mental constructs in order to appreciate his words. In fact, the more “innocent” readers’ thinking, the less narrow their minds have been made by ideological and social constructs and the greater their potential responsiveness to the text. Makdisi argues that it is our very “learning” that stands in the way of “our reading his work with all the freshness of a child.” Instead, we “must embrace – rather than trying to normalise – those aspects of his work that make it special or unusual” (Makdisi, *Impossible* 162-63). The status of a book as being of “innocence” or of “experience” depends upon the reader’s attitude and perspective (Snart 89).

With this in mind we see that Blake, like Spenser, was acutely aware of the fact that no text may assume full authority as it relies upon readers’ perspectives and interpretations. However, instead of agonising over his readers’ potential judgements, Blake actively encourages them to be a vital part of the textual experience. In inviting multiple interpretations, Blake used his texts to free readers from the oppression of authoritative Urizenic textual domination. This attitude is expressed in the energy of visual enlightenment depicted in *Jerusalem*:

> And the Four Faces of Humanity fronting the Four Cardinal Points
> Of Heaven going forward forward irresistible from Eternity to Eternity
> And they conversed together in Visionary forms dramatic which bright
> Redounded from their Tongues in thunderous majesty, in Visions
> In new Expanses, creating exemplars of Memory and of Intellect
> Creating Space, Creating Time according to the wonders Divine
> Of Human Imagination, throughout all the Three Regions immense
> Of Childhood, Manhood & Old Age[;] & the all tremendous unfathomable Non Ens
> Of Death was seen in regenerations terrific or complacent varying
> According to the subject of discourse & every Word & Every Character
> Was Human according to the Expansion or Contraction, the Translucence or
> Opakeness of Nervous fibres such was the variation of Time and Space
> Which vary according as the Organs of Perception vary (*J* 98.26-38)

In this passage Blake makes language appear to be a living, breathing organ in itself. He highlights the extent to which every word and every character varies according to the individuality of the speaker or writer (Snart 49). His description is an allegorical presentation of the way in which readers use eyes, ears, tongues and minds to perceive the world from individual and subjective viewpoints. This is the reality and privilege of our existence. No one person is the same, nor do we see from exactly the same viewpoint. Voices and perspectives are bound to be different, and their communication is variously unique. Blake shows that these differences can be powerfully inspiring, words whipping up energy, aiding and encouraging imaginative interaction rather than thwarting communication. His deliberately different and unique texts awaken and encourage textual interaction and invite a range of readerly opinion.

However, this ecstasy of vision can only be achieved through continual textual work. Just as Blake's processes of engraving and colouring were slow and painstaking – he rightly said in 1804 that "Endless Work is the true title of Engraving" (E 747) – his readers' engagement with his texts must be ever thoughtful. Blake's texts perpetuate an "endless" process of thought and re-reading, urging readers to think unconventionally and to exceed (what they had assumed were) the limits of their mental capacity.[110] The meaning of his texts is shown to emerge from the process of reading itself which rouses our faculties to act. Makdisi comments:

> Rather than resisting the open logic of Blake's work, our mode of reading accepts this logic and takes it as far as possible, by locating much of the meaning of the work in the very logic animating it, the kinds of connections it allows us to make, the freedom of thought and of energy that it enables. (*Impossible* 163-64)

Blake encourages humankind to see divinity in their thoughts and words. The voices of many tongues are "Visionary forms dramatic," which propel us to see "new Expanses" and express "wonders Divine Of Human Imagination." Blake's verse allows us a glimpse of the power of words to communicate forceful imaginative energy, as seen in this passage in *Jerusalem*. His words are almost magical in the exhilarating transformation they inspire in the reader. His text promises imaginative and visionary gratification to careful, attentive and open-minded viewers. For the conscientious reader, the Piper's verse may be read without the loss of his child-like inspiration.

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[110] Spenser's allegory is seen as "endlesse worke" in a book of that title by Jonathan Goldberg: *Endlesse Worke: Spenser and the Structures of Discourse*. In his study Goldberg argues that the narrative discourse of *The Faerie Queene* continually works to defer meaning thereby challenging our expectation of a textual conclusion (1-21). This can be seen to be a characteristic of allegory in general. There are no definite answers and readers have to work hard to manage varying discourses in order to determine the text for themselves.

## Blake's struggle against the "mind-forg'd manacles" of slavish censorship

The passionate language within the passage above forcefully indicates the enthusiasm with which Blake strove against codified textual repression, highlighting the extent to which he felt his contemporaries languished beneath strict and oppressive rules. As we have seen with Spenser, Blake's work was influenced not just by habits of interpretation, but by social conventions and practices of censorship and propaganda. His processes of reading and writing also reflect these pressures. The tense political culture of the 1790s produced many strands of radicalism calling for personal and social liberty from extreme and controlling powers of state which sought to regulate these discourses (Makdisi, *Impossible* 26).[111] Perhaps because of the tight network of government control and surveillance and the state's extraordinary crackdown on radical activity, any threat of revolt in England during the 1790s never materialised (Makdisi, *Impossible* 47). However, tensions bubbled beneath the surface, and Blake felt the strict consequences of the controlling reactions of the state. His commissioner, the publisher Joseph Johnson, was imprisoned in 1799 for publishing an outspoken political pamphlet (Bentley, *Stranger* 197). Ironically, the piece was probably not as inflammatory or as well publicised as Paine's *Rights of Man* (1791), which Johnson had refused to publish on the grounds that it was too provocative (Bentley, *Stranger* 197). Just as in Spenser's day, there were tight regulations upon the printed word. These controls did not pass Blake unnoticed. Among his annotations to Watson's *Apology for the Bible* he wrote:

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[111] For more information on the political atmosphere of the late eighteenth century, see Mee, *Dangerous Enthusiasm*; Erdman, *William Blake: Prophet Against Empire*; Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self* (especially the last two chapters); Bentley, *Stranger* 196-97 and Makdisi, *Impossible History*.

> To defend the Bible in this year 1798 would cost a man his life
>
> The Beast & the Whore rule without control…
>
> I have been commanded from Hell not to print this as it is what our Enemies wish. (Bentley, *Stranger* 196; E 611)

Blake can only "tear" this text in the blank spaces around its edge: its margins. It is from the margins that he speaks.[112] Like Spenser, Blake was highly aware of the slippery nature of words and the extent to which they can be manipulated and turned against the speaker by enemies who, like the Blatant Beast, are waiting for a chance to bite and wound. His words reveal that printed lines potentially result in trouble as they became public property – readers take possession of the text – and therefore have the right to read or silence the writer's words. Written work was feared and hunted down by the government in the 1790s, due to its potentially large circulation. The cheap price of a pamphlet could be damning evidence of a writer's wish to attract the attention of the populace (Makdisi, *Impossible* 49). During his lifetime Blake was arrested twice, once on charges of spying and again in 1803 for sedition.[113] These experiences are likely to have further hardened his attitude against a state which he already saw as overly controlling and oppressive.

Blake's verse therefore speaks from the margins.[114] He lends voices to those who usually go unnoticed. A recurring theme in his illuminated poems is that of slavery, the enforced repression, regimentation and surveillance of human beings both physically and psychologically. Blake sought to highlight this ultimate form of human control and thereby undermine it, revealing its cruelly constructed nature.

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[112] Erdman notes that in *The Four Zoas*, Blake depicts the plight and exile of the Tongue in the form of Tharmas. The Gates of the Tongue are locked. Tharmas is bound and exiled in pain and agony, unable to cry his woes (*Prophet* 275). Blake is using this allegorical analogy to express the constant repression of censorship and the struggle to get words written and heard.

[113] See Bentley, *Stranger* 251-66, and *Blake Records* 23-4, for details of both incidents. See also Makdisi, *Impossible History* 52.

[114] Speaking from the "margins" leads us to think about the marginal glosses of the Geneva Bible and to ask what Bible Blake would have read from. Whether it was the King James or the Geneva Bible, it played a huge role in Blake's poetry.

> Blake reminds us of the extent to which the 'fallen' human body anticipates, even complements, the modern assembly line, so that the sovereign subject – with all his supposed freedom and liberty – is revealed to be the mirror image, the necessary correlate, of the factory drone; hardly free at all. (Makdisi, *Impossible* 6)

He was writing at a time of great industrial mobilisation and upheaval. Long shifts in mills dictated the pattern of work. The creation of the spinning jenny, the water frame, carding machines and steam-powered traction engines reduced skilled labourers to automatic machine operators (Makdisi, *Impossible* 90, 106-07).[115] The ideal factory was held to be one in which the workers are transformed into "simple machines devoid of their own will and intellect" and completely "subservient to the will of the supervisory power" (Makdisi, *Impossible* 126). Blake represents these figures allegorically through the depiction of the chimney sweep and the London harlot, their bodies used as commodities before being lightly discarded when they are no longer deemed useful.[116]

Natural rhythms of life were being replaced by mechanical automation, which was increasingly coming to be regarded as normal. Urizen's "dreadful letters" within his metal “book of iron” (*FZ* 78.2) dictate and reinforce these attitudes. His “book of brass” contains the following “Words of Wisdom” (*FZ* 80.1, 2):

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[115] Even the arts were affected by the process of industrialisation. Wedgwood's porcelain workshops swapped skilled artists for a pottery-painting production line which saved time and money (Makdisi, *Impossible* 108-115). Likewise, Joshua Reynolds employed a team of painters to finish portraits; he usually worked on the sitter's face only. See D.W. Dörrbecker, "Innovative Reproduction Painters and Engravers at the Royal Academy of Arts" 125-41, for an analysis of the relation between painters and engravers at the Royal Academy and debates on artistic reproduction.

[116] Makdisi notes that the new machines of production allowed for the mechanisation of a largely female and juvenile workforce, usually working fourteen hour days, six days a week with another six hours on the seventh day for the cleaning and maintaining of the machines (*Impossible* 107). Blake reflects this commodification of bodies graphically through the deformed crying of his chimney sweeper and the similarly short life and appalling conditions of the harlot, along with many images throughout his verse of women spinning and weaving.

> Compell the poor to live upon a Crust of bread by soft mild arts
> Smile when they frown frown when they smile & when a man looks pale
> With labour & abstinence say he looks healthy & happy
> And when his children sicken let them die there are enough
> Born even too many & our Earth will be overrun
> Without these arts[.] If you would make the poor live with temper
> With pomp give every crust of bread you give with gracious cunning
> . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
> Flatter his wife pity his children til we can
> Reduce all to our will as spaniels are taught with art (*FZ* 80.9-21)

Blake’s words reveal the sinister manipulation by Urizen and the state which intend to keep the underprivileged poor. It is an “art” to deceive by appearing to be generous, just as Spenser’s Bower of Bliss beautifully hides its artifice by seeming to be natural. Urizen’s book displays the rules by which society is stratified, and yet it also exposes those rules as being built upon guile and deceit – “gracious cunning.” Like Spenser, Blake is emphasising the tentative balance between illusion and reality. He is revealing society’s long-standing “Wisdom” as based upon fabricated arts of false kindness and delusion. Perhaps Urizen’s book has remained until now a secret which we were not privileged to read? Perhaps it has been held up as an unquestionable fact of life until Blake was brave enough to open its pages and explore it? Perhaps it is only with our new sense of reader awareness that we see the irony in Urizen’s words? Blake now conveys its instructions through his verse in a language accessible to his readers. We have to be attentive to his meaning and understand the insincerity of

Urizen's "Wisdom." Blake's revelation through Urizen's "metal" books is a warning to his readers to scrutinise all authoritative texts and voices for elements of deceptively "gracious cunning." Only when his readers have the tools and capabilities to read Urizen's cold "book of iron" for themselves are they fully able to judge the rulings of society. Blake sought to give his readers these tools, thereby teaching them to be able to make their voices heard and counter tyrannical authorities and regimes.[117] He strove to make his verse expansive and educational, communicating to readers the complicated realities of the context in which they lived, while aiding rather than oppressing the mettle or "me-tal" of mental development. Yet the desire for his readers to read anew and the sense of responsibility Blake felt in striving for a collective shift in insight and perception brought personal pressures which he represents through the figure of Los.

Los can be seen to be a sign of Blake's awareness of the imaginative potency and creativity of poetry, while acknowledging the dangers of disillusionment, and the very human capacity for destruction. "Impatient" at the "stifled, stiffend, hardened" world around him, Los bursts his bondage, rendering "the vast solid" surrounding him which "crack'd across into numberless fragments" (*BL* 2.1-3)

> The Prophetic wrath, strug'ling for vent
> Hurls apart, stamping furious to dust
> And crumbling with bursting sobs (*BL* 2.3)

Through Los, Blake depicts the agonies of a prophetic voice which struggles "for vent," often overlooked or unseen from the margins. He is trapped. His imaginative creativity is not understood or heard within the prescribed discourses of his socially codified world. These constraints are perhaps reflections of the social impositions felt by the poet and his audience. Blake's words attempt to shatter these social structures of perception and belief. The walls and constructs of civilisation fall into "fragments," revealing a "horrible vacuum / Beneath him & on all sides around" (*BL* 2.4), representing the fragile artificiality upon which society is based and the terrifying emptiness which remains after these constructs have been removed. While deconstructing the walls of society, he demonstrates that the alternative "vacuum" is not necessarily any better. Los is even shown to have gone too far in his destruction, to have allowed his impatience and wrath to overstep the bounds of humanity as Blake depicts him, like Satan in *Paradise Lost*, falling: "Falling! Falling! Los fell and fell /…day and night without end" (*BL* 2.5). The fact that Los is also subject to pain, fault, impatience and criticism makes him a very human character within Blake's verse. His allegorically ambivalent depiction parallels Blake's attitude towards language, books and reading. He reflects elements felt by the poet himself, becoming a conduit for his emotions and frustrations. Los articulates the poet's conscious awareness of the limitations of his own voice, his own frustrations with himself and his world which bubbles up in aggressive urges to hurl apart and "stamp to dust" all that he has so far created.

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[117] For Blake, the French Revolution was initially seen as a creative upsurge of the popular voice against the autocratic regimes of the French monarchy. However, this attitude soon faded as leaders of the revolution imposed their own authoritarian regimes upon the people. For more on the French Revolution and the government of England during the 1790s see Makdisi, *Impossible History*; Erdman, *Blake: Prophet Against Empire*; Bloom, *Blake's Apocalypse*; Mee, *Dangerous Enthusiasm*.

Los, like Blake, is a creator, a forger of tales, a blacksmith scraping at metal and etching intricate details upon plates. Hagstrum notes that "Los, like Blake himself, is a worker in metal, an artist who draws lines on the walls of heaven" (*Poet and Painter* 5-6). "[T]he Prophet / Of Eternity beat on his iron links" (*BL* 4.3). Having learnt about Urizen, we must be equally cautious when analysing Los. This time, however, the metal "links" may not be oppressive but expansive. Los is the "bright" energetic figure of imagination within Blake's poems, actively stamping or beating out the tune of the poem with prophetic insight. As Blake says, all mental things are real, and therefore the imagination is real (E 545). Limitation may be the reader's own "mind-forg'd manacle," and therefore we must open our minds to the possibility of a discourse that suggests creative as well as debilitating meanings. Just as Los stood aghast to see the endlessness of the "vacuum," the reader must learn not to be afraid of the unknown, the different or the difficult, but must train and trust his or her mental capacities to re-read and understand new contexts and the language in which Blake conveys them.

Blake's verse prescribes a new way of seeing in order to free readers from the constraints of social rules and censorship, where "inspiration [is] deny'd; Genius forbidden by laws of punishment" (*J* 9.16). Los "must Create a System, or be enslav'd by another Mans" (*J* 10.20). Blake creates an allegorical system to free us from existing systems, and to expand our senses and escape the constraints of limited ways of seeing, hearing and viewing – as Spenser does in *The Faerie Queene*. Using the verb to "read," Spenser shows that readers must not take language for granted. He questions the certainty of our senses, urging the viewer to read more closely to avoid the illusion of the superficial and to retrace steps upon misreading. One conclusion that can be drawn from studying these techniques is the extent to which Spenser evades any form of pigeon-holing or "pinning down." His verse cannot be encapsulated and condensed – an aspect which is also very true of Blake. Spenser's methods point towards the formulation of a new language, a unique way of seeing. He rejects all stereotypical conventions to assert his own vocabulary for representing the many cacophonous voices within his text. It is only when we really look at the words on the page, prepared to relearn with the freshness of a child, that the directed allegorical meaning can be found. Both poets develop new ways of seeing, hearing and telling within a climate of censorship and propaganda. Difficulty is essential to allegory (Makdisi, *Impossible* 164-5), and both poets present texts that require re-reading, careful reader engagement and a heightened receptivity to complex meaning.

Having looked at Spenser and Blake in an atmosphere of political and religious censorship, during which both poets felt the pinch of its oppressive forces, we now turn to examine the extent to which these newly developed vocabularies allowed allegory a voice at a time when one seemingly was not licensed. If, as we have seen, allegory could speak from the margins, perhaps its voice is as rebellious as it is conservative.

# Chapter Three: Allegory, Resistance and the Reader

> Writing both bodies forth presence and stands as a mark or "trace" of an absence… (Pierce 67)

This chapter challenges the assumption that allegory is essentially conservative, that it upholds traditional values and preserves social hierarchies. Instead, I argue that allegory can be seen to interrogate traditional structures and ways of thinking. Its veiled structure of saying one thing and meaning another allows space for disruptive implications. As seen in chapter two, allegory unsettles the reading process and thus the reader, whilst seemingly maintaining the status quo. This process I term allegory's will to "contain" unruly and disobedient or rebellious meanings, while continuing to prompt readers with the notion or "trace" of their troubling presence.[118] Allegory manages a fine balance between upholding conservative values and transgressing them. In so doing, the mode encourages readers to look at the text in new ways and to be aware of any unsettling or difficult undertones which demand readerly interpretation. Allegory alerts readers to problematic readings and refuses to make their meanings simple.

Gordon Teskey sees the troubling disquiet presented by allegory as the mode's attempt to suppress any element that does not accord with the presentation of a smooth self-contained whole (*Allegory* 7, 12). Allegory, as he sees it, attempts to gag or stifle any form or utterance that will break its iron grip on a seamless presentation (*Allegory* 8, 12-20). In this sense, allegory actively seeks to contain any rumblings of dissent or disquiet by reinforcing traditional values. I believe that allegory does not function in this way. Instead of concealing problematical and confusing elements within the text, the mechanisms of allegory work to reveal them. As we have seen, our readerly assumptions are continually challenged by Spenser and Blake as we progress through the poems. Misreading, we revisit passages in the text. The more we read, the more we become aware of elements that resist simple explanations, and the more we are forced to revise our original interpretations. These fault lines or eruptions of difficult and anti-authoritarian elements within the poems are intended to draw our attention. They are designed to encourage us to make further investigations and to see other, less conservative or traditional readings contained within the verse. Instead of gagging the many voices within the text, allegory demands readerly engagement to help decipher them. In so doing, the reader becomes alert to resistance and disruption within the poems and what they may signify.

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[118] My work on this theory has been inspired by Jonathan Dollimore's studies on transgression and to some extent by the writing of Steven Greenblatt. See Dollimore, "Transgression and Surveillance in *Measure for Measure*" 72-85; and "Subjectivity, Sexuality, and Transgression: The Jacobean Connection" 53-83. See also Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* 21-65.

Allegory's complexity makes it not only a didactic form, but a dialectical one as well. John B. Pierce, noting the "writerly" and oral practices in Blake's work, recognises conflicting elements in his representational media.

> We find throughout Blake's representations of writing a regular confirmation of its importance as a signifying process at the same time that these scenes of writing register the resistances inherent in the medium and its tools – the materiality, ambiguity, and linear restrictions of writing. (26)

Pierce notes that, just as the "written mark attempts to body forth some content" or meaning, "it fails to do so. It stands for an absence, for something that is not there. Derrida describes this general sense of writing as having a fissured value" (26). While Pierce takes a Derridean stance towards Blake's language, I feel his study touches the heart of what links Blake to Spenser's allegory: the continued deferral of meaning in order to encourage readers to pause, become aware of the workings of the text, and be able to look at it anew. Resistances exist within both poets' verse in order to point to further meaning, to expose the complexity of other ways of knowing and perceiving. Pierce notes that in Blake's verse there are traces of resistance towards the very medium of the written form. In this way, Blake directs his readers to think about the rules governing what they take for granted: the written word. Blake's self-conscious approach encourages readers to interrogate and question the written word, its authority, its authenticity, and the reasons why those in power seek to control it.

This chapter explores the ways in which Spenser and Blake question and challenge the structures, principles and authorities of their respective eras through the mode of allegory. I will begin with Spenser. His allegory is a flexible medium, allowing for the articulation of dissident voices, without appearing to be openly subversive (Patterson 5-6). However, as *The Faerie Queene* progresses, he can be seen to reject the implicit veil of containment provided by allegory, turning towards increasingly direct and unallegorical methods in order to express his personal frustration with his Queen. The second part of the chapter focuses upon Blake's liberated use of allegory to convey explicitly the hardship and suffering of a workforce mechanised by the powers of the Industrial Revolution and crushing authoritarianism. Unlike Spenser's, his dissident notes are overt and undisguised, perhaps reflecting the comparative freedom provided by having a printing press of his own.

## Spenser's *Faerie Queene* – mirroring grace and majesty

Spenser's allegorical disquiet can be traced through analysis of his representations of Elizabeth I, the ostensible subject of his poem. Many critics have argued, and rightly so, that *The Faerie Queene* is a poem dedicated to her praise.[119] However, elements within the first three books, and especially in the second half of the poem, added in 1596, imply a darker representation of the Queen and her government, while the *Mutabilitie Cantos*, not published until 1609, can be seen almost to break with allegory altogether in propounding the poet's fears and concerns. Spenser was participating in a complex cultural dialogue whereby he hoped to influence his readers by skilful "political pragmatism," rather than being a dogged mouthpiece for received or extreme views (Suttie, "Political Pragmatism" 56-58). He uses his allegory to enable such "political pragmatism," carefully shielding more disgruntled comments about Queen and government within characters and epic tales. Before I discuss the later sections of the poem, I want to begin with the dedications, which point to Spenser's changing attitudes towards his Queen. Introducing the poem to the reader, the dedications provide an important point of engagement between the poet, his audience and the text. They prompt the reader to compare the character of the Faerie Queene with the Queen herself. They also act as a guide by channelling various readings of the poem, specifically by encouraging readers to interpret the figure of the Faerie Queene. Unless the dedications are read carefully, Spenser's shifting attitudes towards his monarch would be barely detectable. In order to perceive and understand the subtle but increasingly severe criticisms they embody, I will trace his allegorical portrayal of the Queen throughout the poem, beginning with the opening dedications.

The dedications provide the reader with a key to analysing and understanding the poem as a whole and the ways in which allegory can be used simultaneously to praise and disparage (Miller 60-61).[120] They also highlight the complex relation between the poet and his Queen. *The Faerie Queene*'s dedication in 1590 is composed of eight lines:

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[119] See Cain*, Praise in The Faerie Queene*, and D.L. Miller's *The Poem's Two Bodies* 29-67.

> TO THE MOST MIGH-
> TIE AND MAGNIFI-
> CENT EMPRESSE ELI-
> ZABETH, BY THE
> GRACE OF GOD QVEEN
> OF ENGLAND, FRANCE
> AND IRELAND DE-
> FENDER OF THE FAITH
> &c. (*FQ* 26)

In italics in a smaller font towards the end of the page Spenser's name appears, followed by the words, "*Her moſt humble Seruant*" (*FQ* 26). By the 1596 publication of books Four to Six, the dedication had become even more elaborate. It was made up of 25 urn-shaped lines, of which Spenser's name was now a part and in the same font as that of his Queen.

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[120] D.L. Miller notes that feelings of opportunity and anxiety were mixed in poems of this period as poets were aware of both the limits and advantages to their comparative power in verse. Indefinite placement allows Spenser to address and supplicate a range of figures within his verse, engaging in transactions with them, which in turn allows the reader to trace his speculative investments in the symbolic economy (60).

TO
THE MOST HIGH,
MIGHTIE
And
MAGNIFICENT
EMPRESSE RENOVV-
MED FOR PIETIE, VER-
TVE, AND ALL GRATIOVS
GOVERNMENT ELIZABETH BY
THE GRACE OF GOD QVEENE
OF ENGLAND FRAVNCE AND
IRELAND AND OF VIRGI-
NIA, DEFENDOVR OF THE
FAITH, &c. HER MOST
HVMBLE SERVAVNT
EDMVND SPENSER
DOTH IN ALL HV-
MILITIE DEDI-
CATE, PRE-
SENT
AND CONSECRATE THESE
HIS LABOVRS TO LIVE
VVITH THE ETERNI-
TIE OF HER
FAME. (*FQ* 27)

The shift in tone between these two dedications is notable. Firstly, we see that praise for Elizabeth is elaborated, but more importantly, the poet's positioning in relation to the monarch has altered dramatically. The small italics that present the poem as being the work of a "moſt humble Seruant," subservient and modest with regard to the Queen, have disappeared. Despite the poet's continued claim to being "her most humble Servavnt" who "in all hvmilitie" dedicates his poem to the Queen, there is a sense of confident self-assurance in his words. It is noticeable that Spenser's name appears in a larger font in the second dedication (although we do not know what input he would have had on the design of his text).[121]

As the lines of the dedication progress, the focus shifts from Elizabeth and her might to Spenser and his labours in verse. His humility is countered by his ambition to "present and consecrate these his labovrs to live with the eternitie of her fame." In offering his verse, he implies his desire to give the poem to the Queen directly, suggesting a right to gain access to her court and person. We know that Spenser was granted a £50 pension from the Queen following the publication of the first books of the poem and this, along with his association with Raleigh and the Leicester circle, may have fuelled his confidence that further praise of her majesty would reap greater rewards.[122] Imagining the "consecration" of his work, Spenser places his poem on a par with the Queen and the legacy of her reign. Just as the Queen "of Faerie" will be remembered, so will *The Faerie Queene*. This weaving of the Queen and the poem shows the poet's intention of making *The Faerie Queene* the ultimate praise of

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[121] For information on Spenser's publisher, refer to "Ponsonby, William," by Michael G. Brennan in *The Spenser Encyclopaedia* 554-55. By 1596 Spenser would have received a certain amount of recognition following the publication of the first books of the poem and thus the poet or his publisher may have felt it appropriate to display his name in a larger font. It must also be noted that Ponsonby did not print books himself, but sent them to prominent printers of the day, such as Field, Windet, Orwin, Wolfe and Creede (*Sp Enc* 555). Therefore, it is difficult to establish exactly who set the font and layout for the dedications.

[122] For evidence of Spenser's ambition for courtly favour and reward see Rambuss 7-8; Helgerson 55-100; Giamatti, *Double Senses* 14-15; Erickson 143-47.

Elizabeth I, a form that will be unrivalled and remembered for generations to come. Spenser's dedication creates a complicated construction of the relation between monarch and poet. Just as the Queen determines the status and welfare of the poet, her subject, he details her portrayal and representation within his verse, as she becomes his subject in writing (Montrose, "The Elizabethan Subject" 318). This construct allows for the poet to be both proud and humble. In magnifying Elizabeth's "fame," Spenser consciously magnifies his own. We are reminded of Kenneth Gross's *Shakespeare's Noise* and his argument that "fame," while promoting autonomy and allowing one to brave the flux of time and "to live in eternitie," is also an unstable guarantee of power, nobility, honour and life (42). Fame is a vanity that is poisoned property. It is "a gift that, ironically, puts one's identity into the hand of others" (Gross, *Shakespeare's Noise* 42). Spenser refers to "his labovrs" in the third person, just as he would his monarch. In an implied ambition to become as famous as she is, Spenser is objectifying himself. In seeking fame, he ironically places himself in a position in which he, like his monarch, may be known, and therefore watched, judged, and potentially criticised.[123] His poem may subtly expose Elizabeth's weaknesses, but in doing so, it also exposes his own. Like the monarch, the poet is subject to the constructive and destructive opinion of others, as seen in chapter two.

Aware of the extent to which his position as poet makes his work and his person subject to reproach, Spenser became an expert at combining praise with oblique censure.[124] Allegory is the tool which allows him to do so. Even in the 1590 edition of the poem, in the proems introducing each book of *The Faerie Queene*, the careful reader may glean hints of shadows within Spenser's early beaming portrayals of his Queen.

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[123] On the subject of Spenser's desire to create a form of professional national poetry and thereby a major literary career, see Helgerson*, Self-Crowned Laureates: Spenser, Jonson, Milton and the Literary System*. Rambuss argues against Helgerson, stating that Spenser, due to social and financial constraints, was not able to prioritise his work as a poet above his career in government. Instead, Spenser's experience as a secretary aided his poetical aspirations. See *Spenser's Secret Career* 9-15.

[124] See Deneef for an analysis of Spenser's self-conscious style (3-14, 91-156), a topic discussed in chapter two.

> O Goddesse heauenly bright,
> Mirrour of grace and Maiestie diuine,
> Great Ladie of the greatest Isle, whose light
> Like *Phoebus* lampe throughout the world doth shine,
> Shed thy faire beames into my feeble eyne,
> And raise my thoughtes too humble and too vile,
> To thinke of that true glorious type of thine,
> The argument of mine afflicted stile:
> The which to heare, vouchsafe, O dearest dread a while (*FQ* Proem 1.4)

This stanza praises the Queen as being "heauenly bright," a "Great Ladie," akin to a beaming goddess or angel, magnificent in her divinity, her purity expressed through her brightness. Like the second dedication, the lines begin with the monarch and end by focusing upon the poet in his "humble" and "afflicted" state. Louis Adrian Montrose clearly outlines the interplay between subject and author in his essay, "The Elizabethan Subject and the Spenserian Text":

> In the process of representing the queen within his discourse, the subject is in some very limited but nevertheless quite real sense also constituting the sovereignty in relation to which his own subjection and subjectivity are constituted. Every representation of power is also an appropriation of power. (330)[125]

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[125] For more on the courtly interplay between the poet and the monarch, or the courtier and his admired subject, see Moretti, "Love is not Love: Elizabethan Sonnet Sequences and the Social Order" 396-428. Moretti argues that the genre of courtly sonneteering stemmed from desire for material recognition and social elevation. Feelings of hurt, pain and rejection mirrored emotions felt by courtiers such as Wyatt and Sidney, whose ambitions were not fulfilled. These sonnets can therefore be seen to be allegories of

Spenser’s alternating mix of congratulation and humiliation is subtly woven into his text. He seems to prostrate himself before his monarch, claiming to be maimed by her bright beauty, his talents limited and “afflicted.” However, in describing his Queen as a “mirrour of grace and Maiestie,” Spenser is taking control of her representation. A mirror’s reflection may be so bright that it blinds and potentially harms our eyes. Elizabeth may be only a dazzling, empty space in the poem. She is ethereal and also, necessarily, insubstantial. We cannot see the Queen; we see a refracted or inverted representation or nothing at all – a bright, blinding white space. She is “the most high, mightie and magnificent Empresse”… “Elizabeth by the grace of God Qveene of England Fravnce and Ireland and of Virginia, Defendovr of the Faith, &c,” but these often-used epithets generalise and distance her. It is true to say that Spenser could be suggesting the limitation of his talents as poet, that his “vile” and “afflicted style” cannot do justice to the magnificence of the monarch. Yet, despite his seeming humility, he assertively commands her “to heare” the remainder of his song. Spenser’s use of allegory allows for such readings of contained subversion to be implied in a balanced and coordinated way so that just when we feel his words imply too much criticism, we are forced to recognise his extreme praise of his monarch. He has carefully represented his Queen as he sees her, and as she wants to be represented, but it has to be acknowledged that she as Gloriana, the Queen of Faery, is also his subject within the poem. Spenser uses allegory subtly to suggest Elizabeth’s limitations through implication and indirection, thereby cloaking his disapproval in robes of seeming admiration. The implicit suggestion is that his Queen is insubstantial in her brightness, and that her public have been blinded to her faults

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thwarted personal and political ambition, although more work needs to be done on the relation between allegory and sonnets.

and weaknesses. Brightness is a mask for the emptiness that lies beneath a seeming show of power and majesty.

Spenser's implicit criticisms are more than subjective posturing. To some extent they are grounded in fact. As a female monarch in a patriarchal society, Elizabeth is essentially an anomaly: she is a woman ruling in a male dominated world (Montrose, "Shaping Fantasies" 80).

> As a woman in her body natural, Elizabeth represented an affront to those very principles of hierarchy of which she was the guardian … an unmarried woman at society's symbolic centre embodied a challenge to the homology between hierarchies of rule and gender. (Montrose, "The Elizabethan Subject" 309)

However, as discussed in chapter two, the Queen played to her weakness, and her weakness in turn defined her strengths. She did not challenge the patriarchy but upheld it by moulding herself into multiple roles bound to the good of the kingdom.[126] Portraits accentuate her goddess-like powers. In the Ditchley Portrait (c. 1592) (fig. 21 on page 378) she stands upon England, her pearl-white skirts forming the southern counties. She figuratively and allegorically becomes "England." Delicate, beautiful, and vulnerable to invasion, she is ever determined to cast away evil and nourish her people. The Armada Portrait (c. 1588) conveys her as statesman-like, regal, poised, turning from the chaos of defeated Spanish ships towards a calm sea and a view of the victorious English fleet. Her hand rests on a globe, a symbol of her importance and control in the affairs of foreign nations. As Spenser says, her "lampe throughout the world doth shine." In the Rainbow Portrait (c. 1600) (fig. 9 on page 131) she is forever youthful, a sexual creature, less a mother and more a goddess. Her filmy dress is low cut, open at her bosom, her crimson mantle matching the blush of her lips and cheeks. She holds a rainbow, a symbol of peace and harmony, while her gown is formed of eyes and ears indicating her omnipotence: nothing escapes her notice. The number of carefully cultivated political images the Queen makes available seems to be designed to capture the love and reverence of every one of her subjects.

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[126] Elizabeth's personas can be seen reflected in her speeches to parliament and the people. She is recorded as saying in 1559 in reply to a petition that she marry, "I am already bound unto an husband, which is the kingdom of England, and that may suffice you" (Marcus et al. 59). In a speech of 1563 Elizabeth concludes that "after my death you may have many stepdames, yet you never have any more mother than I mean to be unto you all" (Marcus et al. 72). In her address to the troops at Tilbury before the Armada of 1588, Elizabeth famously states: "I have the body but of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a king and a king of England too" (Marcus et al. 326). These recorded speeches give just a glimpse of the many roles adopted by Elizabeth.

Following the Queen's lead, Spenser forms his poetical allegory from the many allegories the Queen inhabits. Several female figures within the poem can be associated with Elizabeth, as Spenser reflects her in "mirrours more than one her selfe to see" (*FQ* 3 Proem 5). Una, dressed in pure pearl white, a colour most esteemed by the Queen and used by her publicists to great effect, is herself "from Royall lynage" (*FQ* 1.1.5). Una is "one," allegorically referring to the marriage of the true Protestant religion with England, as seen both by Elizabeth's religious settlement of 1559, and Una's betrothal to St George, or England, at the end of Book One (Norbrook 121). Associated with religion and wholeness, Una is Truth, again referring to Elizabeth's coronation procession through London in which the newly crowned Queen elaborately and graciously receives the Bible and with it her motto *veritas filia temporis* ("Truth the daughter of Time") (Miller 124-28; Marcus et al. 53-55). Like the Queen, Una's face "shyned bright, / And made a sunshine in the shady place; / Did neuer mortall eye behold such heauenly grace" (*FQ* 1.3.4). She is yet another mirror, or reflection of the Queen's "faire beames." The independent female figures of Belphoebe and Britomart, alluring maids upholding the virtue of chastity, unattainable and warlike, convey the political and statesmanlike sides of Spenser's monarch. Britomart, "a mayd Martiall" (*FQ* 3.3.53), wearing armour, and Belphoebe, "clad in hunters weed" (*FQ* 2.3.21), calls to mind Elizabeth's warlike speech to her troops at Tilbury before the Armada of 1588, and the subsequent Armada Portrait in which she is shown to control the forces of war. Montrose notes that Elizabeth did not want to take the Amazonian image of herself too far, instead transforming it to represent herself as a ladylike androgynous martial maiden, which Spenser translated into Britomart (Montrose, "Shaping Fantasies" 79). Spenser is aware that his Queen sought to be presented both literally and allegorically as chaste, strong and powerful. Just as her body belonged to no man, so her country would remain an unconquered dominion.

However, conveying such a complicated and vast array of often contradictory political personas – mother, lover, female warrior, divine representative – could potentially result in a confusion of the sexual with the virginal, the maternal with the girl-like, the masculine with the feminine. Allegory's "trace" allows for the shady implications associated with these figures to be recognised. As discussed in the previous chapter, Una is blind to Redcross's faults for much of Book One, leading readers to question her judgement of "Truth" (Suttie, *Self-Interpretation* 69). The beams of her bright reflection blind herself as well as her viewer. This glittering brightness is also reflected in the Queen's allegorical presentations. While looking at her dazzling depictions, we cannot miss the troubling representation of Lucifera, Queen of the House of Pride. Like Gloriana, her visage beams brightly:

> A mayden Queene, that shone of *Titans* ray,
> In glistring gold, and perelesse pretious stone;
> Yet her bright blazing beautie did assay
> To dim the brightnesse of her glorious throne,
> As enuying her selfe, that too exceeding shone. (*FQ* 1.4.8)

As with all the female figures, no single character is directly related to Elizabeth, but the allegory maintains that the implication is there. Lucifera's pride reflects upon Elizabeth's obsession with the management of her image. Her lustre highlights the Queen's vanity and the false presentation of herself as forever youthful and beautiful. Spenser's presentation of his monarch as reflected through mirrors not only highlights the inversion of her original image, but emphasises a gendered logic whereby the looking glass is traditionally associated with the female gaze (Ogden 2-6; Berger 46).[127] Along with Elizabeth's struggle to maintain her regal stature comes an accompanying criticism of her feminine obsession with the pomp and paraphernalia of statecraft.

Spenser's image of mirrors in the first three stanzas to Proem One of *The Faerie Queene* relate to these many allegorical depictions of the monarch.[128] Several popular portraits of the Queen were completed comparatively late in her life, dating from the 1590s when Elizabeth would have been entering her sixties. In every portrait a youthful face beams out, inverting and distorting the true aged face of the monarch (Norbrook 156). Even in the 1580s when Spenser was writing the first books of his poem, the Queen would have been considered old – a grandmother rather than a mother, and certainly not a girl. Official portraits and the late Elizabethan trend for miniatures depict the Queen with an eternal "Mask of Youth" (Haigh 104; Fischlin

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[127] Berger and Ogden reflect on gendered ways of looking or gazing. As Berger says, "Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at" (46). Ogden's study analyses the gendering of vision in England within scientific, cultural and literary discourses going back to the eighteenth century. I would suggest that this gendering of vision existed even before then, as implied by the allure of Elizabeth's portraits. There is a very ancient tradition of the female watching herself being watched. See Ogden, *The Language of the Eyes: Science, Sexuality, and Female Vision in English Literature and Culture 1690-1927*.

[128] As well as the lines of the Proem to Book One, see "In this fayre mirrhour maist behold thy face" (*FQ* 2 Proem 4) and "In mirrours more then one her selfe to see" (*FQ* 3 Proem 5).

178-79).[129] Thus Spenser's "Mirrour of grace and Maiestie" is not misplaced. He would have been aware that the Queen's image was unfaithful to the original. Perhaps the "mirrour" is intended rather cruelly as a hint that she should attend more closely to her own genuine reflection and the fact that she can no longer delude herself that she is young. Her goddess-like brilliance is not eternal but frail and transient. Just as the poet's eyes are "feeble" and frail, the Queen is only human and her "light" will fade and die. "Nothing is sure, that growes on earthly grownd" (*FQ* 1.9.11). Spenser's excessive praise may highlight the extent to which his audience have blinded themselves to the monarch's eternal beams, gesturing towards the recognition that this distorted view must be corrected by the political awareness of his Queen's inevitable mortality.

Adding to this implicit criticism, Spenser's allegory of his Queen's representations suggests her desire to capture her subjects' love while being unable to give love herself. Her blinding beams can be read as aggressive, stunning and immobilising her viewers, thereby keeping them at a distance. An important fact when reading *The Faerie Queene* is that one never gets to see or meet the Queene of Faery herself. She is always absent, forever deferred. She is the central guiding principle of Spenser's allegory: its capacity to create meaning through the endless deferral of meaning or closure (Goldberg 4-6, 26).[130] Her subjects blindly follow her, hoping for a glimpse of her face, while the reader carefully picks through an often convoluted and challenging linguistic landscape looking for satisfactory closure, which is always denied. Allegory defers meaning in order for the reader to engage with the text and recognise "other" ways of reading, or the "trace" of absence which may be important to understanding significances within the poem. Prince Arthur speaks of his dream-like encounter with the "royall Mayd" who "rauisht" his heart "with delight," but who disappears upon waking. Arthur "found her place deuoyd, / And nought but pressed gras where she had lyen" (*FQ* 1.9.13, 14, 15). Only traces of the Queen's presence remain, and yet the image of "pressed gras" implies the existence of a more physical relationship than that of a mere dream. The Queen, according to the process of correctio, has been withdrawn and redrawn, almost completely erased in order to be re-presented. Arthur later tells of the "great wonder [that] would your thoughts deuoure" and the "infinite desire" which enters "into your spirite" on seeing Gloriana's "glorious visage" (*FQ* 2.9.3). He is clearly entranced by his Queen. The words "rauisht," "infinite," "deuoure" and "delight" along with the image of infinite desire being transferred into one's "spirite" has sinister connotations of lust-filled or witch-like enchantment, the self-destructive swallowing of a toxic potion. One cannot help calling to mind a similar image of Acrasia as she, "greedily depasturing delight" … "through his [Verdant's] humid eyes did sucke his spright" (*FQ* 2.12.73). Acrasia devours Verdant's body in sweaty throes of gratification, suggesting the usurious and possessive nature of lust. Its sensual visions and vapours captivate and bewitch. Passion can be a destructive, debilitating condition, one that both Acrasia and the Faery Queene use to their advantage to command and control their subjects. The implication is that Elizabeth I governs the desire of her (male) subjects in this homocentric realm with her calculating female charms and endless allegorical representations.

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[129] Haigh argues that Elizabeth's "mask of youth" was political. Images of an aging Queen were suppressed due to fears that her authority would decline and a struggle for the succession would ensue (104).

[130] On the endless deferral of meaning in *The Faerie Queene*, see Goldberg, *Endlesse Worke*. Rambuss comments on the same topic at 65-67. On the deferral of meaning in Blake, see Pierce, *The Wond'rous Art* 60-67. Pierce sees writing as marking both presence and absence. This comment is particularly pertinent to allegory, which presents multi-dimensional approaches to interpretation and meaning, as well as suggesting meanings which are not immediately present to the viewer.

Robert Mueller gives a detailed impression of the balance of power cultivated between the Queen and her court.

> The queen's calculated use of favour suspends the courtier in a state of desire. Within this circle of frustration, the ambition of the courtier keeps producing and reproducing the absolute status of the arbitrary power. (756)

She, like Acrasia who commands male attention, "as seeking medicine" (*FQ* 2.12.73), relies upon this relation as a vital part of her regal power play.

> To maintain her power, the queen continually manipulated her subjects. She was adept at balancing one ambitious courtier against another and at extending and then withdrawing favour. (Mueller 755)

The promise of fulfilment in gaining the Queen's genuine presence, her ear to supplications, or her favour, is often futile. The Queen makes it seem a tangible reality – as tangible as the "pressed gras" before Arthur, evidence that a liaison took place. Or did it? This formulation of desire between monarch and subject is a potentially self-destructive endeavour that results, like unrequited love, in bitterness, rejection and darkness. Spenser seems to be articulating his own frustrated desire at his lack of advancement within courtly circles since his involvement within Leicester's sphere in the late 1570s and his attempts at finding favour through verse (Rambuss 64, 80). Both the empty promises of the Faery Queen and the lasciviously deadly postures of Acrasia suggest what Spenser sees as the fickle, manipulative nature of his female Queen with regard to her subjects.

There are still other reasons for this deferred, constantly re-represented and reflected allegorical portrayal of the Queen. *The Faerie Queene* details the moral virtues of a courtly centre from which Spenser was distanced. He was sent to Ireland as secretary to Arthur Lord Grey de Wilton in 1580, and he lived there for most of the rest of his life, working as a clerk and official for the Queen's government (*FQ* xiv; Renwick 171-76). It is debatable whether he saw this move as a form of advancement or an exile. It took him further away from court, to the margins of the kingdom, where Elizabethan order struggled to be upheld. However, eventually he gained substantial property and land while upholding English rule.[131] Andrew Hadfield has carefully argued that Gloriana's deferred presence within *The Faerie Queene* is "made conspicuous by her absence" (*Literature, Politics* 192), suggesting that her deliberate absence indicates her ineffectual government and policy. Hadfield comments on the presentation of the Queen and her knightly "virtues" and Spenser's simultaneous distance from her.

> The subject who can show her in all her glory – the poet – is so alienated from her supposed centre of power that he can only reveal her inner mind, her courteous conscience, as detached from her … The revealed essence of the queen proves to be a public criticism of her lost (political) essence (*Literature, Politics* 192).

Hadfield's argument has substance, especially when we consider Spenser's position in Ireland; he praises a *distant* Queen, so far away that her presence will always be deferred. She and her government have forgotten the brave English colonials struggling to retain control in a violent and remote land. Spenser's *View of the Present State of Ireland* clearly details the issues and problems in Ireland between the indigenous population, the older English colonials and newer officials. Religion, race and policy are topics at the forefront of this text.[132] Although *A View* was registered for publication before 1598, it was such a direct and controversial piece that it was not published until 1633, and given continuing tensions in Ireland, it was not necessarily the representation that Spenser would have authorised (Brink 203-27; Hadfield, "Certainties and Uncertainties" 197-201; Hadfield & Maley, *View* xi, xxv). Spenser felt strongly about Ireland. So strongly, that Book Five of the *Faerie Queene* is a barely disguised allegory of events based there. Here, at least we know that having passed the Stationers' Register in 1596 during Spenser's lifetime, this Book was a version that he was happy to put his name to. Book Five is notable for being less subtle in its use of allegory as a means of articulating grievances. Ireland, to an extent, is entwined with a shift away from allegory within Spenser's work. Yet again, it is the absences, the silences or the gaps between words and sounds that are the most telling in their meaning. The gaps demand our attention. In this case, the gaps are silent marks of disapprobation.

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[131] See Oram, "Spenser in Search of an Audience: The Kathleen Williams Lecture for 2004" 23-46. "Whatever his parentage, Spenser had an MA from Cambridge, a pension from the queen, and an Irish estate of more than three thousand acres" (25).

[132] For more on *The View*, see Maley and Hadfield's introduction to *The View of the State of Ireland*. For debates on the authorship and production of *The View*, see Brink, 203-28, and Hadfield's reply, "Certainties and Uncertainties: By Way of Response to Jean Brink" 197-202.

### Book Five: stretching the limits of allegory and Justice

Artegall's quest for justice involves rescuing a "distressed Dame" named Eirena from the clutches of a tyrant, Grantorto (*FQ* 5.1.3-4). The name Eirena refers to *Éire*, the Gaelic name for Ireland, while "gran torto" is Italian for "great wrong." In contemporary political terms Grantorto represents, *interalia*, Spanish aggression supported by the Pope in Ireland (*FQ* 510n). The native Irish were traditionally Catholic, but with English colonisation came attempts at the imposition of Protestantism. The Spanish and Irish Catholics, antagonised by the Elizabethan Settlement of 1559 which legislated a more Protestant scripted mass in England, and by her support of Protestant wars abroad, saw Ireland as a springboard, a back door to the control of or invasion of England both religiously and politically. Ireland, being a chaotic site of Anglo-Irish conflict, was a weak point in England's territorial security. It was therefore a place which posed multiple threats to Elizabeth and her government.[133] Spenser, utilising the figure of Eirena, replaces Irish antagonism of English occupancy with a desire for English help. Eirena

> Did to the Faery Queene her way addresse,
> To whom complaining her afflicted plight,
> She her besought of gratious redresse. (*FQ* 5.1.4)

It could be argued that Eirena is in fact a representation of the English in Ireland. She represents a delegation from the English Pale who, besieged by wild Irish, appealed directly to the Queen for aid (*FQ* 511n). It is interesting to note the extent to which English residents of the Pale saw Ireland as their home, a place they could not leave and desperately sought to fortify (Renwick 173-75). Grandtorto may refer allegorically to the many "great wrongs" which were present and immediate to the English as they fought to defend territory for the Queen in Ireland. Spenser was all too aware of the dangers surrounding him. Every year saw new antagonisms and rebellions. His estate at Kilcolman was sacked and burned by Irish rebels during the Tyrone rebellion in October 1598, forcing him and his family to flee to England (Renwick 176; Lethbridge 306). Book Five is as much a comment on the conditions in Ireland and the chaotic and unjust system with which government officials were forced to work, as a glorification of the Elizabethan justice system through the character of Artegall.

Spenser complicates the notion of justice and encourages his readers to judge episodes and characters for themselves in order to recognise that truth is fraught with difficulty. Following the disturbing destruction of Munera (*FQ* 5.2.25-28), a representative of early capitalist society, Artegall and Talus encounter an egalitarian movement in the form of a Giant with Balances and his crowd of supporters (*FQ* 5.2.29-54).[134] As with Distraction and the Blatant Beast, Spenser provides a space for alternative voices to speak. The Giant addresses the topic of social inequality, calling for the elements of the world to be weighed and restored to the state in which they were first created in order for all wealth to be shared equally: "And looke what surplus did of each remaine, / He would to his owne part restore the same againe" (*FQ* 5.2.31).[135] He debates with Artegall, his hierarchical opposite, over the course of several stanzas. Artegall is given a superior footing, countering and cutting down the Giant's arguments to defend the social order by stating its divinely ordained nature, as represented by the divinely appointed monarch (*FQ* 5.2.41-43). In this sense, O'Connell notes that the Giant is positioned as being not only a political rebel, but a rebel against God himself ("Giant with Scales," *Sp Enc* 332). The "vulgar" crowding around the Giant "cluster thick" and "did about him flocke" like "foolish flies" (*FQ* 5.2.33). The Giant reflects the fear of the Elizabethan ruling classes that popular uprisings would threaten the existing social hierarchy. This was immediately felt during the period in which Spenser was writing. Poor harvests during the 1590s caused the price of grain to double in 1594 and again in 1595, initiating widespread food riots among a population that barely had enough to eat even in times of plenty ("Giant with Scales," *Sp Enc* 332). The Giant clearly personifies the social threat this form of human misery represented to the political order of the kingdom ("Giant with Scales," *Sp Enc* 332). His demands for equality parallel those voiced by radical religious groups such as the Anabaptists ("Giant with Scales," *Sp Enc* 331; *FQ* 521n) and mirror the Irish tradition of gavilkind or tanistry, whereby private property was converted into communal property for the good of the clan (*FQ* 521n; *View* 16-18). The Giant and his swarming followers are therefore also reflective of the threat of Irish rebellion and disturbance. The Giant's demand for equality threatens the very basis of the structure of Elizabethan society, in particular the rights of the monarch and nobility. It is for this reason that Talus, inflamed by the Giant's "lewd" mind, "shouldered him from off the higher ground, / And down the rock him throwing, in the sea him drowned" (*FQ* 5.2.49).

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[133] For more on the foreign political context of Elizabeth's reign, see Guy, *Tudor England*; Doran, *England and Europe in the Sixteenth Century*; Haigh, *Elizabeth I*; and Pettegree, *Europe in the Sixteenth Century*.

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[134] The balance, or scales, is a symbol of Justice. The Giant is therefore a parodic version of Astraea (*FQ* 5.1.5) ("Giant with Scales," *Sp Enc* 331).

[135] Michael O'Connell notes that there are several scriptural allusions to balances and the weighing of the elements. See Job 28.23-25; Isa. 40.12; Jer. 31.37; Rev. 6.5 ("Giant with Scales," *Sp Enc* 331).

As with the character of Malbecco, who "on the rocks … fell so flit and light" (*FQ* 3.10.57), the reader feels some sympathy for the Giant. Talus's actions once again prove disturbing, suggesting that extreme brutality is the only means of maintaining a faltering hierarchical system. This is reflective not only of the volatile situation in Ireland, but of the fragile political and social state in England during the 1590s. The fact that Spenser allows the Giant to speak prompts the reader to consider his argument. To a certain extent Spenser himself defied the rigid confines of his social station. He escaped the low social status of his birth to study at Cambridge, acquiring an estate, fame as a poet and a pension from the Queen (Giamatti, *Double Senses* 3-15; Rambuss 7, 26, 63). As Greenblatt notes in *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, the sixteenth century was a period of intense change and transition (1-9). Early capitalism, international exploration and early industrialisation allowed for increased social mobility in relation to the declining power of the nobility (Bryson 136-48). Given Spenser's background and upbringing, there is a suggestion that he acknowledges the Giant's argument and that it introduces a shift in the poet's attitude towards those in power, as will be discussed below. What is certain is that Spenser's allegory warns readers against the extremes of Munera's capitalism and the Giant's social equality or communism. However, the Giant's murder at the hands of Talus registers the degree of fear felt by the ruling classes not only of Ireland but also of England, a fear manifested in Elizabeth's incessant work to preserve her image and the constant surveillance of her subjects.

This fear is further projected by Artegall, who does not rebuke Talus for shouldering the Giant off the cliff so spontaneously and without command. Talus's violence so is extreme that it causes the reader to ask whether it is justified. He is both Artegall's body guard, and he figures as his personal army. He moves as commanded and surges forward to protect his master when he feels Artegall is being threatened. He devastates the "lawlesse multitude," the "rascal crew," who rise to avenge the Giant's death (*FQ* 5.2.51-52): "He like a swarme of flyes them ouerthrew" (*FQ* 5.2.53). Perhaps the crowd's vengeful reaction is justification enough for the destruction of the Giant. Readers are left to come to their own conclusions.

Spenser must have observed instances of brutality in Ireland as there are many images of destruction in *A View of the Present State of Ireland*[136] and *The Faerie Queene*. In Book Five, Artegall helps Burbon fight his enemies, the episode representative of English intervention in France in 1589 and 1591 to support Henri de Burbon, King of Navarre, in his attempt to become King of France (FQ 590n). The passage also suggests the almost constant confrontations between the English and native Irish clans,

Who flocking around about them, as a swarme
Of flyes vpon a birchen bough doth cluster,

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[136] In *The View* Irenius details a brutal plan to get the Irish to conform to English rule. He likens the Irish to a diseased limb or plant that "must first be cut away by a strong hand, before any good can be planted" (*View* 93). Haunting images greet the reader, when he concludes that a complete purge is necessary to rid Ireland of "corrupt braunches and unwholesome boughs" (*View* 93): "should none of them fall by the sword, nor bee slaine by the souldiour, yet thus being kept from manurance, and their cattle from running abroad, by this hard restraint they would quickly consume themselves, and devoure one another" (*View* 101).

> Did them assault with terrible allarme,
> And ouer all the fields themselues did muster,
> With bils and glayues making a dreadfull luster;
> . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
> And all about the fields like Squirrels hunt;
> But chiefly *Talus* with his yron flayle,
> Gainst which no flight nor rescue mote auayle,
> Made cruell hauocke of the baser crew,
> And chaced them both ouer hill and dale:
> The raskall manie soone they ouerthrew (*FQ* 5.11.58-59)

The verse suggests Spenser had firsthand experience of bloodshed in Ireland. It is the dark actions from which seemingly "civilised" society constructs its order and structure: "the *baser* crew" and the "*raskall* manie" are soon exterminated (emphasis added). The implication is that violence is a necessary force for the eventual creation of harmony. Like the Queene of Faery, Artegall distances himself from this brutality, and yet he orders Talus to carry it out. At times, Talus kills without command. We have to wonder whether this is to protect Artegall's reputation. Talus undertakes Artegall's "dirty work," thus allowing him to appear free of blood, a knight without taint. Dominance of the court of Faery is based upon the culling of forms of opposition, the elimination of other cultures and regimes in order to assert their own, maintaining it through hostility and aggression. The Queen's goddess-like domination of "Fravnce and Ireland and of Virginia" (*FQ* 27) is revealed through Spenser's allegory to be founded upon the shady acts of war, suppression and domination. This is an obligatory mode of aggressive violence for the containment and order of society. Opposition is scored and erased. Nowhere is this better seen than in Tudor attempts to govern and suppress resistance in Ireland. In his allegorical representation of Eirena's call for aid from the court of Faery, Spenser suggests his desire for greater support in the repression of the native Irish for the maintenance of order. Throughout *The Faerie Queen* blood is shed, and thoughts of death are never far away. This dark atmosphere eats its way into the text. And, as always, satisfactory closure is deferred and the trace of resistance remains.

Book Five ends very abruptly when Artegall is called back from the reform of Ireland and the quashing of the Blatant Beast "To Faery Court" at the Queen's behest (*FQ* 5.12.43). The suddenness of this decision and the open-ended nature of the conclusion to the book is startling. The rest of the page remains blank: a telling marker of interruption caused by the Queen's wavering stratagems. Grantorto may be dead, but the reform of the "common-weale" has yet to begin, leaving the country in a state of unrest (*FQ* 5.12.26) (Hadfield, *Literature, Politics* 199). This hasty conclusion marks Spenser's frustration at Elizabeth's policies in Ireland – or lack of them. Critics have argued that Artegall's recall to court parallels the removal of Lord Grey from office as Deputy of Ireland in 1582, a man Spenser admired, and for whom he worked as secretary (*FQ* xiv; Renwick 173). Elizabeth's government felt Grey's management to have been too harsh, but Spenser believed his regime would have bought results, whereas the Queen's policy "being by nature full of mercy and clemency" and "mildnesse" left Ireland lawless and "topside-turvy" (*View* 102-3). The Queen was known for her hesitant and inconsistent involvement in foreign policies from the war in the Netherlands in the 1580s to her unpredictable dalliances with French princes concerning marriage proposals (Doran, 78; Loades 54; Hadfield *Literature, Politics*

186).[137] English forces pulled out of Ireland in 1598 following Tyrone's rebellion, which had been aided by the Spanish, leaving Spenser homeless and Ireland in chaos (Norbrook 152; Renwick 176). Book Five details not only Spenser's frustration at Elizabeth's flimsy and inconsistent policies in Ireland, but his despair at Ireland's abandonment at the very moment when her (English) subjects needed the Queen's guidance the most. Elizabeth resented any conflict that would potentially drain finite resources of men, arms and money. Ireland drained England of all three, especially during the 1590s. Taxes were rising and yet rules were inconsistent and progress towards order and control was increasingly fragile. The situation was exacerbated by crop failures, famine, inflation and outbreaks of plague in England (Pettegree 209). It is no wonder that Spenser leaves off his conclusion, instead filling the last stanzas of the book with the slanderous curses of the Blatant Beast and the recall of the hero, his work deliberately and tellingly unfinished. The Beast, originating in Eirena's land, is figurative of the slanderous corruption that threatens to engulf England if Elizabeth does not take greater control of the situation in Ireland. By Book Six the Beast's violence and disruption has grown to the point that he escapes not only his captors but the pages of the text itself. His escape signifies that decorum is under threat; instead of being carefully contained and controlled, scored and re-written, words threaten to tumble out unchecked, slanderous and unlicensed. The Beast is a true force of destruction, bred from complacency and weakening moral virtue. He is a prominent reflection of the decay of Elizabethan government and society, an expression of Spenser's increasing irritation and disassociation from the world in which he lived.

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[137] During the 1570s Elizabeth had marriage proposals from French princes, including Henri, Duke of Anjou in 1571-72, and from Henri's younger brother, Francis in 1579-81. Such proposals proved concerning for an English public fearful of Catholic and French domination, especially at a time when the Queen was beyond her child-bearing years, meaning that she would potentially compromise herself and her realm for nothing (Loades 54).

## Courtliness and courtesy

The allegory of Book Six implicitly conveys sombre manifestations of the landscape and court of the 1590s, while paradoxically being as far away as possible from the central hub of courtly life. This sign of absence is in itself most expressive of Spenser's attitudes and viewpoints. We can see Spenser's allegorical style shifting from scoring and erasing, prompting a continuous need to re-read the text in books One to Three, to an increasing reliance upon absences, "gaps" and the trace of meaning. In books Five and Six, the very language upon which allegory is based is not just scrutinised, it is called into question, emphasising Spenser's increasing frustrations with the religious, social and political atmosphere of the 1590s.

Book Six is about the legend of Calidore or Courtesy and his "courteous" handling of Pastorella and the pastoral world. Yet, for most readers, now alert to the detailed ways of Spenser's allegory, our expectations do not match the outcome of the text. There is an uneasy relationship between Calidore's presentation of "courtesy" and ideas of "courtesy" the reader may have in mind. Leigh Deneef says of Book Six and "Courtesy" that "never before has Spenser been so troubled to locate a source for his virtue. Never before has the sphere of the virtue's action been so conspicuously called into question" (137). This troubling disparity should alert the reader to an analysis of the virtue in question. What exactly is "courtesy"? Spenser's description in the Proem to Book Six should provide a warning to the reader of the slippery meanings associated with this virtue.

> Amongst them all growes not a fayrer flower,
> Then is the bloosme of comely courtesie,
> Which though it on a lowly stalke doe bowre,
> Yet brancheth forth in braue nobilitie,

And spreds it selfe through all ciuilitie:
Of which through present age doe plenteous seeme,
Yet being matcht with plaine Antiquitie,
Ye will them all but fayned showes esteeme,
Which carry colours faire, that feeble eies misdeeme.

But in the triall of true curtesie,
Its now so farre from that, which then it was,
That it indeed is nought but forgerie,
Fashion'd to please the eies of them, that pas,
Which see not perfect things but in a glas:
Yet is that glasse so gay, that it can blynd
The wisest sight, to thinke gold that is bras.
But virtues seat is deepe within the mynd,
And not in outward shows, but inward thoughts defynd. (*FQ* Proem 6.4-5)

Spenser makes it clear that courtesy is a troublesome quality, increasingly warped from its original ancient meaning, to present more show than substance which "feeble eies misdeeme." He alerts the reader to the need to look carefully and objectively at the presentation of Calidore as Courtesy. He also shows the discrepancy between the rich or courtly and their seemingly noble and virtuous deeds. However, it should not be automatically assumed that courtesy is to be regarded as a false virtue. As highlighted by Puttenham's *Arte of English Poesie*, to "dissemble" in the courtly circles of the early modern period was to show one's skill in rhetoric, conversation and sociability. This important talent was known as *sprezzatura* – the ability to disguise artful effort so that it appears natural, or to make the difficult appear easy

(Javitch 32). Using his arts of dissimulation, the courtier could flatter and entertain with wit and grace. These were ploys by which he could assert his refinement (Javitch 46), disguising what may be vulgar, appearing gentle to mask his military fierceness, or appearing modest in the light of the worthiest deeds (Javitch 56). This courtly art was therefore part of the armoury of courtliness and bound within the virtue of courtesy.[138] It was part of a culture which sought to cultivate civilised manners (Bryson 136-53). Thus, "comely courtesie" may branch "forth in braue nobilitie" which in turn "spreds it selfe through all ciuilitie," the court being the pinnacle of refined manners and customs. However, the following stanza in Spenser's proem shifts to suggest what courtesy has become.

Courtesy is "now so farre from that, which then it was" that "it indeed is nought but forgerie." Spenser may be commenting upon a fundamental shift in attitude towards the court that took place in the 1590s. During the last decade of Elizabeth's reign, social and economic factors saw the court decline in wealth and morality (Javitch 127).

> By the end of Elizabeth's reign, Englishmen began to lose their faith in perfect courtliness. In the 1590s poets found it increasingly necessary to disassociate their art from court conduct, now more often seen to be the corruption rather than the cultivation of beautiful manners. (Javitch 16)

Book Six marks Spenser's distress at the failings of court. His allegorical debate over courtesy leads readers to investigate and question this virtue, so as to distinguish genuine courtesy from its false double. The latter is forged and fashioned; the former lies “deepe within the mynd.” Spenser seems to use images of mirrors or powerfully reflective “glas” to warn his readers against the danger of being blinded by beautiful, arresting representations. Even the “wisest sight” can mistake brass for gold. He is prompting his readers not to be impressed by the appearances of Elizabeth’s court, but instead, to question its principles and to recognise where true virtue lies.

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[138] For more about courtliness and the cultivation of virtues in the sixteenth century see: Bryson, "The Rhetoric of Status: Gesture, Demeanour and the Image of the Gentleman in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century England"; Javitch, *Poetry and Courtliness*; Elias, *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*; Richards, *Rhetoric and Courtliness in Early Modern Literature*; and Frank Whigham, *Ambition and Privilege: The Social Tropes of Elizabethan Courtesy Theory*.

Spenser is attempting to re-write courtesy, to construct it anew in his poem. His allegory carefully demystifies courtly constructions that seek to present the brilliance of court and thus blind viewers to its faults. As we have seen, Spenser’s mirror works in many ways, but most importantly, it is a self-conscious marker which forces readers to pause and reassess the assumptions they bring to the text. The Elizabethan court is no longer a shining reflection of virtues. Like Elizabeth I, it presents a blinding reflection which limits rather than encourages vision and understanding. The mirror in this proem is perhaps suggestive of the extent to which the Queen also manipulates the appearance of courtesy for her own diplomatic and political ends. This may also account for the difficulty Deneef notes that Spenser feels in attempting to define the virtue. If this is the case, it reflects the increasing problems Spenser may have felt in reconciling the content of the poem – the extent to which the court and the Queen of Faery are pinnacles of moral perfection – with the reality of the court’s reputation in the 1590s. If he concluded his poem prematurely, abandoning the original outline for the twelve-book structure, this may have been a reason why he did so.[139] Spenser’s probing examination of the nature of courtesy reflects unease with the current moral state and authoritarian structure of his society, and a need to re-examine constructions of courtliness exhibited by the nobility.

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[139] See Grogan 22. Spenser’s death may have prevented him from completing more of the poem. Some scholars feel his work is complete, while others discuss manuscripts which were written by the poet and then subsequently lost. See Rambuss 56. For an account of Spenser’s last days and a debate on the completion of *The Faerie Queene*, see Lethbridge, “Spenser’s Last Days: Ireland, Career, Mutability, Allegory” 302-36. Some critics argue that the projected twelve-book *Faerie Queen* would have culminated in the wedding of Arthur and Gloriana (Kouwenhoven 49).

How can we tell if characters are being genuinely courteous or not? The examples of Archimago and Duessa's seeming "courtesy" make this hard to answer. The Salvage, when treating Serena and Timias's wounds with "deepe compassion" displays more courtesy than Calidore, who, "greedy" for Pastorella's beauty, wishes to ingratiate himself with her father with "wrought" speech and "pleasing tongue" (*FQ* 6.4.11; 6.9.26).[140] Spenser differentiates between natural kindness which is given of itself, seeking no reward, and that which is calculated for show or self-seeking gratification. Calidore's "courtesy" is "farre" from "true" and yet it threatens to "blynd" readers who do not see beyond the "glasse" of fashioned "showes."

Although representing "courtesy," Calidore seems not only to forget the reason for his quest, he is oblivious to his mistakes and conduct (Neuse 345). Donning shepherd's robes, he neglects his role as knight to the court of Faery. As a character, Calidore probably regresses more than he grows.[141] From the warning in the opening stanzas of Book Six, Spenser challenges his reader to distinguish not only between this and other books in the poem, but between the displays and the reality of Calidore's sense of "courtesy." In figuring Calidore thus, Spenser highlights the extent to which the character himself seems to wish to escape the world of the court by playing the shepherd. It is as if Spenser finally expresses his frustration with the ideals and the affected "outward shows" of the Elizabethan court. Richard Neuse has written insightfully on the issue of courtesy and courtly virtues. He argues that "the dominant sense of Book VI is one of disillusionment, of the disparity between the poet's ideals and the reality he envisions" (331). This sense of disillusionment stems from an awareness that chivalry was losing its determined and purposeful character. "For the courtier chivalry becomes largely a label, a matter of social status, not the test and exercise of a noble nature" (Neuse 333). This is demonstrated throughout Book Six, in which Calidore never questions his own actions. His conscience is untouched as he lies to save Priscilla's "virtue" before her father, attesting to her "perfect pure, and guiltless" innocence even though he saw her with Aladine "in ioyous iolliment" (*FQ* 6.3.18; 6.2.16).

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[140] Grogan notes that the Salvage's lack of language proposes threats for the civilised community. The Salvage is without language and without shame – the two fundamental elements, according to Elias, upon which the process of civility is based (171-73).

[141] This characteristic is represented by Blake in his painting of the *Characters in Spenser's Faerie Queene* (see fig. 4 on page 27). Calidore is heavily armoured, suggesting his over-determined obsession with appearance and the difficulty in telling the difference between the truth and the falsity. His extreme armour suggests his need to be seen as a knight, and yet this betrays his lack of genuine knightly qualities, as shown in his near-abandonment of the quest, dressing up in shepherd's robes, shunning knightly status and duties, intruding upon couples' private moments, and his abandonment of Pastorella once she is reunited with her parents (*FQ* 6.12.2-22). His incongruous armour also reveals the discord between the comparatively modern notion of "courtesy" and older traditions of knighthood. Old notions of chivalry gave way to concepts of "courtesy" during the late sixteenth century, when there was increasingly little need for nobles to be armoured knightly protectors, questing and doing battle.

Part of Calidore's dis-courtesy lies in his invasion of private moments – those of Pricilla and Serena as well as Colin Clout (Neuse 343). He has little regard for the feelings of others. His intrusion mirrors his attitude to "virtue": that it be public, and only displayed for "show." However, the best virtues are private and quietly carried out, a concept that Calidore has little awareness of. His intrusion upon and ruining of the mysterious vision of dancing Graces on Mount Acidale in canto ten suggests a mind not worthy of, or attuned to, viewing subtle spiritual beauty. Calidore does not even recognise this detail, a fact which perhaps would have challenged characters from earlier books, such as Redcrosse, to deeper reflections about themselves. Calidore turns himself into a bad reader. He embodies a mental state Spenser most fears his own readers may possess: a mind that does not question and therefore does not learn. These instances are further warnings to readers self-consciously to monitor and assess their methods of reading and interpreting allegory. As with the interruption of Pricilla and Aladine's dalliance, and again with his intrusion upon Serena and Calepine's private moments, Calidore's actions are shown to be thoughtless and discourteous, but despite this he makes no effort to change. As Neuse argues, Calidore is hiding behind the label of chivalry and "courtesy," a marker which the careful reader will see is increasingly inaccurate. There is a genuine absence of courtesy beneath Calidore's posturing. He feels that the title of "noble" is enough to let him get away with his actions and feels no need to "test" his virtue. However, in presenting this allegorical character, Spenser is inviting his readers to examine Calidore, for he does not have the self-perception to do it himself.

Through Calidore's blindness, Spenser suggests the changing nature of chivalry in an increasingly modern age, from that in which virtues had substance to increasingly altered displays of "virtue" which only bear a semblance of that substance. What was present in the concept of chivalry and courtliness is now increasingly absent. Only a trace of the original signification remains. Likewise, Book Five registers a discomfort at the distance between Artegall's pronouncements of justice and Talus's violent enactment of the punishment. While violence against bloodthirsty foes seemed justified in the old ages of Arthurian legend, Spenser articulates an increasingly uncomfortable relation between extreme brutality and the supposed virtues of religion and conduct as upheld by more modern formulations of chivalry. The ideals of chivalry seem to clash with the ethics and politics of late sixteenth-century society (Neuse 334). Spenser comments upon an older world that is increasingly lost. Virtues no longer hold anti-social behaviour in check, while anti-social behaviour continually erodes virtues. Fame-hungry nobles are brought down by the seditious tongues of those who seek to replace them. Courtiers use their high birth to invade and use the bodies and lives of others, and the pastoral is increasingly encroached upon by urban masses and the chaos caused by foreign invaders (as in the case of Ireland in Book Five, and figured allegorically by Pastorella's capture in Book Six [*FQ* 6.11.1-24]).

Acknowledging all these threats, Book Six stages a retreat into the pastoral world, an escape from reality for both poet and reader. This pastoral world is the realm of Colin Clout, a pseudonym for Spenser derived from *The Shepheards Calender*. It seems as if Spenser is retreating from detailing and praising the constructed façade of courtly life. It is as if he no longer seeks material possession, an elevated name and recognition. Fame is a greedy beast hungry to bite (Gross, *Shakespeare's Noise* 40-41). Instead, Spenser's verse turns to worshipping the mysteries and simplicity of the pastoral realm. Tired of seeking praise and recognition, he is instead praising the honest and pure beauty of the natural realm of Ireland, rather than the crowded, self-seeking atmosphere at Elizabeth's court. With this retreat from court comes a retreat from language and therefore from allegory. The "wyld" Salvage is more courteous and noble than Calidore in taking in and nursing the victims of the Blatant Beast – victims of fame and slander, destroyed by words (*FQ* 6.4.2-16). Without language and without sophistication, Serena and Calepine are cared for with herbs, strict guidance and diligence in lowly and natural surroundings. Spenser guides his reader to see beyond language as a form of communication. Instead of language, Serena, the Salvage and Calepine use their senses – eyes, ears, hands, and instincts – to communicate in new and profound ways. With language comes the potentially dangerous "false semblant," as Puttenham states, the impending corruption of tongues that blab, as seen by Calidore's "pleasing tongue" and the imposing presence of the Blatant Beast. The chivalric world of Calidore has been cheapened and outmoded by the misuse of language. Spenser has shifted his emphasis to focus upon the noble beauties of the natural world, and their potential corruption and neglect at the hands of those at court (as seen in the possible rape of Pastorella, whom Calidore after rescuing and returning to her true parents, then abandons for the Faery Court).

Book Six warns that words are powerful and dangerous tools. Words have to be understood in conjunction with other ways of knowing, seeing and perceiving. Allegory encourages multiple ways of viewing and interpreting, but as it is based upon language, even allegory must be regarded with caution and suspicion. As Spenser concludes, lamenting the blame his writings may have incurred, and reflecting on the destructive "backebite" of "wicked tongues" within a society that destroys itself upon the lure of the Blatant Beast, he wishes to instil another language within his readers (*FQ* 6.12.41). While the Beast runs free, forever an aspect of society and a reflection of all that is dark and predatory within human nature, Spenser's retreat into a greener realm reflects a need for new perspectives and alternative ways of articulating life within the world. Through the spontaneous action of the "wlyd" man within a green and rustic setting, Spenser points towards a primitive pre-linguistic moment and stresses that although language is vital to allegory, language is not the only means of communicating. Spenser refines, scores and erases, pushing language and allegory to its furthest extreme. As highlighted by Colin's vision of the Graces on Mount Acidale, the imagination and the visual are just as communicative and are vital to the perceptive expression of life, as argued in chapters four and five.

Not only is Spenser upset at the ravaged beauties of Ireland in the war between the English and Irish, he reflects upon the ultimate corruption of the court and government that he once supported so enthusiastically in his initial praise of Elizabeth

I, before perhaps recognising in himself his own fame-hungry desire for promotion and advancement. Richard Rambuss has identified a shift in Spenser's work during the 1590s, noting "a significant public renegotiation of both Spenser's relation to the court and his terms of literary management" (64). Detouring from his high Virgilian career route, Spenser, according to Rambuss, revives medieval modes of the complaint and dream vision – as suggested by the pastoral scenes of Book Six – using these genres as a means of "unmasking certain fictions upon which patronage and courtly advancement depend. Whereas the impulse in his poetry up to the 1590 *Faerie Queene* was to keep secrets," the impulse beyond 1591 "is to expose them" (Rambuss 64). Spenser as secretary finally relinquishes all his secrets, highlighting the extent to which those with noble power relied upon servants and subjects, such as himself, to contain, promote and uphold the fictions of their worth. All levels of fame, from the Queen to her courtiers and policy makers, are exposed as being carefully orchestrated, monitored and constructed. This exposure of secrets comes perhaps with a breakdown of allegory, allowing for a drive to "expose" otherness directly, rather than subtly prompting the reader to find implicit meaning. This exposure, as seen in the *Mutabilitie Cantos*, discussed below, is perhaps the ultimate reflection of Spenser's irritation with his Queen, court and society. Frustrated, and determined to let his readers share in his allegory, he turns towards a more populist notion of the mode. He abandons his usual allegorical structure, conveying instead a barely concealed tale relating to the reality and fears surrounding the Queen's demise.[142] Giving up on the nuanced and careful style of the allegory in the *Mutabilitie Cantos*, as I will explain in the following section, Spenser gives up on his belief in the ability of his readers to understand his verse allegorically.

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[142] See Teskey's article, "Mutability, Genealogy, and the Authority of Forms," in which he notes the breakdown of allegory's grip in the *Mutability Cantos*: "In *Mutabilitie*, genealogy operates in three distinct contexts to undermine an analogically coordinated, allegorical world" (107). On this point I agree with Teskey.

The distrust of language, court and appearance, so frequently featured within Book Six, finally effects a shift in Spenser's use of allegory. The Savage man and the Hermit's lack of linguistic understanding, as well as the focus upon the pastoral scene, suggest a pre-verbal setting. Neuse notes that it is the illiterate "Savage Man" who stands out as "Nature's nobleman *over against* the courtly reality" (339). Perhaps Spenser becomes disillusioned with allegory as a mode for the subversively contained articulation of frustration. Perhaps he was aware that only careful readers will recognise his subversive implications. Perhaps he sees allegory as too subtle a means of communication in a society increasingly at odds with his values and principles. Perhaps, in fact, he associates allegory with the Queen's representational manipulations to the point that he must cease using the mode in order to expose her artifice. If so, Spenser can be seen to turn allegory against itself in order to betray the Queen's allegorical self-fashioning. Spenser's rejection of traditional modes of allegory, having been used throughout much of *The Faerie Queene* to contain his frustrations, has wider dissident implications, as I will explain.

### Transgression defies containment: the breakdown of Spenser's allegory?

Marked within Spenser's articulation of dissatisfaction is a notable increase in the breakdown of allegory from Book Five onwards. Instead of refining and re-drawing the scene as he goes, scoring and erasing in order to adjust the view and thereby readers' perspectives, Spenser moves away from the highly wrought mode of the earlier books, presenting his poetry in a starker, colder light, which seemingly requires less interpretive work from the reader. Spenser can be seen to show irritation and disillusionment with the allegorical mode, especially in the last two books of *The Faerie Queene*. Indeed, we may read Colin's breaking his pipe on Mount Acidale as Spenser's smashing his allegory. Spenser, it seems, cannot give form to his frustration and disappointment within his allegorical mode, and his meanings like the Blatant Beast, threaten to escape confinement to become openly critical. Increasingly there are "gaps," silences, and traces which demand the reader's participation in making sense of the text while increasing the difficulty of so doing. Moreover, in the remaining fragments of Book Seven Spenser chooses to voice his anxieties through the depiction of an alternative and poorly veiled mythological realm. He elects for a clearer, less ambiguous, less allegorical way of expressing his concerns. It seems as if Spenser can no longer trust his readers not to misconstrue his text and replace "Bon Font" with "Malfont" (*FQ* 5.9.26). The *Mutabilitie Cantos* are the culmination of this collapse of allegory. It has been thought that they were too subversive to be printed in the Queen's lifetime as they are barely allegorical, commentating almost directly upon the Queen's inevitable demise (Teskey, "Mutability" 112-13). As Hadfield says, the verse contains "a pointed *memento mori* aimed at Elizabeth" ("Death of the Queen" 31). The force of the poet's personal sentiment threatens to be openly unmasked. While criticisms tended to be shrouded in allegory whereby one thing signifies another, the trace pointing to the absence, indirectly alluding to disapproval, the *Mutabilitie Cantos* comment almost directly upon the mortality of the Queen.

Elizabeth's personal choices had had a huge impact upon her nation. Without husband, child, or designated heir, the aged Queen sat on the throne in the 1590s in the full knowledge that she would be the last Tudor to rule England. The succession was of vital importance for the stability of the country. Elizabeth's cousin, Mary Queen of Scots, was until her execution in 1587 next in line to the throne. Following her was her son, James, a man educated in Scotland, but whose intentions and religious upbringing were relatively unknown in England (Hadfield, "Death of the Queen" 40). He banned the sale of the second edition of *The Faerie Queene* in Scotland, finding Spenser's representation of Duessa in Book Five too likely to evoke his mother's life and her ungracious trial and execution (Hadfield, "Death of the Queen" 37-38). The question of the succession was uncertain and added to the mounting troubles of the 1590s. Within this context, Spenser's focus upon the transient nature of life and the inevitability of death seems ever more pertinent to the representation of his monarch. As we have seen, not only does the first proem to *The Faerie Queene* hint at the Queen's age through the metaphor of looking glasses, suggesting that her image is distorted from its real form, but the *Mutabilitie Cantos* depict the march of life and the approach of change and decay within "Cynthia" or the Moon, a common literary representation of Elizabeth.[143]

The *Cantos* convey the legend of Constancy, relating to the twelve original virtues as outlined by Spenser in his overview of *The Faerie Queene*. However, the fragmentary remains of these two cantos are more mythological than the rest of the poem, detailing disputes between gods, Jove, Mutabilitie and Cynthia. This shift is reflective of Spenser's withdrawal from the earthly realm and its protagonists, of his frustrated awareness of the limitations of his world and the knowledge that "Constancy" is itself a myth, a concept that cannot exist in the reality of the evolving world.

In the *Cantos* Spenser continues likening his monarch to the bright beams of a goddess. Cynthia, goddess of the Moon, "whose bright shining palace" is "fairely deckt with heauens goodly story," has "two steeds, th' one black, the other white, / Environd with tenne thousand starres around" (*FQ* 7.6.8-9). Black and white refer to the two phases of the moon, but these were also the personal colours of the Queen, signifying authority and power (black), and purity and virtue (white) (Strong 71, 74). Mutabilitie seeks to push Cynthia from her throne, highlighting Elizabeth's mortal status. Constancy must inevitably be overtaken by natural mutability. The struggle between Mutabilitie and Cynthia reflects the violence out of which authority must emerge (Teskey, "Mutability" 106). One rule must be extinguished for another to take its place. Elizabeth's vow of chastity has prevented her rule from continuing through a natural born heir. Instead of trumping the inevitable forces of nature through her own offspring, Elizabeth's choice of chastity has left her no recourse but the termination of her royal lineage. These passages, imagining the Queen's death, emphasise the darkness created by the gap in Tudor genealogy. The implication is that the Queen, in not providing an heir, fails to put her other children – her citizens – before herself. The needs of the populace are forgotten while the Queen attends to upholding her own personal image and her self-defeating motto – constancy and chastity:

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[143] Raleigh calls his monarch "Cynthia" in the poem entitled *Ocean to Scynthia*, honouring and flattering his Queen. In using the moon as a symbol for Elizabeth, Raleigh was utilising an image that had become very popular in representations of Elizabeth (Strong 48). The moon was regarded as a symbol of the empire, and the Queen seen as a chaste moon-goddess, shedding beams of pure religion, in contrast to the sun, which was a symbol of papacy (Yates 76).

> Meane-while, the lower World, which nothing knew
> Of all that chaunced here, was darkened quite;
> . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
>     happy wights, now vnpurvaide of light,
> Were much afraid, and wondred at the sight;
> Fearing least *Chaos* broken had his chaine,
> And brought againe on them eternall night: (*FQ* 7.6.14)

Spenser envisions the coming loss of the Queen, the inevitability of her death and the confusion that will ensue. Because she has not made her successor known to bear the "light" of the monarchy, all is plunged into darkness, which will increase if no one is found to undertake the responsibility for the government of the realm.

Gordon Teskey details the various stages of resistance that make the antagonistic tone of these cantos markedly clear.

> In *Mutabilitie*, genealogy operates in three distinct contexts to undermine an analogically coordinated, allegorical world. These are the mythological, in which Mutabilitie asserts her claim as a descendent of Titan; the political, in which the logic of succession and of uncontrolled growth is subversive of an aesthetically legitimated order of forms; and the philosophical, in which metaphysics, the study of things with independent being and freedom from change, is shown to have come out of something other than itself that it subsequently tries to contain. (Teskey, "Mutability" 107)

Teskey points to the struggle between nature or "natural subversion" and the urge to contain or counter it, the desire to prevent the aging process, to escape decay. However, the power of nature is greater than all other forces. Change will prevail. Spenser implies that in seeking to counter nature, the Queen is herself being subversive as she attempts to deny the natural laws of life and death, godly laws that order the progress and passage of life. Here it is not Mutabilitie who is wrong or unnatural, but Cynthia.

Mutabilitie's attack is direct and full of venom:

> Euen you faire *Cynthia*, whom so much ye make
> *Ioues* dearest darling, she was bred and nurst
> On *Cynthus* hill, whence she her name did take:
> Then is she mortall borne, how-so ye crake
> Besides, her face and countenance euery day

> We changed see, and sundry forms partake,
> Now hornd, now round, now bright, now brown and gray:
> So that *as changefull as the Moone* men vse to say. (*FQ* 7.7.50)

The passage is barely allegorical. As Elizabeth has shaped her representation through allegorical portrayals, Spenser shows these representations breaking under the weight of ever-apparent reality. As a divinely appointed monarch, she is Jove's (God's) "dearest darling." Elizabeth is Cynthia because the mechanisms of Elizabethan praise and propaganda have made the name interchangeable with her own. This over-used comparison strips the association of power and leaves instead a hollow shell, the frail body of the Queen, dim without the paraphernalia of iconic props and meaning. Spenser suggests that everyone can see through her allegorical mechanisms. Instead of blinding the viewer with her bright beams, Spenser shows the Queen as she truly is: "her face and countenance… We changed see." What was beautifully youthful is exposed, as Duessa is stripped in Book One, and shown to be "Now hornd … now brown and gray."[144] Spenser cannot keep from directly stating his criticisms. The words unpack and demystify the images and representations built up around Elizabeth over her many years as monarch. She is "mortal born" – a true assertion of fact and one which goes against her goddess-like representations. It also jars with any implication of her divinity as an absolute monarch, by grounding her in flesh and reinforcing her status as merely a representative with the task of guiding the people and attending to their spiritual welfare. As seen by the encroaching darkness and the Queen's seeming selfishness in not producing offspring of her own, her care has gone amiss. Spenser shows the ravages of time upon her face, the changes that take place over time, and compares these to her distorted, falsely youthful, and constantly eternal portraits and presentations. Constancy is a false motto because everything alters and changes over time. The Queen's constancy has further been negated by her inconsistent policies and motives. To be likened to the "*changefull*" moon, as Spenser's last line shows, is not necessarily a compliment. The moon was traditionally gendered female, not as bright or powerful as the masculine sun with which the moon was compared.[145] To be as wavering, pale and shadowy as the moon suggests distance, a cold watery brightness that must wax and wane, according to the movements of the earth and the sun. As the distant cold moon, Elizabeth is inaccessible to her subjects. Spenser exposes her power as an illusion. Her power is not absolute when considering the potential force and threat from Europe, or from Ireland. However, her greatest threat is her natural body. Spenser finally unmasks his monarch for what she is: a woman in a frail body who takes all the tools of government and representation and manipulates them to make herself anew. Elizabeth is the ultimate example of self-fashioning in Renaissance England, a woman as much created by events and people as she is the creator (Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* 1-9). She is reactionary as much as she is revolutionary, a woman as weak as she is strong.

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[144] For the stripping of Duessa see *FQ* 1.8.45-50.

Allegory brings to the foreground stark and immediate issues that perhaps had previously not been made conscious and certainly had not been articulated. Spenser uses his allegory to reflect upon the shady mechanisms of government and society, taking these truths to their very limit, to the point where he reaches the edge of articulation, and his allegory starts to break down. He seems to find himself limited by the very mode chosen to express his verse. Imaginatively, we feel, he is not free to say exactly what he wants. We know he was distrustful of wilful and unconscious misreading, and his poem is acutely aware of the high probability of misreading allegory. If he appears to be abandoning allegory towards the very end of *The Faerie Queene* in the urgency of making his views known, we need to ask whether Blake is, finally, more of an allegorist than Spenser. Blake, in contrast to Spenser, seems to find allegory to be a liberating mode. This is partly reflective of the different eras in which both poets lived. However, the social dynamics surrounding each poet also played a part. Spenser seems to have had more at stake in terms of upholding standard social codes and with them his ambition for courtly and social status. Blake had very different ambitions. His relative poverty and alternative religious and social views marked him as an outsider. He sought to challenge rather than uphold contemporary social values and allegory is an alternative and expressive means of doing so. Thus, while Spenser seems increasingly disappointed with his allegorical work, Blake never appears to be. It is as if Blake's lowly social position reinforces his allegorical freedom. As an outsider, he was not hampered by social strictures and used allegory as a means of freely stating his views. In contrast, Spenser, having been relocated to Ireland, found himself excluded from a social world of which he sought to be a part. His poems register his frustration with his situation, both condemning and upholding the government which drove him to take this position. Losing sight of his goal and eventually overcome by personal loss and ruin, Spenser's allegorical voice during the final years of his life seems to die. In Blake, however, the allegorical accent remains as a prominent means of liberated and lively articulations of resistance.

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[145] For more on Elizabeth's association with moon symbolism, see Berry, *Of Chastity and Power* 134-35. See also Marion Campbell's analysis of Raleigh's poem "The Ocean to Scinthia" and his common likening of Elizabeth with the moon in "Inscribing Imperfection: Sir Walter Ralegh and the Elizabethan Court" 233-53.

## “In soot I sleep”: Blake’s allegorical reassessment of social mental attitudes

William Blake was critical of institutions and dogmatic rules governing social conduct and morality. However, as discussed in chapter two, he was also highly aware of censorship, the methods by which the government could silence the tongue of Tharmas. *The Four Zoas* depicts Tharmas whose “Gate of / the Tongue” is “closd” “in trembling fear” (*FZ* 5.43-4). Much of the epic is taken up with the tongue’s plight in exile and under censorship, an aspect of Blake’s own predicament during and after the 1790s. The poem details the uneasy struggle as the tongue clamours to speak out while reason seeks to enforce his silence (Erdman, *Blake: Prophet Against Empire* 273). An anxious pact is formed as the tongue has his way and Blake does write, but reason dictates that his writing should not be formally printed and that it be written in ambiguous words so as to mask its resistance to social customs (Erdman, *Blake: Prophet Against Empire* 273). Blake contained his subversion deep within layers of language, his poems becoming increasingly cryptic and mythical (Morton 17). Allegory was therefore a vital tool to his art. Without it he may not have articulated his deeper criticisms in such effective and potent ways, and he has much to say both about his society and its moralistic religious principles. Allegory was the perfect means of expressing criticism without overtly attacking the status quo.

I wish to focus first of all on the *Songs of Innocence and Experience*. These short and seemingly simple poems tell us much about Blake’s world, its social stratification and the institutions and structures within it. The poems mark the extent to which attitude colours the perception of the world, attitudes that Blake’s poems seek to address. Contrasting ways of thinking are directly correlated in the parallel or companion poems which make up much of the dialectical structure of *Innocence* and *Experience*. Rather than the controlling voice of the poet guiding readers to assume certain attitudes, in these poems there is no obvious omnipotent voice and no such direction (Glen 4). This un-authoritative structure would have surprised eighteenth-century readers and perhaps explains in part the mixed critical reception of Blake's *Songs* (Glen 4). Just as "The Chimney Sweeper" of *Innocence* looks to an inner strength and spirituality in his bleak situation, the sweep of *Experience* can only see his position bitterly and literally, regarding himself as being insignificant and devoid of blessing, a "little black thing among the snow." The implications that these complementary yet contrasting poems generate creates allegorical potential. One can see both poems as the psychological reflections of a single chimney sweeper as his mind invariably shifts between optimistic and pessimistic thoughts. However, the chimney sweep of *Innocence* possesses a multidimensional view of his predicament. The character is aware of his poverty-stricken situation: "my father sold me while yet my tongue / Could scarcely cry weep, weep, weep ... / So your chimneys I sweep and in soot I sleep." Despite this awareness, he is sustained by his own "bright" visions and has the energy to care for and encourage others such as Tom Dacre to nurture "happy and warm" thoughts to shield himself from the harsh climate outside. The Sweep's attitude is one of human compassion and spirituality, dimensions that mark him as having attained a state of higher innocence, a state in which he is aware of more than the suffering of the human world. The Sweep of *Innocence* functions in an expansive, multidimensional, and therefore allegorical manner, an approach Blake encourages his readers to attain. This position of perceptive awareness has not been gained by the Sweep of *Experience* who lets his worldly woes crowd all the faculties of his mind. This Sweep is confined in a one-dimensional singularity of vision. Readers are made conscious of the limitations of their own attitudes in comparing these figures.

From another perspective, Blake intends the reader to feel outrage for both Sweeps' situations. They are representations of the hardship and cruelty of the late eighteenth-century workplace. These young children were forced into dangerous labour because their limbs are tiny enough to enable them to squeeze into chimney stacks. By the late 1780s and early 1790s, there was concern for the welfare of the "climbing boys," as they were called (Makdisi, *Impossible* 105). Laws were passed to forbid the boys "calling the streets" without supervision and only between the hours of five in the morning and midday, six days a week (Makdisi, *Impossible* 105). However, this legislation hardly protected them. The boys worked in filth and darkness, continually inhaling soot and smoke, being forced – sometimes by scorching – up narrow and twisted chimneys, unable to secure adequate rest and cleanliness. Their work subjected them to terrible scars, burns, scratches and diseases. Often beginning work at the age of five, by the time they were twelve or thirteen years of age, they would have grown too large for chimney sweeping, but their bodies would inevitably be broken, leaving them stunted and deformed (Makdisi, *Impossible* 105). Blake's "little black thing among the snow" is designed to prompt the reader's conscience. The poems highlight the extent to which work could literally form the worker, mentally, physically and emotionally (Makdisi, *Impossible* 105). The sweep is no longer a person, but likened to a piece of coal, a "little black thing" whom many would pass in the street without a care. Blake's Sweeps are allegorical figures for the chronic working conditions of the poor. As Makdisi states, "Blake's urban figures of whore and chimney sweeper offer particularly striking cases of the reduction of human beings to reified organs for work" (*Impossible* 106). Blake uses his verse to expose darkness within the social systems of the late eighteenth century, prompting his readers to see the wrongs within these systems. In this sense, his Sweeps are designed to illuminate readers' attitudes while dusting out the chambers of their minds.

Blake uses his Sweeps deliberately to shock readers into acknowledging that many of the poems, despite their seemingly simple and childlike language and rhythms, deal with harsh, adult subjects. The design of the poems of *Innocence* and *Experience* again challenges and defies reader assumptions. Innocence is not a state of blissful ignorance. If anything it is exactly the opposite. Innocence requires an enquiring mind that is hugely aware of inequality and suffering but that can also transcend situations of pain and despair with thoughts of hope and an awareness of the presence of God. It is capable of perceiving multiple levels of reality. Perhaps in choosing children as his predominant subjects, Blake was aware of the perceptive minds of most infants as they become conscious of the world around them. He would be familiar with Jesus' attitude to children in Matthew 18.2-4: "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." It is the "humble" little child who is seen as "greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 18.3-4).[146] Children are reminders to the reader to approach Blake's work with the freshness of a child, free from conventional ways of knowing (Makdisi, *Impossible* 162-63). Blake's allegory is based upon the shifting and altering of readers' attitudes and perspectives. An open, inquisitive mind is best for reading Blake's verse and the understanding of his meaning. Therefore, we cannot condemn the Sweep of *Experience*, but we must try to see from his perspective in order to transcend it and illuminate our own. In choosing to present children in his *Songs*, Blake illustrates the rapidity with which they become tainted and corrupted by the doctrines and the existence to which they are born, as highlighted by "Infant

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[146] See also Mark 10.14 for a further example of Jesus' compassion towards children: "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God."

Sorrow."[147] While the Sweep of *Innocence* can still imagine what it feels like to be a carefree child playing in the river and feeling the sun warming his skin, the child of *Experience* is highly aware of his lost innocence. He can never forget his "misery" and the "injury" his parents have caused him by forcing him to work while they worship at church. His childhood has been replaced by cynicism and bitterness. Through the *Songs*, Blake reflects the devastating weight of social burden upon vulnerable children at increasingly early ages. Unless they become aware that it is possible to view their situation in different ways, most are reduced to passively bitter compliance with the lives they are forced to accept. The *Songs* are a profoundly rich and dark expression of the processes of the society in which Blake lived, while also being a reflection upon the ways in which allegorical perception works to free minds from exploitation. Blake uses the allegorical paralleling of both Sweeps' viewpoints to make his readers aware of the situations and perspectives of others. In so doing, he guides his readers to look at the world and its characters afresh, and, unlike the Sweep of *Experience*, not immediately to pre-judge and condemn.

The Chimney Sweep's cry of "weep, weep, weep" may be a lisping cockney or childlike rendition of his cry of business, "sweep, sweep, sweep." Through the depiction of a small child weeping his wares, Blake gives a graphic impression of the commodification of human life in London, a city that doubled in size during the eighteenth century to become the largest metropolis in the world (Tambling 100). Everyone was in the business of trading, buying and selling in order to survive, and the Chimney Sweep poems are a graphic reflection of this. Bodies increasingly become objects with a market value. The poem "London" is probably the most striking in its portrayal of the literal and metaphorical consumption of human bodies and their confinement within tight social bonds.

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[147] "Infant Sorrow" depicts the hardening of a baby's mind from the moment of birth. "Bound and weary I thought best / To sulk upon my mother's breast" (*SE*). Struggling against his "swadling bands," the child is already aware of being bound to conform to social customs and rules.

I wander thro' each charter'd street,
Near where the chartered Thames does flow
And mark in every face I meet
Marks of weakness, marks of woe (*SE* "London")

Gavin Edwards notes that the poem is filled with performative utterances – "charter'd," "ban" and "mark" – whereby conventional relationships are established in conformist and particularly legal contexts for the social identification and use of human beings (88). Bans of marriage are announced to unite two people, often for economic or social gain, a christening establishes a child's parents and "marks" his or her name and identity within a religious community. Charters establish the incorporation of companies and towns in business, and define social contracts between ruler and ruled (Edwards 88). "Blake's poem is overwhelmingly concerned with these overlapping areas of Church, Law, property, Crown and marriage" (Edwards 88). The poem reflects upon the categorisation and institutionalisation of life and society. It highlights the expectations of that society: that one be christened into the Church, that marriage be legally proclaimed, that all is "chartered" and contracted and ordered to "flow" within legitimate bounds, like those of the ordered streets of London, and the river Thames within its banks. Makdisi comments on the proliferation of charity schools, foundling hospitals, asylums for industry, shelters, orphanages and workhouses that appeared at this time. These institutions worked to nurture the ingredients for production (children and people) while eliminating the criminal poor. This was "*individual* engineering" on a huge scale: the production of useful individuals (Makdisi, *Impossible* 101-04). Anyone who countered this ordering was repositioned within the lower ranks of this regimented system. Thus, the body of the "youthful Harlot," a social "outcast," is bought and sold, often used by married men whose own wives have been contracted with neat bonds accompanied by marriage dowries. All are "marked" or named according to their status and function. Blake notes the confining limitations of social codification and the extent to which it "marks" or wounds people with "woe." Their "weakness" is that they unquestionably accept these social rituals and conventions: "So your chimneys I sweep & in soot I sleep" (*SI* "The Chimney Sweeper"). It could be argued that Blake too "marks" his work in taking his pen and writing or engraving his copper to produce the poem. He also categorises and codifies the people he sees in London's streets. However, he does so in order to challenge his readers' assumptions and force us to recognise that we impose rigid mental structures and labels upon ourselves and others as much as the mechanisms of government do. Language has a power beyond that of merely naming. Language produces traces of meaning which "marks" like a scar. In thus "marking" all he sees, Blake is self-consciously reflecting upon the ways in which language fixes meaning while expressing new forms of communication.

To illustrate this, Blake, like Spenser, seeks new ways of thinking about and viewing his society and language. He is aware of the extent to which language can "mark" all including himself. He uses his verse to get readers to realise the self-conscious workings of allegorical language.

> How the Chimney-sweepers cry
> Every blackning Church appalls,
> And the hapless Soldiers sigh
> Runs in blood down Palace walls (*SE* "London")

Here images of sight and sound have become conflated. The sound of the soldier's "sigh" is visualised as blood running "down Palace walls." Blake seeks to break the bonds that readers themselves make when approaching a text. The chimney sweep's cry of "weep, weep, weep" conveys sound with image to express the scene through multiple senses. The verbal utterance of the soldier is transformed into a blood-smeared mark. The blood of dead soldiers lies metaphorically on the hands – the palaces – of the ruling elite who have ordered the wars, just as the sweep's cries of squalor and degradation echo and blacken the walls and thresholds of churches whose members sit back and do nothing. Mixing words conveying sounds and images, Blake entices his readers to see with greater and deeper perception. His words become multidimensional. As we have seen in Spenser, civilisation is formed out of darkness and violence. All human beings, from soldiers to harlots to child sweeps, are commodities for sale, used and cast aside. Blake utilises his contained and unusual expressions and his repetitions to jolt his reader into perceiving the world in new ways and with new eyes. Despite the necessary use of language as a means of communicating his views, Blake uses his allegory to guide readers to analyse his verse multi-dimensionally, taking in the sights and sounds of the scene and feeling its visual impact with renewed force. He sought to shed light upon the injustices he saw every day, "marking" them as unacceptable, one label he hoped his readers would open their eyes to recognise and ultimately agree with.

It was not just the elite, the government, conventions and institutions that Blake sought to criticise. The main focus of his criticism is weighted against general social passivity, inactivity and narrow-mindedness – "[t]he mind-forg'd manacles I hear" (*SE* "London"). He wishes to break self-imposed limitations. He hears these manacles at work in the human mind through woeful, passive cries and utterances. He sees this passivity in narrow, hardened eyes. "We are led to Believe a Lie / When we see [*with*] not Thro the Eye" ("Auguries of Innocence"). Instead of simply looking at the scene, Blake stresses the eye's active involvement in searching, analysing and judging the visual. The eye is not simply an empty hole into which light pours, but a precious tool to be used effectively. "He who sees the Infinite in all things sees God. He who sees the Ratio only sees himself only" ("There is No Natural Religion"). This passage gets to the heart of Blake's writing: that his readers open their minds, eyes and hearts to perceive the multidimensional complexity of the world, rather than being bound to their own limited and narrow perspectives. The concept of the "Ratio" refers to a limited system founded upon the facts that are available and organised by Reason. These were often ideologies proposed by scientists such as John Locke (1632-1704) with his materialistic universe based on a philosophy of the five senses (Foster Damon 341).[148] Blake found these scientific concepts limiting, distorting and dictatorial. He sought for his readers actively to use their minds, senses and imagination to see the world for themselves rather than accepting the partial and incomplete theories of the scientists of Reason.[149]

Blake fears that too many people have Earth's attitude in "Earth's Answer." Prostrate, bound down, "her locks cover'd in grey despair," Earth accusingly asks:

Can delight

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[148] In composing his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), Locke wrote: "I imagin that all knowledge is founded on and ultimately derives its self from sense, or something analogous to it and may be cold sensation which is donne by our senses conversant about particular objects which give us the simple Ideas or Images of things" (1). See *Drafts for The Essay Concerning Human Understanding, and other Philosophical Writings*.

[149] Locke's essay takes on a scientific tone in Draft A: "That all our knowledg of things existing are only particulars and that if we knew the truth of any universall proposition it only supposes existence upon which supposition the universall truth follows. for though we know it to be universally true that the three angles of a triangle are equall to two right ones, yet it supposes a triangle to exist which can be knowne noe other way but by our senses, which are conversant only about particular things" (82). Locke's debate on a human knowledge of abstract mathematical principles leads us to think of Blake's depiction of Newton/Urizen and his formulation of the triangle with his pointed compass. (See the opening plate to *Europe* [fig. 15 on page 351] and Blake's picture of Newton. This image is discussed in more detail in chapter five).

Chain'd in night
The virgins of youth and morning bear (*SE* "Earth's Answer")

She can only see her own dark misery. She blames others for her condition, without realising that her own state of mind is the cause of much of her pessimism. She must be the one to break the chain and rise up. She must appreciate youth and morning in order to cultivate her own delight and joy. And yet she is cold and passive, believing herself unable to motivate renovation and new life. Her state of mind makes her a victim, a role she willingly accepts and plays upon. She "locks" herself up in her self-constructed chains of "grey despair." Her isolated self-misery makes her unaware of anyone else. Focused upon her own situation, she becomes stony, cold, lifeless, dead to the voices of others and ultimately to her own self-awareness. Using the allegory of Earth, Blake makes it expressly clear that this problem of accusatory bitterness and passivity is almost ubiquitous. We must start looking "with" and not "thro the eyes" in order to transcend our position and reflect objectively on the world. If not, the mind becomes a self-enclosed "little black thing," dark, hard and impenetrable.

Blake uses allegory in order to inspire energetic reader engagement with the text. As seen in the confusion of senses in "London," his verse creates a form of "resistance" to simple reading, thereby forcing his reader to work between discourses. His poems show human beings bound down both physically and mentally, forced to work like machines as industrialisation swept across urban areas during the eighteenth century. As the tiny chimney sweeps poignantly illustrate, human beings were being reduced to organs for work (Makdisi, *Impossible* 106). The process of industrialisation turned bodies into machines. New industrial inventions marked the total reorganisation of manufacture and the application of steam power from 1790 (as seen in the Albion Mill, near where Blake lived, which was subsequently burnt down),[150] allowed for the mechanisation of the workforce (Makdisi, *Impossible* 107). Intensified manufacturing processes which included long hours and shift work reduced often female and juvenile work forces to a miserable existence. "[L]ocked up in coffins of black," they were often ill clad, half starved, over worked and ill lodged (Makdisi, *Impossible* 108) – "your chimneys I sweep & in soot I sleep." Blake not only comments on the appalling conditions in which many in London were forced to work. His poems harness the language of anatomy and mechanisation to force readers to read allegorically and perceive ways of freeing themselves from both their physical and "mind-forg'd manacles."

*The Book of Urizen* and *The Book of Los* convey a sense of incessant activity combined with oppression and increasing horror. These poems can be seen as being allegorical reflections of London, a city compelled to endless strife and bondage through the workings of Urizenic laws. "Dark revolving in silent activity" (*BU* 3.18), "*Lungs* heave incessant" (*BL* 4.54, my emphasis), Los's "Hammer of adamant" "beat on the Anvil" (*BL* 5.22, 33), "*organ*ising the Human / Into finite inflexible *organs*" (*BL* 4.44-45, my emphasis). The impression is of the clamour of bodies and machines, the ongoing industrial process, whereby man has become machine and is organised, responding only to commands (at odds with his organic instincts and natural impulses). Makdisi notes the "high level of anatomical language" used within these books, arguing that Blake forces his readers to move between and link together multiple discourses: "physiology, psychology, economics, religion and politics" (Makdisi, *Impossible* 83). Blake compels the reader to shift between discourses rather than thinking in a single register. This is fundamental to his allegorical process. In so doing, he continually unsettles readerly assumptions. *The Book of Los* combines anatomical and industrial concepts to illuminate the creation of Urizen and thus the portrayal of a mechanised workforce, paralleling the ceaseless activity of the human body. "Lungs heave" to the "incessant" beat of hammer on anvil, while human labourers are organised into "inflexible organs" or mechanised cogs of production. This language of cold anatomical mechanisation is unfamiliar. It calls for the reader to discard old assumptions and rethink the relationship between the body and forces of industrialisation. We are made to think of the consequences of mechanisation and Urizenic law upon bodies, lives and society. Again, Blake is challenging his readers to think creatively and imaginatively. Makdisi states that Blake deliberately associates concepts with language not necessarily designed to handle those concepts. He had to work with what he had. He had to put together new perceptions in any way he could, even when he did not necessarily have the means by which fully to articulate these new impressions. Blake comments on a fairly new phenomenon. His fusion of anatomical language with the heat, pain and labour of industry poignantly describes the rapid unnatural industrialisation of individuals witnessed by the poet during his lifetime. In forming new ideas from several disassociated parts, "he could devise a way to write about the relationship of parts to wholes that would allow him more poetic and conceptual flexibility than some other more readily available language" (Makdisi, *Impossible* 83-85). This may be true, but I feel that Blake's mingling of various discourses does not just create new, fresh, invigorating perspectives on life. It also produces creative allegorical energy which he sought to transfer to the reader and thus to his society in general.

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[150] For more on Albion Mill, see Ackroyd 130-31. The Mill was the first great factory in London, built along Blackfriars Road, near to where the Blakes lived in Lambeth (from 1790-1800). Run upon steam engines, it was designed to produce 6000 bushels of flour every week. It was burned down in March 1791 and remained a black ruined shell until 1809. Arckroyd notes that Blake would have passed it every time he walked into the city (130-31). References to mills feature frequently in the poetry of Blake. For a comprehensive list, refer to "Mill" in Foster Damon's *Blake Dictionary* 273-74.

Blake promoted this expression of linguistic allegorical energy. “Energy is the only life and is from the Body and Reason is the bound or outward circumference of Energy … Energy is Eternal Delight” (*MHH* 4.13-15). By the eighteenth century, “energy” had become a “fashionable cult-word,” according to Morton D. Paley (*Energy and the Imagination* 4). Paley details the numerous eighteenth-century meanings of “energy.” Firstly, it signified strength of expression, force of signification, spirit or life. This use was often associated with the language of the Old Testament. Secondly, it meant faculty or operation in an early scientific sense. Thirdly, it designated “power not excited in action.” Paley argues that this meaning was closest to Blake’s usage of the words “force, vigour, efficacy, influence,” showing that energy is considered to be a divine, non-material and spiritual phenomenon (*Energy and the Imagination* 6). Blake therefore regards energy as being the property of the soul as much as it is of the body, a complex and inseparable phenomenon of human existence. He licenses energy and vigour in all areas of life – bodily, imaginatively, spiritually and mentally. His use of the word is a complete reinterpretation and encourages readers to read it in this sense. Not only does he promote a new way of seeing, he imparts to his readers a new allegorical language, of which the word “energy” is just one highly important example. More than being a physical force alone, energy is a life-giving spirit, the essence of humanity: “Energy is the only life … Energy is Eternal Delight.”

Thus the Sweep of *Innocence* has the mental energy to move from the prostrate position adopted by Earth, of sleeping in soot (“in soot I sleep”), to leaping, laughing, running and shining in the sun. What is most subversive about Blake’s texts is his use of this energetic, potent, graphic language. In conveying anatomical activity in the books of *Urizen* and *Los*, Blake is implicitly pointing towards the potential energy and activity inherent in every human being. If "mind-forg'd" manacles could be broken, human beings would have the creative capacity to rise above their mental and physical confinement. It is with imaginative and allegorical energy that the Sweep of *Innocence* can see the cold, dirty reality of his existence but still transcend it with warm and generous thoughts, encouraging others, such as Tom Dacre, to share in them. The implications give rise to dissidence for several reasons. Not only does Blake call into question a carefully outlined and regimented social order, his verse prompts his readers actively to think for themselves and form their own opinions concerning the policies of the decision makers and the situation in which they live. Instead of being a "slumberous mass" of prostrate bodies, Blake encourages his readers to "arise" and participate individually and energetically with their lives (*SE* "Introduction").

The implications within Blake's texts are especially subversive given the context of the 1790s. The period contained a "[b]ubbling variety of radicalisms" issuing from educated rationalists who spoke out against the established order (Makdisi, *Impossible* 21). Calls for freedom, individual rights and liberty were expressed by both Tom Paine and organisations such as the London Corresponding Society (Makdisi, *Impossible* 49).[151] Increasing pressure was put on the government by events in France. Added to this, the working classes were actively demonstrating their rights, often for economic benefits. Textile workers went on strike in Manchester in 1791; carpenters in Liverpool in April 1792; Liverpool dock workers in May 1792; cutlers in Sheffield in June 1792; colliers in Bristol in August of the same year; and sailors in Yarmouth in October, to name just a few (Makdisi, *Impossible* 64). Energies were being combined to undermine oppressive regimes in the struggle to assert humane and individual rights. Blake's allegory both comments upon and encourages this energy.

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[151] For more on radical thinkers and movements in the later eighteenth century see Mee; Makdisi in *Impossible History* and *Romantic Metropolis*; Morton's *The Everlasting Gospel* (especially for seventeenth-century religious influences on Blake), and Morton D. Paley, "William Blake, the Prince of the Hebrews, and the Woman Clothed With the Sun" 260-93. On Swedenborgism, see Bellin and Ruhl, *Blake and Swedenborg: Opposition Is True Friendship*.

However, before we assume that Blake took a typical radical line, we must pause and reassess. As his allegory shows, nothing can be assumed or taken for granted. While his work participates in the radical attack on the *ancien régime*, his ideas depart in significant ways from the dominant radical position of the time (Makdisi, "Metropolitan Radicalism" 114). As with Blake's allegory, his version of radicalism

> [i]nvolves new ways of imagining past, present, and future within a metropolitan space that is seen no longer as opposed to an exterior world, but rather as opening out to it….
>
> A perspective in Blake's terms is, of course, not something that one falls into inevitably or unconsciously, but rather something that one must actively construct and keep modifying. (Makdisi, "Metropolitan Radicalism" 114)

While Paine and others were concerned with the rights of individuals and individual freedom and liberty, Blake's notion of liberty worked for the imaginative expression of humanity as a whole. Perhaps he saw that to seek rights for "individuals" was too naïve, especially considering that no one is born equal, and therefore no one will necessarily be judged or treated in exactly the same way. As seen in Spenser's allegory, Blake's verse requires continual reader-engagement and modification in order for meaning to be generated and perspectives to be illuminated.

This sense of extreme, rebellious energy is found in *America*, Blake's most explicitly revolutionary work, first printed in 1793. Ironically, at the time he was producing this poem, most of the "respectable" radicals were abandoning the cause for reform for fear of the terror sparked by the French Revolution (Makdisi, "Metropolitan Radicalism" 121). Yet, rather than concentrate on intellectual posturing, Blake's poem focuses upon the imaginative and creative energies inherent in the working masses.

> Let the slave grinding at the mill, run out into the field:
> Let him look up into the heavens & laugh in the bright air;
> Let the inchained soul shut up in darkness and in sighing,
> Whose face has never seen a smile in thirty weary years;
> Rise and look out, his chains are loose, his dungeon doors are open. (*A* 6.6-10)

Instead of detailing the affectation of Washington and the battles of Concord and Lexington (Makdisi, "Metropolitan Radicalism" 121), all action is concentrated at the level of the impoverished worker. The poem, while seemingly depicting the revolution in America, is an allegory for the drive for sociological change in England. The image conveyed throughout is that of the energetic rush of an urban workforce.

> Fury! rage! madness! in a wind swept through America
> And the red flames of Orc that folded roaring fierce around
> The angry shores, and the fierce rushing of th' inhabitants together:
> The citizens of New-York close their books & lock their chests;
> The mariners of Boston drop their anchors and unlade;
> The scribe of Pensylvania casts his pen upon the earth;
> The builder of Virginia throws his hammer down in fear. (*A* 14.10-16)

The striking workforce can be seen to reflect the many walkouts which took place throughout England the year before *America* was printed. This potent "fierce rushing" is a demand for changing attitudes with regard to working conditions. Blake shows that the urban workforce can demand better working conditions and must be respected for its energetic power and creativity. The “fierce rushing” may be reflective of Blake’s desire for political revolution, whereby autocratic forms of government are overturned by the masses. However, this form of public rebellion was just what respectable radicals were desperate to avoid, having witnessed scenes of “rage” and “madness” in Paris (Makdisi, “Metropolitan Radicalism”121). The “red flames” and the “fierce rushing” may refer to the Gordon Riots of 1780, of which Blake was either a part or a spectator (Bentley, *Stranger* 55-7). During the uprising, people took to the streets and a mob freed prisoners from Newgate prison and set buildings alight (Bentley, *Stranger* 56-57). Blake must have been inspired by the powerful energy generated by the crowd. The influential creativity of the automated workforce has shifted its attention to the injustices within the system that enforces its labour.

Interestingly, it is the “fierce rushing” crowd rather than the individual that creates the energetic rebellious atmosphere in *America*. Although resistant to authoritarian modes of control, Blake formulates a different perspective on liberty from that held by many radicals of his time, including Tom Paine. Not only is Blake’s mad rushing far from the sobriety of the “liberty” and “emancipation” outlined in carefully regulated prose by writers such as Paine, Godwin and Wollstonecraft (Makdisi, “Metropolitan Radicalism” 123), but he envisions a different type of “liberty” altogether. Makdisi notes that while Blake accepted the attack on priestcraft, kingcraft and patriarchal tyranny, he was very far from accepting the Lockean notion of the unitary individual.[152] Blake distrusts the idea that the individual could be associated with genuine freedom, or that such an individual could be assumed to have trans-historical, eternal validity (Makdisi, “Metropolitan Radicalism” 125). In other words, he would have seen the Lockean figure of the individual as limited in imagination and unable energetically to create or perceive multidimensional texts. The individual's mind is closed and therefore the journey towards vision and enlightenment is thwarted. When looking at the rushing multitude, the individual is not to be seen. It is the collective, rather than the individual, that is celebrated in Blake's poem, just as is the celebration of the vintage, the harvest and the cycle of the seasons, depicted in Night Nine of *The Four Zoas*. The combined contribution of many individuals and the incredible force of nature are depicted working in a complex, vibrant landscape of passion, hardship, life and death (see especially plates 133-39 in *The Four Zoas*).[153] Blake recognises that we are formed of multiple discourses and that we perceive on multiple levels. Thus, to see in isolation is to perceive one-dimensionally and with a closed mind. It is only when looking at things in their totality that the reader may look anew "as one," with the freshness of a child of *Innocence*.

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[152] For more on Blake’s relation to Locke, see Makdisi, “Metropolitan Radicalism” 113-131. See also Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*.

Despite his disagreement with the "modern" notion of individualism, Blake's work challenges traditional principles of authority while also containing any threats his work poses. To be seen to encourage revolution is openly to critique the empire and the government of the kingdom. Blake, aware of the controversy surrounding antagonistic or potentially treasonous utterances, sought to temper his energies in order to express his opinion. He compromised between imagination and reason. The prophecies of *America* and *Europe* contain very few references to actual events in contemporary history. Instead, the content and order of the plates are deliberately obscure, disrupting straightforward narratives. Plate B of *America* was even incorporated into Plate 9 of *Europe*, highlighting the extent to which Blake frustrated attempts to reduce the poems to straightforward "messages" (Mee 26). As demonstrated by the imprisonment of publisher Joseph Johnson, the publication of unorthodox material in any context and to any group, however small, risked dangers (Bentley, *Stranger* 197). Even the selling of cheap print material could ignite the suspicions of the government, aware that print was the most effective means of conveying radical and anti-authoritarian concepts to the masses (Makdisi, *Impossible* 49). Blake uses his technique of energetic, allegorical discourse as a form of resistance within the text, not only to obscure subversive aspects of his work, but to encourage the reader to re-read, that is, to read more closely and to see his verse working on multiple levels. In this sense, he was transferring energy to his readers and asking them to be more energetic and attentive when analysing his work.

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[153] Refer to the whole passage of the Ninth Night of *The Four Zoas* for the yearly seasonal cycle of events from winter through to autumn. For an interesting analysis of this passage in relation to harvest, illness and vision see chapter six, "Blake and the Blighted Corn," in Frederick Burwick's *Poetic Madness and the Romantic Imagination* 180-99.

Blake was left disillusioned after the events of the 1790s (Bentley, *Stranger* 160).[154] In contrast to his hope of an increasingly spontaneous urban mass, freed from "mind-forg'd" manacles of state and self-imprisonment, rules and regulations became stricter, as the situation in France worsened (Makdisi, "Metropolitan Radicalism" 120). *America* is perhaps reflective of Blake's frustrations as poet and prophet.[155] Not only will his texts reach a very limited audience, there is a fear that his readers will not have the mental strength to comprehend his allegorical visions. Beneath the hopeful picture of Orc rising up from the earth are the words:

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[154] Not only was Blake concerned about the political situation, he had lost his beloved brother Robert in 1787 and then his mother. His dream in the Church of Swedenborg had evaporated and he had produced so little visual work that he did not exhibit at the Royal Academy during this period (Bentley, *Stranger* 160). From 1795 he produced no new illuminated material for over ten years (Erdman, *Prophet* 264), perhaps reflecting a drained and shattered state of mind.

[155] Blake's work can be seen to have prophetic qualities. Critics tend to believe he embraced religious antinomianism, principles for which his poems are a mouthpiece. It could be argued that Blake's verse speaks enthusiastic non-conformist religious discourse for a society which he felt needed enlightening. Antinomianism describes a variety of sects and groups not united in beliefs or organisation but holding a set of doctrines often not easily distinguished from one another. For example, the Ranters, Quakers and Muggletonians were all to a certain degree antinomian (Morton 34-35). Important doctrines that made up Antinomianism were: 1. that God existed in man and all created things, 2. that moral and ceremonial law was no longer binding on God's people, and the orthodoxy that attempts to impose it is anti-Christian, 3. that Babylon be destroyed and replaced with Jerusalem – this final point evokes images of which Blake's poetry is full (Morton 36-37).

> The stern Bard ceas'd, ashamed of his own song: enrag'd he swung
> His harp aloft sounding, then dash'd its shining frame against
> A ruin'd pillar in glittering fragments: silent he turn'd away,
> And wander'd down the vales of Kent in sick & drear lamentings (*A* 2.18-20).

This violent shattering of the harp parallels Spenser's frustrations figured in Colin Clout's fierce breaking of his pipe. Both poets are aware of the extent to which their words rely upon the interpretive activity of their readers – an activity which can be highly precarious, especially given the complex and allegorical nature of both poets' poetical constructions. Not only is Blake frustrated at the political, economic and social strictures of his era, he is perhaps frustrated at himself and the limitations of his verse in describing such momentous events as the Gordon Riots or the American Revolution. He is also irritated by the reluctance of his readers imaginatively and energetically to engage with the texts. Interestingly, Blake never again wrote such precisely dated prophecies as *America* and *Europe*, and after 1795 he produced no new work for a decade (Erdman, *Prophet Against Empire* 264). Blake himself recognised that energy had to be channelled in order to maintain a voice in late eighteenth-century England. Turning towards increasingly allegorical ways of writing embodies a realisation that imagination and reason work best hand in hand. His early thoughts and fragmentary pieces are incorporated into the later, longer, and more cryptic works of *Milton*, *Jerusalem* and *The Four Zoas*. Blake shields his ideas more obscurely within these epic allegorical poems, and yet he also inspires readers to disengage from their own worldly situations and attempt a great energetic range of imagination and language in reading his new work. Seditious connotations are more tightly controlled in these later poems, and the reader is encouraged to work hard to enter into Blake's expansive landscape of allegorical perception.

## Blake's allegorical rewriting of the Bible

Perhaps more revolutionary than Blake's criticism of society is his reinterpretation of traditionally accepted religious codes and practices. The frustrated bard of *America* reflects prophetic strains in Blake's verse, dissident strains in the context of the 1790s, as I will show. Blake's poetry is closely associated with the Bible in its construction, disjunctions and allegorical call for readerly interpretation.[156] However, it is his challenging and unusual interpretations of biblical material that prompt the reader towards greater scrutiny of both the text and accepted biblical codes and religious practices.

Blake's dissenting background[157] combined with his intense analytical scrutiny of social codes allows him to question fundamental principles upon which eighteenth-century culture is constructed. While Blake did not question the Bible, per se, he did recreate it in his verse, thereby prompting his readers to look at its passages anew and reinterpret its content. Not only is he testing the "given" meanings of one of the most powerful doctrinal texts of western Europe, he is encouraging his readers to interpret its meanings for themselves. In the books of *Urizen*, *Los* and *Ahania*, Blake creates his alternative, inverted Bible or "Books of Hell" which openly challenge authorised versions of the Bible. Jon Mee notes that in the *Book of Urizen*, the deluge or flood, rather than being a single event, is a recurrent metaphor: "A void immense, wild dark & deep … The vast waves … A wide world of solid obstruction" (*BU* 4.16, 21-3). The Flood becomes a trope, a series of deluges none of which is privileged as

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[156] Biblical styles of writing are reflected everywhere in Blake's verse. See Tannenbaum, *Biblical Tradition in Blake's Early Prophecies*, and Frye, *The Great Code* especially page 21. See also Auerbach, *Mimesis*, particularly chapter one.

[157] For more on Blake's religious background, see A.L. Morton, and Mee. See Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed* for more on the historical background to dissenting religious movements of the seventeenth century.

*the* Flood (Mee 10). Instead of depicting the seeming ease and beauty of creation in Genesis, the *Book of Urizen* conveys a dark, horrific and painful entrance to life, akin to the convulsions and pain of childbirth. Within this context, images of the Flood are presented as a recurring deluge, reflecting the unrelenting vindictiveness of the Old Testament God (Mee 11). There is no prelapsarian moment in Blake's version of the Bible, suggesting his rejection of the doctrine of Original Sin in his era.[158] Instead, characters are born to an awareness of anxiety, repression and constant dark striving as reflected by both Urizen and Los. As suggested above, these characters are indicative of the continually labouring workforces of the urban landscape in which Blake lives. His Hellish Bible is an allegory of oppressed society, a society forged by authoritative Urizenic "books of brass."

Blake's biblical rewriting may be considered subversive in its challenge to authority. In writing his Blakean Bible, he is actively disrupting the codes and doctrines upon which social and religious principles are based. Mee argues that Blake was hostile to the very notion of the "pure text" – texts which assert authority from claims to be sacred, invariable and original (Mee 11), a topic discussed in chapter two. Not only does Blake reposition his plates and illustrations, colouring them variously, so that no one printed text is exactly the same as another, the *Book of Los* and the *Book of Ahania* recount parts of *Urizen*, but from different perspectives and including different details (Mee 16). No one text may stand alone as "the" authoritative version, but each relies upon the other and, most importantly, the interpretation of the reader.[159] Thus, as argued in chapter two, Blake guides his readers to interpret the allegory for themselves, rather than relying upon a dictatorial manuscript. He is countering perceived social notions that the Bible can only be interpreted singularly and definitively. The books of *Urizen* and *Los* play upon the allegorical capacity of the Bible to awaken readers to the possibilities of fresh interpretation and activity.

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[158] Blake rejects the doctrine of Original Sin in his poetry by showing that all who are born are innocent while having guilt placed upon them by those whose minds have hardened, or by the state which oppresses by means of such doctrinal inventions.

[159] This is a notion upon which Blake and John Milton are held to differ. Milton sought to establish the purity of Scripture, thus maintaining it against the potential violation of misinterpretation. See H.R. MacCallum, "Milton and Figurative Interpretation of the Bible" 397-415. See also Dayton Haskin,

The fevered energy of binding, pain and continued labour within the darkness of the books of *Los* and *Urizen* reflects a world in which characters are struggling both with the "mind-forg'd manacles" they place upon themselves, and with the authoritative constructs placed upon them by external influences (the church, King and government), who use the Bible to justify their doctrines. Blake's books of "creation" are allegories of living and working conditions within eighteenth-century London. Writing them, Blake is prompting his readers to an awareness of the extent to which pain, suffering and menial labour are mentally and imaginatively destructive, a "creation" based upon religious premises for the advantage of the powerful who dictate from "books of brass" and hide within the "blackning Church." Blake's allegorical books counter those of the Bible to reveal the extent to which those in authority defame the Bible, distorting its meanings and reinterpreting its content to satisfy their own right to power. As Mee states, Blake's writing during the 1790s sought to liberate the Bible and its readers from the forms of worship sponsored by state religion (168).

In this sense, Blake as the "Bard" is prophetic. Prophets have often been misconceived as speaking about the future, when in fact they often comment on the troubles of the present, while seeking, through the vision of their audience, to change

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*Milton's Burden of Interpretation*. Haskin argues that Milton changes his attitude to Scripture over time, beginning with convictions that it was clear in meaning and ending his career with the belief that the Bible was necessarily dark and required interpretation (54-90).

the present for the betterment of the future.[160] Prophets pose difficult challenges to their often limited audiences, and Blake is no exception.[161] His complex texts and alternative visions prompt his readers to see the relevance of the Bible to the shattered lives of the sweeps, the harlots and the labourers as they toil in the dark London streets. Through his Books of Hell, Blake establishes the need for his readers to understand the conditions in which people work, the repressive codes upon which they base their lives, and the imaginative allegorical energy which may be cultivated in order to view their situation from alternative perspectives. Blake's Books of Hell, while difficult, invite his audience to perceive both the Bible and the workings of lives from different imaginative and religious perspectives. In other words, Blake inspires his audience to read the Bible as a poetic document, "in the light of the reader's active judgement" rather than as "a rigid, sacred authority" (Mee 176).

The books of *Los*, *Ahania* and *Urizen* therefore powerfully attest to the extent to which the Bible can be variously interpreted. Again, Blake is demanding that readers reread Genesis and establish their own interpretations. His books function as points of mental liberation, as a means by which readers may be free from the "brass" constructs established by church and authority, to find personal readings for themselves. This occurs on every level in Blake's poems. As he writes to the Rev. Dr. Trusler,

> This World Is a World of Imagination & Vision[.] I see Every thing I paint In This World, but Every body does not see alike. To the Eyes of a Miser a Guinea

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[160] The meaning of "prophecy" can be as difficult to pinpoint as the meaning of allegory. See Wilson, "The Prophetic Books" in *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation*, especially 213-15. See also *Prophecy: The Power of Inspired Language in History, 1300-2000*, edited by Taithe and Thornton; Hoagwood, *Prophecy and the Philosophy of Mind: Traditions of Blake and Shelley*; and Oliver, *Prophets and Millennialists: The Uses of Biblical Prophecy in England from the 1790s to the 1840s* 11-46. Wittreich links prophecy through Spenser to Milton and Blake in *Visionary Poetics: Milton's Tradition and his Legacy*. For a study of prophecy and Spenser, see Fletcher, *The Prophetic Moment*.

[161] Milton's phrase "fit audience find, though few" (*PL* 7.31) resonates when describing the reader/audience of the prophet in *Paradise Lost*.

> is more beautiful than the Sun & a bag worn with the use of Money has more beautiful proportions than a Vine filled with Grapes. The tree which moves some to tears of joy is in the Eyes of others only a Green thing which stands in the way. (E 702)

Blake continues:

> Why is the Bible more Entertaining & Instructive than any other book. Is it not because they are addressed to the Imagination which is Spiritual Sensation… (E 702-03)

Blake's biblical variations on the book of Genesis encourage just such imaginatively allegorical readings as suggested to Dr. Trusler. Instead of seeing scripture as an oppressive mode of writing associated with laws and rules, he saw the poetical and imaginative within the Bible, a written mode which was open and multiform and sought the imaginative participation of the reader (Mee 12). Blake probably inherited this openly interpretive attitude towards the Bible from his parents and their parents. The Blakes rarely went to church and instead avidly read the Bible for themselves (Bentley, *Stranger* 9). They were not alone. Dissenters, they had inherited a practice of deciphering the Bible for themselves rather than trusting their faith to formal state religious houses and doctrines (Morton 33-37). Presenting the Bible's allegorical and interpretive potential to his readers, Blake encourages them to follow their own spiritual reading, thus undermining the voice of the establishment.

Speaking from the antinomian discourse of Enthusiasm, Blake is following in a dissenting tradition that can be traced back to the seventeenth century. The tone, language and style of his verse resemble the pamphlet literature of Coppe, Cromwell and Muggleton (Morton 11). In this sense, Blake is writing within a well-established English tradition which would have struck many of his readers as old-fashioned rather than radical or revolutionary (Morton 36). By the mid-nineteenth century this antinomian tradition had all but disappeared, accounting for much of the obscurity we find in his poetry (Morton 64). Blake's works are founded upon biblical principles, linguistic structures, visions and tales. The Bible was the single greatest source for his poems. He used it with care to form his own highly personal version of faith, a version that he went on to encourage in his readers, free from the constraints of religious intuitionalism. Blake says:

> And all must love the human form,
> In heathen, turk or jew.
> Where Mercy, Love & Pity dwell,
> There God is dwelling too. (*SI* "The Divine Image")

Blake saw God in every human being. Turning from human constructs towards the divine brings peace and joy. Part of Blake's prophetic mission is to encourage his readers to recognise the divine in the human (Mee 201-02). The divine exists in all things to a mind open and receptive to the grace and love of God. Blake's religion is grounded on the goodness of humanity, a concept that instead of debilitating and weakening belief in humankind in fact reinforces and strengthens human self-worth and human agency.

Blake's concept of spirituality is all-inclusive, regardless of creed, colour, name or rank. He openly criticises the "nets" of conventional religion and the "Priests in black gowns" who suppress individual thoughts and natural actions, "binding with briars"… "joys and desires" (*SE* "The Garden of Love"). He seeks to make his readers aware of the extent to which their principles and feelings are structured and bound by adherence to strict religious doctrines. Blake's "religion" is founded upon looking deep within and recognising our own personal relationships with God. His texts, images and language seek to shake readers out of self-complacency, to challenge us to see beyond the institutionalisation of religion and human thoughts, and to create our own intimate awareness of God's love.

However, as with many prophets, Blake's "vulgar" enthusiasm functioned as a lack of respectability which excluded him from the newly emerging bourgeois public sphere (Mee 220). This may account for his rather limited audience during his lifetime. Yet, as we have seen with political radicalism, his prophetic work functioned differently from that of the prophets of his day. Morton D. Paley has interestingly compared Blake with such contemporary prophets as Richard Brothers (1757-1824) and Joanna Southcott (1750-1814). Brothers prophesied against the war with France, paralleling it with the war in chapter eleven of Revelation, and warning of the fall of the monarchy in Europe. He was arrested on 4th March 1795, marked a madman, and confined to an asylum in Islington (Paley, "Prince of the Hebrews" 261). Southcott, a Devonshire farmer's daughter, wrote *The Strange Effects of Faith* in 1801. Like Brothers, she drew heavily on the Book of Revelation (Paley, "Prince of the Hebrews" 281). In 1814, at the age of sixty-five, she declared she was pregnant with the New Messiah, Shiloh. She died while seemingly seven months pregnant in December of that year. There was no evidence of the child upon autopsy (Paley, "Prince of the Hebrews" 285-87). In both Brothers's and Southcott's use of imagery from the Book of Revelation, and their enthusiastic inspirations, Blake's verse is similar. After all, he subtitles both *America* and *Europe* as "a Prophecy." The law at the time had not changed since Elizabeth I's edicts stating that it was illegal "unlawfully, maliciously, and wickedly writing, publishing and printing various fantastical prophecies, with intent to cause dissension and other disturbances within the realm, contrary to the Statute" (Paley, "Prince of the Hebrews" 261). Given the subversive content of *America*, Blake must have found Brothers's arrest and confinement far from reassuring (Paley, "Prince of the Hebrews" 262). He produced no new illuminated material from 1795 to 1809, perhaps reflecting the nature of the tense political and religious climate (Paley, "Prince of the Hebrews" 267). However, it has to be noted that Blake is a different "prophet" from Brothers or Southcott. While Brothers and Southcott spoke literally – and thereby threateningly – of what they believed was to come, Blake's work spoke allegorically and therefore more subtly of "revelation." For Blake, the Bible is not a literal doctrinal text, but a poetical allegorical form. It is a text which allows for continual reinterpretation and enlightenment: the ultimate structure of mental and spiritual revelation. Blake's works encourage the active participation and use of the Bible for greater spiritual and personal expression, a form so personal and all-encompassing that it cannot be readily monitored or restrained by the state.

Instead of prompting his readers to think of institutionalised eighteenth-century representations of God, Blake instead focuses upon Jesus, God's humane and merciful son. Blake takes the principle of human divinity and pushes it to its furthest extreme in his depictions of Jesus as a man with a corporeal body. In so doing, he is inviting his readers to dispel the constructs of bodily shame and guilt and recognise that they are as Jesus is, human beings with bodies, energies, voices and creative minds. *The Everlasting Gospel* details the commandments broken by Jesus.[162]

> He mock'd the Sabbath & he mockd
> The Sabbaths God & he unlockd
> The Evil spirits from their Shrines
> And turnd Fishermen to Divines (*EG*)

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[162] Blake tends to refer to Christ as "Jesus," especially within *The Everlasting Gospel*. I must note here the extent to which *The Everlasting Gospel* is antinomian and enthusiastic in tone and religious principle, suggesting the source of Blake's religious ideas and beliefs. See Morton 33-40.

The passage highlights the extent to which Jesus overturned the conventions and traditions of his own society to assert his own principles.[163] He upset the Pharisees on several occasions by performing unlawful acts such as healing on the Sabbath (Matt. 21-23). His disciples were fishermen, which further antagonised the priesthood with the concept that common men could be spiritual leaders (Ostriker 1036). Blake forcefully details Jesus's "sins":

> He scornd Earths Parents scornd Earths God
>
> . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
>
> His Seventy Disciples sent
> Against Religion & Government
> They by the Sword of Justice fell
> And him their Cruel Murderer tell (*EG*)

He insists that to sin is to be human. We cannot do good by everyone. It is often through sin that we may improve ourselves and know better. To "sin" is to assume a moral code and this Blake urges his reader to break free from. What is one man's "sin" is another man's goodness. Thus he writes the double-edged lines: "For Moral Virtues all begin / In the Accusations of Sin" (*EG*). One cannot be virtuous unless one is challenged to be so. Often it is through awareness of wrong that we understand what is right. Therefore to sin is to find a path to graciousness.[164] Blake's lines also reverse these "Virtues" which are structured and defined against "Sin." One may count him or herself "moral" by accusing another of sinful practices. Blake suggests that this is how the eighteenth-century church functions in condemning the sinful while assuming its "blackning" institutions are pure. Blake reveals the complacency, ignorance and self-gratification of those who hold this attitude. His words call for the removal of distinctions and classifications, the abolition of preconceived assumptions. Virtue is falsely weighed against sin. Jesus' actions were for the betterment of all humankind, his presence in the world and his death a reminder of the divine in the human and the eternal forgiveness of all sins. Blake challenges his readers to think for themselves and not according to predisposed lines of consciousness or thought.

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[163] See Hagstrum, "Christ's Body," in *William Blake: Essays in honour of Sir Geoffrey Keynes* 129-61, for detailed analysis of Blake's attitude towards Jesus and his disruption of conventional constructions of Jesus.

[164] This parallels the notion in Spenser's *Faerie Queene* that knights and human beings must err, or misread, before they attain enlightenment and restoration.

Spenser and Blake's allegorical resistance invites readers to look at social conventions from different perspectives. The mode also encourages renewed readings of the text. Blake's position allowed for a liberated interrogation of eighteenth-century principles and social structures which in turn promoted self-conscious ways of reading and evaluating the written word. As Pierce notes, his verse is truly didactic and dialectic. Spenser could not be as open in his condemnation of Elizabethan forms of government and the posthumous publication of the *Mutabilitie Cantos* is perhaps reflective of this. However, his "political pragmatism" allowed for his voice to be heard and his allegorical style enabled pathways for readerly interaction and, eventually, the enlightened manner of verse so characteristic of Blake.

# Chapter Four: Allegory and the Imagination

> Imaginations are culturally and historically specific. We should avoid thinking of the term as a human constant or as an essence. (Whale 11)

Isabel MacCaffrey has argued that Spenser's allegory offers a particular insight into the imagination; its workings represent the processes of imaginative thought.

> In allegory, the mind makes a model of itself; more accurately, imagination offers a model of the imagining process. *The Faerie Queene* mirrors the mind's very structure, as well as its properties and powers; it is at once a treatise upon, and a dazzling instance of, the central role that imagination plays in human life. (*Spenser's Allegory* 6-7)

MacCaffrey's study has proved useful to my awareness of the relation between allegory and imagination. She details the ways in which Spenser's poem mirrors the workings of the mind. She argues that it is Spenser's conscious and self-conscious allegory, dealing especially with epistemological problems, and his concern about fictions as vehicles of truth that make his poem so sensitive to the functions of the imagination (*Spenser's Allegory* 9). She makes an important link between language, allegory and the imagination:

> To think of metaphor as an allegorical 'language' is helpful because it includes *both* the idea of separateness between word and referent *and* the notion of the referent's inaccessibility without the word. 'The soul never thinks without the image.' (*Spenser's Allegory* 31)

Language communicates human thought processes (among which is imagination) and allegory amplifies this communication by illuminating meanings that are often latent. Or, put another way, allegory encourages various interpretive exercises and the imagination supports this active process of textual engagement.

The allegorical imagination may thus be harnessed for the process of learning, by which our minds are drawn towards increasing awareness, consciousness or self-knowledge. As seen later in the examples of Archimago and Phantastes, the life of the mind – its workings, connections and illuminations – are characterised consciously within *The Faerie Queene*. Readers are challenged to use their own mental resources to read and comprehend the words, to make connections and judgements, and to allow their own imaginations full scope. The true action of the poem takes place in the reader's mind (MacCaffrey, *Spenser's Allegory* 71).

MacCaffrey's study is fundamental in giving important new insight into the relation between allegory and the engagement of the imagination in Spenser's poem. However, she deals mainly with the poem as a "mental space." This is a phrase that would not have been at all familiar to readers of the sixteenth century. While I believe she is right, I feel this emphasis distorts the reception of the poem and its relation to the imagination, which in the sixteenth century would have been perhaps more subtle and self-conscious. "Imagination" as a term was hardly used by Spenser and it is important to remind ourselves of the context in which he was writing. His poem makes profound mental and psychological links between words on the page and the reader's judgement and mental faculties. (These may be seen to anticipate Blake's visionary work). However, MacCaffrey herself concludes that given his context, Spenser can only hint at transcendent imaginative visions rather than openly embracing them.

> The most audacious claim a poet can make has always been that the world his imagination creates and the world revealed in visionary experiences are the same. Blake's version of the claim is most convincing because it is the most passionate and qualified; Spenser's is rather a hint than a claim, for it was not

> really possible for anyone in his century to state the point openly and without equivocation, or even to think of it in terms recognisable by post-romantic aesthetics. (*Spenser's Allegory* 394)

Thus, Spenser's verse has to be more subtle and cautious. Imaginative connections are not necessarily seen overtly within the lines of the poem, but are made within the minds of readers aided by allegory.

This chapter begins by looking at Spenser's relation to the imagination, before going on to outline the ways in which the uses of the imagination shifted during the years between Spenser's death and Blake's birth. The final section explores Blake's association with the imagination. Spenser's creation of an allegorical imaginative world anticipates Blake's fascination with the imagination and its powerful capacity for vision. Spenser uses allegory to encourage the workings of the imagination; for Blake, the imagination is fundamental to the meaning of his poems.

## The sixteenth-century imagination

Spenser uses the word "imagination" only twice in his poetry, both instances occurring in *A View of the Present State of Ireland*, to suggest a wild or unfounded conjecture ("Imagination," *Sp Enc* 392).[165] The verb *to imagine* appears just four times in *The Faerie Queene*.[166] Spenser seems to have preferred the words "fantasy" and "fancy" to describe imaginative processes ("Imagination," *Sp Enc* 392).[167] The *OED* finds the earliest appearance of "imagination" in Hampole's *Psalter* from around 1340, and defines it as:

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[165] See *A View of the State of Ireland*: "he thereupon groundeth a very grosse imagination" (60), and "let them dreame their owne imaginations to please themselves…" (80).

[166] At *FQ* 2.4.8; 5.5.24; 5.9.34 and 6.6.41. The verb does not appear anywhere else in Spenser's poems. See *A Concordance to the Poems of Edmund Spenser*, by C.G. Osgood.

[167] "Fancy" appears twenty-one times in Spenser's verse (thirteen times in *The Faerie Queene*), while "Fantasies" appears six times (four occurring in *The Faerie Queene*), and "Fantasy" is used nine times (five being present in *The Faerie Queene*). See C.G. Osgood.

> The action of imagining, or forming a mental concept of what is not actually present to the senses …; the result of this process, a mental image or idea (often with implication that the conception does not correspond to the reality of things, hence freq. vain [false, etc] imagination).

This definition remains current today. The imagination is first and foremost a process by which ideas are constructed in the mind. This concept is reinforced by the *OED*'s third definition of "imagination" again recorded from around 1340, its meaning still in existence:

> That faculty of the mind by which are formed images or concepts of external objects not present to the senses, and of their relations (to each other or to the subject); hence frequently including memory.

This definition reinforces classical and medieval attitudes towards the imagination still prevalent in the sixteenth century. Classical theory dictated that the soul was the essence of humankind, of which the rational aspect, the seat of rational being, was located in the mind (Kickel 21). This rational faculty included the imagination with reason and memory as enabling dialogue between the external world and the internal workings of the human mind (Kickel 22). Spenser illustrates these separate operations of the mind allegorically through three chambers in Alma's house, whose occupiers represent Phantastes, Philosophy or reason, and memory (*FQ* 2.9.46-57).

Gianfrancesco Pico Della Mirandola's (1470-1533) essay *On the Imagination* (c. 1500) gives detailed expression to the ways in which the imagination was perceived during the Renaissance.[168]

> [I]magination enters into alliance with all the superior powers, inasmuch as they would fail in that function which nature has bestowed upon each of them unless

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[168] Todd Butler notes that Pico Della Mirandola's essay "is perhaps the most explicit and famous statement regarding the imagination to arise from the Italian Renaissance" (6).

> imagination support and assist them. Nor could the soul, fettered as it is to the body, opine, know, or comprehend at all, if phantasy were not constantly to supply it with the images themselves. (33)

A healthy imagination should, like a mirror, reflect accurate sensible impressions of the external world (Rossky 51). Sir Fulke Greville (1554-1628) writes in *A Treatie of Humane Learning*:

> Knowledges next organ is Imagination;
> A glasse, wherein the obiect of our Sense
> Ought to reflect true height, or declination,
> For vnderstandings cleare intelligence (1: 156)

Kickel's description of the workings of imagination emphasises both its functions and its potential difficulty:

> one of the most persistent functions of the imagination in classical medicine and onward was to transform mental imagery into physical sensation. However, it was also widely believed that physical sensations could also produce mental imagery … [therefore] … real and imaginative events were often difficult to differentiate. (22)

The process of forming mental concepts is rendered potentially dangerous due to the difficulty in separating true from false sensations.

The reputation of imagination therefore depends on the accuracy of its images (Rossky 53). Pico Della Mirandola notes that although the imagination is an inescapable aspect of the human mind, it is potentially troublesome. "[G]ranted that imagination is necessary; nevertheless it is irrational and devoid of correct judgement, unless aided by the guidance of a superior power" (43). Robert Burton in *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) declares: "some ascribe all vices to a false and corrupt

Imagination … deluding the Soule with false shewes and suppositions" (1: 251). Pico Della Mirandola voices his worst fears that the unguided imagination potentially deforms social virtues, corrupting values to become the opposite of what they should be.

> Neglecting reason, she [imagination] gives precedence to injustice rather than to justice, to lust rather than to continence, to savagery rather than to clemency, to avarice rather than to generosity, to discord rather than to peace. (45-47)

In this passage the imagination is associated with everything that should be rejected by humankind – violence, greed, lust and animalistic "savagery" – the very desires that undermine constructed social hierarchies. Therefore, it is understandable that Spenser's limited use of "imagination" may imply a guarded caution about the term.

Pico Della Mirandola's words, however, suggest that there is more to the Renaissance understanding of the imagination. The early modern period was particularly concerned with the association between imagination and the force of desire. "[I]nnate reason … prompts and directs us as often as the adverse imagination tickles us with voluptuousness" (Pico Della Mirandola 77). "[E]very one who is not entirely a brute or a senseless plant well knows that man ought to follow reason, and ought to shake off the allurements of sense and phantasy" (Pico Della Mirandola 63-65). Desire implies the motivations of personal will separate from the conditioning forces of the social hierarchy. Guillory aptly notes that "the imagination is nothing other than the mask of desire; it inhabits the space between the way things are, and the way we wish them to be" (13). Spenser's use of the words "fancy," "fantasy" and "fantasies" reflect the yearning and fantastical associations that coincide with the sixteenth-century definition of imagination. The word "fancy" puns upon the double meaning between imagination and desire (Guillory 13), as indicated by the *OED*'s fourth definition of "imagination":

> The power which the mind has of forming concepts beyond those derived from external objects (the 'productive imagination'). a. The operation of fantastic thought; fancy.

"Fancy" and "imagination" have roughly the same meaning in the sixteenth century.[169] Thus, Milton, who writes of "Sweetest Shakespeare, Fancy's child" in *L'Allegro* (ll. 133), and Joseph Addison, author of the 1712 *Spectator* series, "The Pleasures of the Imagination or Fancy" (*Critical Essays* 175-76), use the two words interchangeably.

While the term "imagination" involves the process of forming images in the mind, some of which may depart from literal reality, "fancy" or "fantasy" may be associated with delusions or delusional images. From around 1360 to the mid-seventeenth century "fancy" denoted "a spectral apparition; an illusion of the senses," a sense now obsolete. Its meaning has shifted very little from the late sixteenth century onwards as the third entry, dated from 1597 and still current in modern usage, defines "fancy" as "delusive imagination; hallucination." Likewise, the fourth *OED* entry for "fantasy" is "imagination." In later use, "fancy" and "imagination" are increasingly distinguished from one another, as I will show when discussing the eighteenth century. However, the coincidence of "fancy" and "imagination" in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries suggests the extent to which imagination was perceived to be associated with delusions, desire, or the false working of a mind, highly susceptible to the imprint of illusion. Francis Bacon in the *Advancement of Learning* (1605) warns men of "the operation of the conceits and passions of the mind upon the body … for although it [imagination] hath a manifest power to hurt, it followeth not it hath the same degree of power to help" (99). Bacon's language implies that strong imaginative forces of desire are at work, potentially leading both the body and the mind towards crisis. In this sense, the imagination is a fragile but necessary mental mechanism, a source of false or delusional information, its capacities as troubling as they are enabling.[170]

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[169] See *OED*, s.v. fancy, def. 4.a.: "In early use synonymous with *imagination* (see *fantasy* def. 4.); the process, and the faculty, of forming mental representations of things not present to the senses."

However, the association of "imagination" with "fancy," while seemingly indicating the imagination's debilitating qualities, also implies its capacity for inspirational creativity. Fancy's illusions expand the mind's capabilities for new connections and illuminations. From the early sixteenth century, the *OED* notes a new meaning associated with "imagination":

> The creative faculty of the mind in its highest aspect; the power of framing new and striking intellectual conceptions; poetic genius.

The concept of imagination as inspiration was in its infancy when Spenser was writing, but it was to develop to become a fundamental principle for Blake, as we shall see. John Guillory's study of poetic authority in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries articulates Spenser and Milton's desire to declare their poetical ability in new and creative ways. Guillory traces their struggle to assert poetic authority using secularised imagination in a period in which religious poetry was no longer viable and the poet had to speak for himself rather than for a religious patron or a monarch. Personal inspiration was condemned at a time, ironically, when inspiration of this nature was the only means by which to write. "Not until the notion of inspiration becomes philosophically untenable does it become possible to place poetry under the regime of imagination – but only because the motive behind the reassertion of inspiration attaches itself to this new object" (Guillory ix). Guillory notes the paradox "that both Spenser and Milton polemicize against the imagination" and yet as the notion of inspiration and imagination become increasingly fused from the seventeenth century onwards, the "polemic of Spenser and Milton is simply forgotten as their names become, for Addison, for Johnson, for Wordsworth, signatures of imaginative power" (Guillory ix-x). In this sense, both Spenser and Milton advance a new language of poetic authority which is eventually interpreted as imaginative creativity. Guillory's study is important for it highlights the fact that despite sixteenth-century ambivalence, the imagination remained an element vital to Spenser's poetic creation and achievement.

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[170] For a brief but thorough explanation of the various ways in which the imagination was feared, used and regarded during the sixteenth century, see Rossky's article, "Imagination in the English Renaissance: Psychology and Poetic."

I would not go as far as Guillory in stating that Spenser's poem is a polemic against the imagination. As we shall see, *The Faerie Queene* voices contemporary attitudes towards the imagination, many of which are mistrustful and ambivalent. However, the allegorical nature of the poem teaches us to read carefully and fully. Spenser's verse is consciously aware of being an imaginatively penned creation, and because of this, it can never fully condemn the means by which it was formed. As a poetical tool, the poet's imaginative creation is a means by which to guide readers indirectly towards truth. Sidney wrote that "Poesy … is an art of imitation" (101), arguing that "a feigned example hath as much force to teach as a true example" (110). Allegory can guide the reader's imagination to discern false illumination from true. Allegory and the imagination, that is, work in conjunction to prompt readerly awareness. Spenser's allegory demands textual engagement and therefore encourages imaginative thinking. This is how allegorical imagination functions in his poem. I feel that Guillory's *Poetic Authority* presents an overly critical portrait of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century imagination. While the imagination was regarded as potentially unreliable and prone to corruption, it was still, nonetheless, a faculty of the god-given mind, a process of thought, a "mirror" upon which the internal mind interacted creatively with the external world.

Philip Sidney's *Defence of Poesy* offers a counter-argument to sixteenth-century critics of the imagination, emphasising what the *OED* terms "the creative faculty of the mind in its highest aspect" or "poetic genius," directly inspired by the imagination or fancy.

> Nature never set forth the earth in so rich tapestry as divers poets have done; neither with pleasant rivers, fruitful trees, sweet-smelling flowers, nor whatsoever else may make the too much loved earth more lovely. Her world is brazen, the poets only deliver a golden. (100)

Sidney acknowledges that poetry imaginatively falsifies, but in so doing, he reveals the skill of the poet in crafting tales that not only please the senses, but offer a better world for the reader to aspire to. In presenting such a world, Sidney sought to teach and reform his readers. Here he counters and inverts the arguments of those who say imagination destroys and demeans virtue, by showing that it can magnify and glorify the earth and its adornments, encouraging readers to want to create a world in its image. Sidney therefore encourages didactic interaction between the reader and the text, his poetry stimulating thoughtful and imaginative creativity in his readers. He defends the poetic imagination on the following grounds:

> Neither let it be deemed too saucy a comparison to balance the highest point of man's wit with the efficacy of Nature; but rather give right honour to the heavenly Maker of that maker. (101)

Sidney calls for a higher estimation of the imagination in poetry as it reflects not only man's intellect, but that of God in whose likeness humankind is created. Therefore it is no sin that the elevated and fantastical are exhibited in poetry as a reflection of the divine in the human.[171] As noted in chapters two and three, poetry teaches through allegorical reader-engagement, and Sidney notes that this quality is likewise extended to the didactic engagement of the reader's imagination.

> I think it may be manifest that the poet, with that same hand of delight, doth draw the mind more effectually than any other art doth. And so a conclusion not unfitly ensueth: that, as virtue is the most excellent resting place for all worldly learning to make his end of, so Poetry, being the most familiar to teach it, and most princely to move towards it, in the most excellent work is the most excellent workman. (115)

Sidney's argument forms the basis for the concept of allegorical imagination which dominates *The Faerie Queene*. Writing at the same time as Sidney, Spenser was aware of criticism directed towards poets whose works were based upon the imagination. However, the self-consciously analytical style of his verse points towards the importance of an imagination guided by allegory.

*The Faerie Queene* reflects a stance that associates the imagination with the fantastical and potentially delusive in a text which is, paradoxically, completely founded upon the imagination, that requires the reader to suspend reality and enter into the fantastical land of "faerie." This is a complex approach to the imagination that shows Spenser at once incorporating contemporary suspicions concerning the imagination, while also promoting it as being vital to his art. "Fantasy" was regarded by Spenser's contemporaries as a vice, especially prevalent within poetry. In the next section I will show how Spenser's use of "fantasy" allows it to blossom from seemingly delusive vulgarity into insightful, meaningful, challenging and pertinent

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[171] This is a point that is fundamental to Blake's conception of the imagination, as I will demonstrate later in the chapter.

"imagination" – the mode that Blake will eventually grasp as fundamental to his verse.

## Imagination in *The Faerie Queene*

Let us begin by looking at passages from "The Teares of the Muses," published in *Complaints* in 1591, lamenting the absence of decent poetry and patrons in England.

> They to the vulgar sort now pipe and sing,
> And make them merrie with their fooleries,
> They cherelie chaunt and rymes at randon fling,
> The fruitful spawne of their ranke fantasies: ("Teares" 319-22)
>
> . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
>
> Heapes of huge words uphoorded hideously,
> With horrid sound though having little sence,
> They thinke to be chiefe praise of Poëtry;
> And thereby wanting due intelligence,
> Have mard the face of goodly Poësie,
> And made a monster of their fantasie: ("Teares" 553-58)

Spenser's poem is notable in suggesting the comparative lack of quality in poetry of the period but also in being consciously aware of the extent to which his own verse must not fall foul of his own criticisms. Both passages stress a wariness of "fantasie" and the ways in which words spawn "horrid" monstrous thoughts in the imagination. Spenser continues to associate the monstrous with poetical "fantasie," as suggested in *The Faerie Queene* by the eruption of Error in Book One ("Imagination," *Sp Enc* 392-93). Redcross Knight, motivated by pride and delusions of grandeur – "full of fire and greedy hardiment" (*FQ* 1.1.14) – ignores Una's warning at the entrance to Error's den and enters, boldly striking the beast. In her dying pangs, Error spews "bookes and papers" (*FQ* 1.1.20), while her "cursed spawne of serpents small," "[d]eformed monsters, fowle, and black as inke," swarm around her body and feed upon her (*FQ* 1.1.22, 25, 26). Spenser makes a connection here between the pen and "inke" of "bookes and papers" and the bloated monstrosity of delusion, pride and fancy, a condemnation of the mechanics of Catholic prose propaganda in an increasingly Protestant realm.[172] Error's example may also reflect upon the "monstrous" inky words of "the vulgar" sonneteers mentioned in "Teares," whose words spark sensual fancies in the minds of readers. His words criticise those, like Redcross, who continually feed their fantasies, believing that in doing so they are immune from any form of moral error. They delude themselves. These verses reveal that Spenser is highly aware of contemporary attitudes towards the imagination. As seen by the wild ravaging of the Blatant Beast and Error's spawn, words and fantasies go hand in hand to create monsters of the mind.[173]

Spenser, I would argue, does not condemn "fantasie" as such, but the medium that conveys and produces fantasy. His verse criticises senseless, thoughtless words that make "horrid" monsters and stir "ranke" raging desires. Through this condemnation, he stresses the need for a thoughtful, rich and illuminated poetry that refuses to cage the imagination in superstitions and hellish constructions, and allows the mind to be channelled towards diverse and divine ways of seeing. Instead of poetry "wanting intelligence" and flinging about "randon" words with reckless abandon, the verse has to be carefully constructed to push the reader towards spiritual, educated and enlightened perceptions. Here allegory guides or channels the imagination to conduct the mind. Instead of seeing Redcross's ambush of Error as a whole-hearted victory, careful readers are encouraged to realise that the allegorical impact of Error's deadly spawn is now left behind. Error has not been defeated. Her reign has just begun, and Redcross has unleashed her deadly brood.[174]

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[172] See *FQ* 36n.

[173] See Kenneth Gross, *Shakespeare's Noise* for more on the relation between words and the Blatant Beast, 33-67.

Spenser uses allegory to promote alternative readings of the imagination. He balances the fanciful elements of his poem with a measured and self-conscious style that prompts readers to become aware of the complexity surrounding imaginative verse. Taking *The Faerie Queene* to the Stationers' Register in 1590 and 1596 to be published indicates that he wished his poem to be read by as wide an audience as possible. He was presenting himself as a professional writer rather than an amateur writing for a coterie. He was seeking, moreover, to restore the diminished reputation of poetry and English poets (Helgerson 3, 55-60). He was aware that he must avoid being interpreted and condemned as a lover of unbounded "vulgar" fanciful imagination. This would have discredited his name and his verse. Therefore, Spenser treats the imagination carefully, even appearing to censure it, in order to make his work acceptable to his readers and the government. His complex construction of imagination is displayed through the figure of Archimago.

Archimago is a metaphor for the poet (Deneef 94). Like Spenser, he fashions fictions and images. He is the arch-image-maker "of pleasing words" (*FQ* 1.1.35), who creates illusions before Redcross and Una's eyes. He is the allegorical figure for the magically transformative powers of the imagination. He is first introduced to the reader as a hermit who lives "in hidden cell" (*FQ* 1.1.30). Hamilton tells us that the now obsolete meaning for "cell" was "a compartment for the brain" or *cellula*

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[174] Although Error's brood gorge themselves to death at *FQ* 1.1.26, the metaphorical impact of Error's entrance into the poem remains. Suttie argues that instead of displaying knightly virtues, Book One conveys a darker depiction of Redcross Knight, especially detailing his many errors, 58-145. See also Dolven, *Scenes of Instruction in Renaissance Romance* 141-47.

*phantastica* (*FQ* 38n). Archimago is both a product of Spenser's brain and a representative of the functions of the mind, the chamber that harbours fantasy or Phantastes. Just as his malicious magic generates plot movement, so he imitates Spenser in crafting illusions before his viewer's eyes (Nohrnberg 105). "Then choosing out few words most horrible, / (Let none them read) thereof did verses frame" (*FQ* 1.1.37). Nohrnberg notes that Archimago plays the part of the false prophet and the fallen imagination (130). He symbolises the sixteenth century's worst fears: "The imagination, as a maker of images or idols, does the devil's work … the devil has exploited the susceptibility of the imagination" (Nohrnberg 129).[175] In Archimago Spenser places all that is false and delusory.[176] Calling for a comparison between Archimago and the poet, Spenser prompts the reader to recognise the poet's struggle for correct reading and the proper use of the imagination. Deneef argues that Spenser defends his texts against the threat of misreading by pitching false and true voices against one another (13). The poet seeks to reveal Archimago's hypocrisy and invites the reader to recognise his "true-seeming lyes" (*FQ* 1.1.38). Archimago is the false poet who illuminates Spenser's truth. "He is arch image and archemagus, both literal antithesis and metaphoric origin, both text and conceit" (Deneef 95). In other words, he is Spenser's Idea of imagination transformed into text, a text which the reader must allegorically and imaginatively recreate as Idea (Deneef 8). Using Archimago, Spenser encourages his readers to contemplate the process of the imagination while being aware of its potential for delusion and hypocrisy. Here the active nature of reader-participation – the necessity of imagination for the comprehension of the allegorical text – is graphically represented.

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[175] There are several references to false prophets in the Bible. See Rom. 1:25; 1 Kings 12:11; 2 Chron. 18; Jer. 29:8-9. See Nohrnberg 129. Archimago's relationship to the devil is further emphasised by his association with dark magic arts (*FQ* 1.1.37-44). See *FQ* 38n; "Archimago," *Sp Enc* 53; and Nohrnberg 105.

[176] For more information on Archimago, see *FQ* 38-43n; Nohrnberg 103-30; "Archimago," *Sp Enc* 53-54; and Deneef 94-102.

While Archimago's "cell" playfully refers to *cellula phantastica*, Spenser allegorically represents imagination in the poem through his depiction of Phantastes. Phantastes's chamber is "dispainted" with everything one may associate with the "mad or foolish" imagination (*FQ* 2.9.50, 52):

> Infinite shapes of thinges dispersed thin;
> Some such as in the world were neuer yit,
> Ne can deuized be of mortall wit;
> Some daily seene, and knowen by their names,
> Such as in idle fantasies doe flit:
> Infernall Hags, *Centaurs*, feendes, *Hippodames*,
> Apes, Lyons, Aegles, Owles, fooles, louers, children, Dames.
>
> And all the chamber filled was with flyes,
> Which buzzed all about, and made such sound,
> That they encombred all mens eares and eyes,
> Like many swarmes of Bees assembled around,
> After their hiues with honny do abound:
> All those were idle thoughtes and fantasies,
> Deuises, dreames, opinions vnsound,
> Shewes, visions, sooth-sayes, and prophesies;
> And all that fained is, as leasings, tales and lies. (*FQ* 2.9.50, 51)

These two condensed stanzas give an impression of the ceaseless chaos of a mind "encombred" by buzzing thoughts, a mind ensnared by the constant distractions of the “thin” but “infinite shapes” of fancy. This seems to have been a conventional image for the imagination during the period, as suggested by a description of the imagination penned by physician Thomas Wright in 1604: “when we imagine anything, presently the purer spirits, flock from the brain, by certain secret channels to the heart, where they pitch at the door” (*The Passions of the Mind in General* 123). The mind is conceived as a mass of constantly moving “spirits” or forms. However, Spenser’s verse implies the darkness of an imagination filled with images of blackness or night – swarming flies, “Owles,” “feendes” and “Infernall Hags” – suggesting that far from being divine, fantasy is in league with deviant, evil forces. Flies were seen as symbols of persistence in the early modern period (*FQ* 244n). Spenser associates them with Error and Archimago in *The Faerie Queene*. Error’s brood are referred to as a “cloud of cumbrous gnattes” (*FQ* 1.1.23), while Archimago’s magic deeds are undertaken by “Legions of Sprights,” likened to “litle flyes” (*FQ* 1.1.38).[177] Hamilton notes that flies were reputed to be the form assumed by demons and that Spenser is equating Archimago with Beelzebub, “the lord of the flies” and “chief of the devils” (Luke 11:15, Matt. 12:24) (*FQ* 40n). Indeed, these flies are sometimes shown to be predatory. They “molest” their victims, “striuing to infixe their feeble stinges”; “from their noyance” one finds “no … rest” (*FQ* 1.1.23).[178] The flies resemble sixteenth-century conceptions of the imagination in being seemingly slight and feeble in appearance, susceptible to infiltration and change, wavering and wayward, momentarily present and absent. Spenser is showing that thoughts come and go in our minds; they flit and disappear or crowd upon us until our heads are filled with ideas. Instead of illuminating, clouds of flies are shown to limit or hinder perception, the chaos of flittering fancies prove a distressing “noyance” that gives no rest.

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[177] See “Archimago,” *Sp Enc*: “flies were emblems of the deceptive power of the imagination” (53).
[178] For other references to flies or gnats in *The Faerie Queene*, see 2.9.16, 52; 5.2.33, 53; 5.11.58; 6.1.24; 6.11.48.

Despite this, when we finally meet Phantastes, we are given a different impression of the figure of “fantasie.” He is a “man of yeares yet fresh” with “sharpe staring eyes” (*FQ* 2.9.52). His eyes signify his intelligent foresight. His years indicate wisdom, a “fresh” awareness of events as they may prophetically be foretold. His name comes from the Greek meaning “a visionary, a dreamer” (*OED* 1; *FQ* 245n). Pico Della Mirandola notes that “phantasy” is linked in wording and etymology to the Greek word for “light” and therefore to sight or vision, the most important of the senses to the ancient Greeks. “Phantasy” means “the true state of things brought to light” according to the ancient Greeks (Pico Della Mirandola 25-27) – the prophetic or visionary power of the imagination. This ancient etymology perhaps indicates why the imagination may also be defined as a powerful creative process of vision and insight. Although surrounded by chaotically moving objects, Phantastes stands upright and tall. His piercing eyes see all. Spenser thereby suggests both the promise and the disruption of the imagination. He tests his readers to see through the infernal buzzing of petty persistent fancies to the greater insights and visions presented by the allegorical imagination. The careful reader will see the poet’s intended illuminations while the careless mis-reader will only see irritating delusions of the mind.

Una, the allegorical character *par excellence*, inspires imaginative learning. She challenges readers imaginatively and allegorically to see beyond her initial presentation and ponder not only what truths she is hiding, but the ways in which she herself represents the intricate workings of truth. Una is “much whiter” “then snow,” and yet she is veiled “full low,” “ouer all a blacke stole shee did throw” (*FQ* 1.1.4). The reader is given a sign that she is hiding something – covering her pure beauty in black garments and carrying “some hidden care” “inly” within her breast (*FQ* 1.1.4). This concealment seems contrary to her meaning as “Truth.” Truth should reveal and bring to light. Surely nothing true should be hidden or concealed. Yet Una’s mystery is an aspect of her meaning. As Gareth Roberts notes, the veil is partly a form for figurative language and its relation to truth (24-25). She is there to inspire readers to recognise that truth is not easy to find. It evolves and remains elusive. Only at the end of Book One does Una reveal herself without her veil. Her “sad wimple throwne away,” she is a divine vision of “heauenly beautie” (*FQ* 1.12.22).

> The blazing brightnesse of her beauties beame,
> And glorious light of her sunshyny face
> To tell, were as to striue against the streame.
> My ragged rimes are all too rude and bace,
> Her heauenly limeaments for to enchace (*FQ* 1.12.23)

From mystery and darkness, the reader is presented with light and revelation. Una can be seen to represent “phantasy” in terms of its Greek meaning – light – and therefore sight. She represents vision itself. She signifies the fact that revelation is not straightforward and easy. It comes to those who are willing to challenge the textual surface, to see beneath the darkness of the ink, to use their imagination in order to be rewarded with her appearance. Exposing truth is a struggle. It takes time, effort and mental strength. Even revealing the vision to his readers, Spenser shies away from being able to give it full illumination – his “ragged rimes are all too rude and bace.” He thereby asks readers to complete the scene in their minds, to use their imagination once again to complete the illumination.

Spenser’s inability at this defining moment to describe Una’s unveiling is itself a comment upon his own status as a visionary. Instead of taking credit himself for moulding the vision, he gives his readers the tools to enable them to complete it in their imagination. This highlights the extent to which *The Faerie Queene* is entwined and reliant upon reader interaction and interpretation.[179] It also suggests that he sought not to promote himself as a visionary, but instead to push his readers towards their own constructions of those visions. Thus Spenser's poem is a vehicle enabling the imagination rather than a site of pre-prepared and conventional images.[180] Reader engagement is paramount both to the successful workings of allegory and the imagination. In *The Structure of Allegory*, Hamilton states:

> Allegory's unique power is achieved through the contrapuntal relationship between the poem's world and our world, and by the centripetal relationship of its parts. More comprehensively and significantly than other genres, it points beyond itself and also to itself. The brazen world of fallen nature and the poem's golden world, reality and the ideal, fact and fiction become united in our reading. (35)

### *The Faerie Queene* as a "glassy globe"

Characters' dreams and visions saturate the pages of *The Faerie Queene*, mirroring our own mental processes. Britomart's future husband appears to her in Merlin's mirror or crystal ball, a sight that renders her love sick (*FQ* 3.2.17-19). Struck by the vision, she is then infected by an imaginative love that is without fruition until she meets Artegall. The power of the image is rendered by Merlin's magical glass and the heroine's conviction. The potential for delusion is great, especially when Merlin is compared with his alter-ego, Archimago, who deliberately misleads through image and illusion. In Archimago's hermitage, Redcross is presented with a vision of a voluptuous Una making love with a sprite (*FQ* 1.1.46-50). Unbeknown to Redcross, his illusion is a dream concocted by Archimago, a "mighty charme… to trouble sleepy minds" (*FQ* 1.1.36). "[F]alse shows abuse his fantasy" and delude him into believing Una to be unfaithful, leading him to abandon her (*FQ* 1.1.46). Again, Spenser stresses the necessity for wariness, as images may be false, truthful, or a subtle mixture of both. This uncertainty is highlighted by Merlin's "glassy globe" – "round and hollow shaped," "Like to the world it selfe, and seemd a world of glas" (*FQ* 3.2.21,19).[181] Its glassy hollowness suggests a transparent emptiness, something intangible and potentially unreal, a brittle world substituted for the world itself. The globe can be seen to be an allegory for the poem and the mind in its presentation of the fantastical and chivalric realm of faerie. Yet as much as it is fragile and constructed, a sealed vacuum from the world outside, it also reflects back upon the reader. Light bends through glass and is distorted. Thus the reader, in the position of Britomart viewing the globe, must register the globe's distortions and illuminations. The globe's world of glass shines back reflected light. It is the reader who must interpret that light, using his or her imagination in order to see beyond the reflection – the *seeming* world of glass, the *seeming* hollow – to the substantial meanings upon which the globe rests. Here the combined use of allegory and imagination is paramount. Mirrors reflect our image and yet that image is reversed, or distorted. Using the globe of glass we must recognise the extent to which all things are potentially distorted not only through representation but by the narrow assumptions we bring to them. This world of glass must be looked at and handled carefully. To see straight through it is not to see it at all. We need to look more closely to be able to see a world within it – akin to Blake's world in a grain of sand.

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[179] For an insight into the process of reader participation in the development and understanding of Spenser's allegory, see Roberts's study, *The Faerie Queene*. "Allegory is a practice of active reading ... Allegory therefore makes great demands on its readers as they produce its meanings" (26). See especially pages 22-34.

[180] For more on the way Spenser's allegory enables reader interaction see A.B. Giamatti, *Double Senses* 106-17; MacCaffrey, *Spenser's Allegory* 45-59; Roberts 22-34; Suttie, *Self-Interpretation* 15-38; Dolven 135-71; Hamilton, *Structure* 7-35.

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[181] In a note on "Mirrors" in the *Sp Enc*, Herbert Grabes notes that references to "mirrhour bright" (*FQ* 1.4.10) and Merlin's magic looking glass (*FQ* 3.2.18-21) were conventional in the sixteenth century. What is original, however, is the shape of Merlin's "glassy globe" as round and hollow (477). Spenser gives the mirror a crucial function in representing it as revealing the past, present and future. It holds prophetic and visionary powers, akin to the magic crystal ball used by Elizabeth's astrologer, Dr John Dee (*FQ* 305n). See above in which Sir Fulke Greville likens the imagination to "a glasse." See also Grogan 86-89 on the relative reflective powers of various "mirrors" during the sixteenth century.

Spenser is aware of the multiple aspects of the imagination that constitute human life. The imagination is not characterised only by blindness and insight. The mind has a life of its own. "It is the mynd, that maketh good or ill, / That maketh wretch or happie, rich or poore" (*FQ* 6.9.30). Archimago represents the delusions of "fantasie," desire, fear and terror. Arthur, in his quest to find Gloriana, is subjected to terrifying visions.

> In stead of sleepe thou sendest troublous fears,
> And dreadfull visions, in the which aliue
> The dreary image of sad death appears: (*FQ* 3.4.57)

The human mind does not require facilitators or debilitations in the form of Merlin and Archimago to trouble the imagination. *The Faerie Queene* mirrors the dynamic and imaginative processes of the mind (MacCaffrey, *Spenser's Allegory* 6-7). The mind, like a "glassy globe" or a poem, holds a whole world in itself.

## Calidore's vision of the Graces on Mount Acidale

Exploring Calidore's vision of the Graces, we are reminded of the poet's vision of "fancie" or imagination in poetry in "The Teares of the Muses." From the lamenting Muses to the harmoniously dancing Graces, we come full circle in considering the complexity of Spenser's presentation of allegorical imagination. Together the stanzas from "Teares" and the scene on Mount Acidale in Book Six of *The Faerie Queene* display the possibilities and limitations of allegorical imaginative vision – limitations that are not just the poet's but the reader's. Just as the Muse inspires the poet, so Spenser uses the Muse to test the reader to recognise that words themselves guide and challenge inspirational or imaginative interaction. Spenser's words must be our Muse.

Calidore sneaks upon the scene, spying upon the "naked maidens" from "the couert of the wood" (*FQ* 6.10.11). He sees "An hundred naked maidens lilly white, / All raunged in a ring, and dauncing in delight" (*FQ* 6.10.11). This freedom and exuberant joy is akin to that of Blake's "The Ecchoing Green" in *Songs of Innocence*. While Calidore spies on the Graces from a distance, they disappear when he "appeared to their vew" (*FQ* 6.10.18), leaving only the shepherd, Colin Clout. Their disappearance reflects Calidore's imaginative and moral capacities. He doubts the vision before his eyes, questioning whether the beauties are Queens, nymphs, faeries "or enchaunted show, / With which his eyes mote haue deluded beene" (*FQ* 6.10.17). Distrusting his imaginative capacities, he enters the scene and ruins it. He is shown not to have the patience to regard the scene from a distance and attempt to work out the meaning of the maidens for himself. In forcing his way into the vision, he makes himself its centre rather than realising that the Graces present something he could be, but is not. He needs to learn grace, attain patience and avoid selfishness in invading intimate scenes of which he is not a part (as happens in his interruption of Serena and Calepine's liaisons [*FQ* 6.3.21]).[182] Calidore's interruption shows how far he is from grace and the distance he has to come both imaginatively and morally to be able to appreciate such visions. Morally, he sees the maidens with greed bordering on the lascivious. "There he did see, that pleased much his sight, / That euen he him selfe his eyes enuyde" (*FQ* 6.10.11).[183] Instead of interpreting the vision as demonstrating the transcendence of grace and the harmonious delight it brings, Calidore's eyes are fixed upon the bodies of the maidens, which generate his sensuous desire for them. He remains firmly focused on his physical and material gain rather than appreciating the visionary spiritual implication of their presence. He displays what sixteenth-century critics of the imagination feared – a mind led astray by lustful desires. The fact that he doubts his imagination further highlights his limited mental capacities; he cannot distinguish delusion from enlightenment. Finally, the Graces represent the very virtue he does not have, but is meant to uphold as Knight of "Covrtesie" (*FQ* 601). They embody gracious and generous courtesy, as suggested by their harmonious dance in the ring. Their hands touch in a sign of peace, beneficence and cooperation. As Colin Clout explains to Calidore, they offer:

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[182] Neuse questions Calidore's courtesy, arguing that he rather duplicitously adopts the appearance of courtesy only when needed, and that he displays poor manners when intruding upon private moments. "[R]ather than evolving towards an ideal, Calidore's character seems to me to develop, if at all, in a reverse direction" (345). See "Book VI as Conclusion to *The Faerie Queene*" 329-53. Explaining how insight disappears before the intruding eyes of the uninvited, see Fletcher, *Prophetic Moment* 129.

> all the complements of curtesie:
> They teach vs, how to each degree and kynde,
> We should our selues demeane, to low, to hie;
> To friends, to foes, which skill men call Ciuility (*FQ* 6.10.23)

These are precisely the qualities Calidore should be striving to attain during his quest. The Graces are a test, a reflection of how much he has to learn before he can call himself courteous.

As the poet, Spenser imaginatively creates this scene, but who is narrating it? This question is important in order to establish the relation between creative vision and imagination in the text. The poet/narrator's positioning in this section of the text is ambivalent. Just as he seems to shy away from being named as the narrator, his use of Colin Clout (the poet's pseudonym from *The Shepheards Calender*) asserts Spenser as being both the creator and narrator of the scene. The poet himself seems to desire no direct link to the visions created within the poem. Instead the Graces seemingly form a ring or barricade between the figure of the poet and his imaginative creation. They surround Colin Clout, who plays for them on his "bag-pipe" (*FQ* 6.10.18).

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[183] During the Renaissance, the word "eye" was akin etymologically to "envy," meaning to look maliciously upon (*FQ* 669n; 68n). See *OED*, s.v. askance, def. 2: "*to look*, *eye*, *view askance*, the idea expressed has varied considerably, different writers using it to indicate distain, envy, jealousy, and suspicion." There is a dark tone implied in Calidore's voyeuristic gaze. Krier argues that "peeping is a morally laden issue" (11), noting that Spenser's depictions of viewing or gazing "assume that there is no such thing as an innocent eye, a pure vision" (8).

> That iolly shepheard, which there piped, was
> Poore *Colin Clout* (who knows not *Colin Clout*?)
> He pypt apace, whilest they him daunst about (*FQ* 6.10.16)

The lines assume that the reader recognises Colin's name from *The Shepheards Calender* (*SC Jan* 1; *Aug* 141). The implication may be self-promotional, not only pointing towards Spenser's previously published poems, but hinting at the figure of the poet himself. The reader would assume that Colin, being the figure of the poet, would be the figure the narrator most identifies with. However, Spenser thwarts the reader's assumptions. Describing him in the third person, Spenser detaches himself from the character of Colin in this passage. Instead of conveying the scene from Colin's viewpoint while he plays for the circling Graces, the poet/narrator maintains a distance both from him and from Calidore in order to present the entire scene from both perspectives, thus attributing authority to no one. Colin is allowed by the Graces to view the dance while he plays his pipes, thus elevating his moral status above that of Calidore, but the scene is not created by him alone. Instead, Colin is simply a character or a "player" within it. The vision is the creation of the poet/narrator, and yet Spenser remains in the background, unnamed and invisible, instead detailing the perspectives of all. He wishes not to be traced. He does not want this vision to be attributed to him. Why? Thomas Hyde provides one answer: Spenser was very cautious about indulging in the prophetic impulse. "[R]igorously he distinguished visionary poetics from any arrogation of prophetic authority" ("Vision," *Sp Enc* 721). While the characters of *The Faerie Queene* see visions, Spenser's narrative voice deliberately declines from owning visionary insight and reports no visions of its own.

Spenser's stance is not surprising given the feelings surrounding the imagination and vision during his lifetime. Guillory's study, *Poetic Authority*, provides another reason for Spenser's reluctance to proclaim his imaginative creation as his own: the sixteenth-century's dismissal of personal inspiration as a means upon which to base poetic authority. Guillory notes that the sight upon Mount Acidale is a moment that "stages a scene of pure inspiration" (43). The dance of the Graces is "an expression that might be offered for the topography of inspiration, if such a thing could be" (43). In staging such a vision of "pure inspiration," Spenser sought to entice his readers through this strikingly innovative way of allegorical imagining. However, he had to defend it by distancing himself – his poetical persona – from what was regarded during this period as a dubious means of asserting visionary authority.

Instead, the narrator relies upon the views and voices of others in order to generate imaginative visions. "Helpe then, O holy virgin chiefe of nyne" … "O helpe thou my weake wit, and sharpen my dull tong" (*FQ* 1 Proem 2). The authority of the Muse is invoked rather than the narrator's own apocalyptic experience. Given his context, Spenser would probably argue that he is not a visionary, although his poem is a vehicle for vision, insight and illumination. His poetry borders on the prophetic while the poetical voice is distanced.[184] Again, Spenser is shielding his position, while simultaneously encouraging the reader to engage with the text and analyse its imagery. This technique is both a defence against accusations of extreme or perverse imagination, and a means of challenging readers to glean allegorical and imaginative insight from the text.

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[184] Fletcher argues that *The Faerie Queene* "is a prophetic poem" (*Prophetic Moment* 3), but we need to be certain of specific definitions of "prophecy" relating to Spenser's era. Fletcher states that Spenser belongs to a broader tradition of prophecy, which is only partially predictive, a tradition that balances

This is where Spenser and Blake's attitude towards imagination differs. In comparison to Spenser, Blake enters into vision wholeheartedly, directly and without masking himself from his own imaginative creation. Spenser had to struggle with the doubt and criticism that encircled imaginative and apocalyptic enterprise and his work is to an extent shaped by the social forces that surrounded it. Blake's world was very different and the freedom provided by his own printing press allowed him to escape the conditioning impositions of authorised print and publication (Eaves 125-6; Viscomi, *Art* 1-19; Bentley, *Stranger* 93-96). Blake's work may be likened to the Graces on Mount Acidale – free flowing, spontaneous, imaginative and challenging in its meaning. I believe he learnt from Spenser's initial glimpsed visions in order to go on and produce his own expansive visionary creations. Blake and Spenser's visionary differences, as noted above by MacCaffrey, are the contrast between sustained imaginative vision and mere snatches of that vision.[185] Both forms are highly potent, as illustrated by the extent to which Blake develops Spenser's notion of the didactic and allegorical use of the imagination when engaging with the text.

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anticipation of the future with a concern for the past and, even more importantly, the present (*Prophetic Moment* 3-6).

[185] Spenser's glimpsed or "snatched" vision is seen in the portrayal of the Graces on Mount Acidale, before they disappear, or when he attempts to describe Jerusalem, or "Hierusalem," "a goodly Citty" wherein "eternall peace and happinesse doth dwell" (*FQ* 1.10.55). This city far surpasses any of earthly note, including that of the Faerie Queene herself. The narrator again declines to describe it fully, merely noting that "earthly tong / Cannot describe, nor wit of man can tell; Too high a ditty for my simple song" (*FQ* 1.10.55). Jerusalem is seemingly beyond the visual imagination of the narrator, a vision so potent and personal that he cannot do it justice. Yet, in so doing, Spenser tests the imagination of his readers, prompting them with just a few words to envisage a beautiful, peerless city existing beyond the realms of reality in the environs of spiritual and human perfection.

Despite Spenser's seeming denials, his work repeatedly presents profound conceptions of a semi-apocalyptic world. In Book One, the betrothal of Una to the Redcross Knight presents a version of the union of Truth with St George, or England, a presentation of religious truth finally prevailing following the Elizabethan Settlement of 1559, and the reformation of the Church of England (Norbrook 121). The implication is that through this settlement Elizabeth I aligned herself with Protestant "Truth." Book One contains many images from the Book of Revelation.[186] However, instead of emphasising destruction, Spenser's use of Revelation builds upon the promise of renewal. The union of Una to St George conveys an image of hope: the final eradication of tyranny and evil to reveal a golden world of perfect Protestantism. This promise is further suggested in Gloriana, representative of Elizabeth I, an omnipotent figure whose deferred presence adds to her lustre. When she finally appears, the true perfection of the golden age will have been attained. Gloriana's absence is testament to the current deficiency of the realm and an insight into what it could be when she finally becomes visible. Spenser's vision looks to the future while being mindful of the realities of the world as it stands. His text can therefore be seen to contain elements of the prophetic. Prophets do not necessarily look to the future but to the potential betterment of the current moment (Taithe and Thornton 10).[187] Spenser may be seen to exercise semi-prophetic powers in presenting images while noting their limitations according to the constraints of the time. While the Elizabethan Settlement brought about a form of compromise between competing religious practices and beliefs within the church, by the 1580s Catholic conspiracies and plots against the Queen's life, the Queen's excommunication, the execution of Mary Queen of Scots in 1587, and repeated threats of Spanish Armadas in the 1580s and 1590s undermined the vision of a harmonious Protestant England (Norbrook 154; Pettegree 209). Beneath the surface, the Catholic-Protestant divide and the split between conservative and reforming Protestants caused much suspicion and resentment. Spenser's allegorical imaginative vision presents an ideal of what could be, in a world where the reality of this ultimate vision is forever deferred.

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[186] Images from Revelation include Duessa as the Whore of Babylon (*FQ* 1.2.13n), Archimago as the Pope (*FQ* 1.2.22n), the Dragon terrorising Una's parent's kingdom as reflective of the Dragon of Revelation (*FQ* 1.11).

[187] Prophecy is a "divinely inspired utterance or discourse" and the prophet is "one who speaks for God or for any deity, as the inspired … interpreter of his will" (Taithe and Thornton 1). Prophecy is often a reaction to cultural and cosmological shocks. It is a language of expression which in turn plays upon the structure of language itself. It is therefore dynamic and unstable, requiring interpretation, as does allegory. Time was considered cyclically and thus prophets believed the future was found by looking to the past, the prophet expressing the hopes and fears of social groups (Taithe and Thornton 1-14).

As noted at the beginning of this thesis, apocalyptic visions are most prevalent in Book One. Redcross's imaginative experience on Mount Contemplation is a detailed example of guided visionary insight. He is accompanied by a blind hermit. The workings of the mind are more productive to insight than the reliance solely upon the senses, hence blindness is often associated with illuminated insight.[188] As Blake says, one must see *through* not *with* the eyes ("Auguries of Innocence" ll. 125-26). Here the union between the imagination and allegory is most strong. One must become aware of the many interpretive possibilities present within the text in order to recognise and comprehend the allegorical content of the verse. Like the imagination, allegory is a process continually at work within the mind, stretching and extending meaning in dynamic and creative ways. A guide is important, however. Just as Redcross is guided up the mountain by the hermit who oversees his viewing, so the reader is guided and led by Spenser's text to formulate valid interpretations. The most accessible interpretation is not necessarily the richest or the truest. The reader, like Redcross, must choose the "litle path," "both steepe and long," in order to scale the mountain and “vew” or “aread”[189] the scene from an elevated and objective perspective (*FQ* 1.10.53, 51). As MacCaffrey says, Spenser’s vision of Hierusalem atop Mount Contemplation may be only a glimpse into alternative spaces beyond that of the human or the faerie realm, but it is a glimpse that challenges the mental and imaginative faculties of the mind to strive to be more attentive and open to the messages within the text. Insight comes from a trained and perceptive mind, receptive to both imaginative and allegorical forces. The trained imagination is as allegorical as allegory is imaginative. This didactic combination works towards schooling the mind to insight and illumination. Spenser began to develop this amalgamation, but its mature expression is seen in Blake’s poetry. Blake fully embraces the combination of allegorical imagination to the extent that it forms the basis for his prophetic poems, as we will explore below.

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[188] "All were his earthly eien both blunt and bad, / And through great age had lost their kindly sight, / Yet wondrous quick and persaunt was his spright, / As Eagles eie, that can behold the Sunne." (*FQ* 1.10.47)

## The evolution of “fancy” and “imagination”

Some assessment must be made of the evolution of “imagination” during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. During this period, the imagination was increasingly associated with “the power of framing new and striking intellectual conceptions” or “poetic genius,” as detailed in the *OED* (def. 4.b) In contrast, definitions of “fancy,” which had characterised the illusory or fanciful aspects of the imagination, were also shifting from the late sixteenth century onwards. Instead of being associated solely with mental images, “fancy” took on new forms, allowing it to be differentiated from the imagination. From 1579, “fancy” was regarded as: “Caprice, changeful mood; an instance of this, a caprice, a whim” (def. 7.a), evolving around 1665 to mean: “Taste, critical judgement in matters of art or elegance.” Thus, in 1705 Addison notes in *Italy* 11 that “Palaces” were “built with an excellent Fancy,” indicating the word’s increasing association during the eighteenth century with sensibility and sophistication, rather than with the process of forming mental images. Along with this shift came the notion, partly developed by Coleridge in *Biographica Literaria*, that “fancy” was passive and secondary to the active creative faculty of the “imagination” (Brann 506). Coleridge was to

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[189] As Anne Ferry’s *Art of Naming* shows, Spenser stressed the importance of correct reading. To “read” was to involve all the senses in interpreting, showing, knowing, speaking and hearing, and thus allegorical and imaginative faculties.

> Suspect…that fancy and imagination were two distinct and widely different faculties, instead of being, according to the general belief, either two names with one meaning, or at furthest, the lower and higher degree of one and the same power. (1: 86-87)[190]

This shift is reflected in the reversal of the instances of word use in Blake’s poems, compared with Spenser’s work. Whereas Spenser predominately uses the words “fancy” and “fantasy” as opposed to “imagination,” we find that Blake uses “imagination” eighty-six times in his poetry, prose and letters; “fancy” occurs only eighteen times (Erdman, *Concordance*).

Eva Brann notes that the recognition of the importance of the imagination to poetry in the late eighteenth century has its seeds in the Renaissance (497-98). Sixteenth-century philosophers, such as Francis Bacon and Philip Sidney, identified poetry with the imagination (Brann 498).[191] This identification, along with the growing perception of imagination as a creative and inspiring form, led to the association of poetry with the imagination which influenced late eighteenth-century and Romantic attitudes towards verse (Brann 498). In June and July 1712, Addison wrote several revolutionary essays for the *Spectator* (issues 409-421) entitled "The Pleasures of the Imagination" (Brann 499; Addison, *Critical Essays* 172-209). These essays turn assumptions and common opinions regarding the imagination upside-down. Brann notes that instead of defining imaginative "pleasure" as merely sensual, Addison was keen to promote "pleasure" as an "aesthetic" quality (499). His essays encouraged the notion that the imagination could be a tasteful, sophisticated guide, rather than simply a mode that inflamed and deluded the senses:

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[190] For more on the association between “fancy” and “imagination” see: Brett, *Fancy and Imagination* 31-49; Kennedy, *The English Heritage of Coleridge of Bristol 1798* 1-18, 73; Brann’s *The World of the Imagination: Sum and Substance* 502-10. For an alternative view regarding “fancy” as a liberating discourse that disrupts the authoritative status quo, see Robinson, *Unfettering Poetry: Fancy in British Romanticism* 3-21, 25-48.

[191] For more on attitudes towards the imagination in the seventeenth century, refer to Brann, *The World of Imagination*; and Butler, *Imagination and Politics in Seventeenth-Century England*. See also Tilmouth, *Passion’s Triumph over Reason: A History of the Moral Imagination from Spenser to Rochester*. For a study of the imagination up to the eighteenth century from a medical perspective, refer to chapter one of Kickel’s *Novel Notions: Medical Discourse and the Mapping of the Imagination in Eighteenth-Century English Fiction*.

> any single circumstance of what we have formerly seen often raises up a whole scene of imagery, and awakens numberless ideas that before slept in the imagination; such a particular smell or colour is able to fill the mind, on a sudden, with the picture of the fields or gardens, where we first met with it, and to bring up into view all the variety of images that once attended it. Our imagination takes the hint, and leads us unexpectedly into cities or theatres, plains or meadows. (Addison, *Critical Essays* 193-94)

The increased awareness of the "aesthetic" quality of the imagination is reflected in Spenser criticism of the early eighteenth century. In his 1715 essay "On Allegorical Poetry," Hughes notes that Spenser

> had an exalted and elegant mind, a warm and boundless fancy, and was an admirable imager of virtues and vices, which was his particular talent. The embellishment of description are rich and lavish in him beyond comparison; and as this is the most striking part of poetry, especially to young readers, I take it to be the reason that he has been the father of more poets among us than any other

> of our writers; poetry being first kindled in the imagination, which Spenser writes to more than any one. (6)

Hughes's comments reflect the shift in definitions of "fancy" and "imagination" during this time. Spenser's "warm and boundless fancy" is an expression of his "elegant mind" and taste in carefully selecting and imaging "virtues and vices," rather than an example of fantastical delusion. Hughes even notes the extent to which poetry and imagination have come to be regarded as seamless during this period, "poetry being first kindled in the imagination." His description shows the imagination to be a means of teaching and learning, Spenser's "striking" images inspiring "young readers" and prompting them to emulate an aesthetic of imaginative and intelligent, virtuous verse.

The alteration in attitude towards the imagination was such that by the late eighteenth century, William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge took the imaginative in poetry and highlighted its potential for stimulating inspirational verse. Coleridge originally saw the imagination as empirically informed by the external world, in relation to theories by Locke and early Burkean philosophies (Brett 35-36; Whale 19-20; 167).[192] However, his attitude towards the imagination shifted over time, and his theory of the imagination is given its fullest exposition in *Biographia Literaria* (Brett 31). Here Coleridge writes:

> The poet, described in *ideal* perfection, brings the whole soul of man into activity, with the subordination of its faculties to each other, according to their relative worth and dignity. He diffuses a tone and spirit of unity, that blends,

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[192] Brett argues that when Coleridge met Wordsworth in 1794 he belonged to the empiricist philosophical tradition of Locke. However, between 1796 and 1801 his beliefs altered to include viewing the imagination as an active mental process rather than being a passive faculty (35-6). Whale likewise argues that Burke's attitudes towards the imagination also shifted, noting that he began from a Lockean perspective which restricted imagination, but by the 1790s "his writings engage substantially with ennobling and lurid forms of imagination" (20). These examples reveal the extent to which attitudes towards the imagination were shifting during the eighteenth century.

> and (as it were) *fuses*, each into each, by that synthetic [synthesizing] and magical power, to which we have exclusively appropriated the name of imagination. (2: 11)

In his lectures, Coleridge states that "the imagination is the distinguishing characteristic of man as a progressive being" (*Miscellaneous Criticism* 195). Instead of being a passive principle, a chamber or cog within the mind that reacts to events in the external world, the imagination is presented as a creative force that is vital to inspire the intelligence and perceptive awareness of humankind. Coleridge's words define the imagination as the means by which one may make autonomous individual judgements, a means by which humans can stand out, not only from animals but from other human beings by the forceful inspiration of individual minds. Coleridge sees imagination as being a new authoritative and powerful source for poetry. Brann notes that the "view of the poet's imagination as being intensely his own, an individual gift, is…the chief legacy of Romantic to modern poets" (502).[193]

Thus, in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth explains his depiction of seemingly ordinary and mundane scenes of the rural world of the late eighteenth century, drawing "attention to the truth that the power of the human imagination is sufficient to produce such changes … as might almost appear miraculous" (*Lyrical Ballads* xxxvi). Here the imagination is seen as the means by which the special is noted in the everyday. It is a quality that provides luminosity, a means of accessing alternative or higher powers of perception. Brann comments that the estrangement of the ordinary and the transformation of the familiar into the unfamiliar was a central property of the Romantic imagination (504). This "estrangement" marks the complexity of the Romantic imagination, a concept that is not stable, and like allegory, is more a mode of discourse than an easily definable essence in itself. Forest Pyle argues that the "imagination" is "invested with huge poetic, philosophical and political significance in Romantic thought" (1), and this makes "the task of defining the Romantic imagination…notoriously difficult" (2). Even Coleridge and Wordsworth disagreed to some extent in their beliefs and attitudes towards the imagination (Brett 49). One way of assessing this complicated relationship is to regard the imagination as a method of thinking, and allegory as a mode that encourages that way of thinking:

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[193] For more on the imagination in the eighteenth century and its relation to Romanticism and the writers of the early nineteenth century, see: Pyle*, The Ideology of Imagination: Subject and Society in the Discourse of Romanticism*; Robinson, *Unfettering Poetry: Fancy in British Romanticism*; Burwick, *Poetic Madness and the Romantic Imagination*; and Whale*, Imagination under Pressure, 1789-1832: Aesthetics, Politics and Unity*.

> Deployed as a principle of coherence, an agent of linkage, or a medium of translation for the discourse of Romanticism, the imagination is simultaneously a principal site of its division and disjunction. (Pyle 10)

Whale reinforces Pyle's observations on the imagination by stating:

> The historical failures of imagination charted here [in this book] are also … testimonies to its resistance and to its enduring presence as it resurfaces in the language and strategies of its opponents. Imagination is not only produced by a spilt or fracture in the culture; it reproduces and disseminates itself across that divide. (Whale 2)

The links here to allegory's complex and shifting association with various forms and discourses cannot be ignored. The extent to which allegory works through fractures or divisions of meaning is paralleled by the workings of the imagination, which allows "contradictions and a multiplicity of identities" (Whale 14). The dissemination and complexity of the imagination is emphasised when we compare Blake's use of the term to that of his contemporaries. Blake "is an extremist of the imagination" even among a generation now promoting the imagination at the turn of the nineteenth century (Brann 509). It is to Blake's unique formulation of the allegorical imagination that we now turn.

## Blake's imagination

In *Milton*, Blake writes, "The imagination is not a State: it is the Human Existence itself" (*M* 32:32). Blake extends eighteenth-century notions of the imagination, making it the basis for human perception and the central motivating force within his poetry. For Blake, the imagination is not just the means by which engaged readers may find new ways of seeing and interpreting, it is a reflection of the divinity of humankind.

> This World of Imagination is a world of Eternity [;] it is the divine bosom into which we shall go after the death of the Vegetated body. This World of Imagination is Infinite & Eternal, whereas the world of Generation or Vegetation is Finite and Temporal. (*VLJ*, E 555)

Blake reinforces this notion by stating that the "Nature of my Work is Visionary or Imaginative[.] It is an Endeavour to Restore …the Golden Age" (*VLJ*, E 555). Ian Singer in the Introduction to Frye's *Fearful Symmetry* comments on Blake's powerful use of the imagination:

> By positing the imagination as the seat of a transcendent divinity in each individual, Blake reveals infinitude and eternity as the living dimensions of creation, the Golden Age which the awakened imagination brings into being continually. (xxxix)

For Blake, the imagination is a continually lived experience, though he is fully aware of the extent to which readers fail to acknowledge and engage with their imaginations. Instead of seeing the "Infinite & Eternal," readers often confine and limit their minds to the scope of the rational and sensible. A major theme within Blake's verse, especially in *Milton*, *The Four Zoas* and *Jerusalem*, is the reawakening of the imagination, the awareness of alternative ways of viewing and interpreting. He sought to invite his readers to think and to see more deeply and profoundly. In this sense, the imagination working in partnership with allegory, guides and prompts a greater awareness of multiple levels of viewing. Just as Spenser's allegorical work encourages readers to use their imagination, Blake's imaginative verse inspires a deep interrogation of the text and the revelation of the allegorical meanings within it. Readers who see not *with* but *through* the eyes are using their minds – their imaginative faculties – when evaluating a scene, rather than relying purely upon the singular dimension of sight when reading the text ("Auguries of Innocence" ll. 125-26). Through allegorical-imaginative didacticism, Blake strives to convey the power of the human imagination.

The extent to which Blake differed from his contemporaries may be seen in his reaction to the role of the imagination in Wordsworth's poetry. Blake's annotations to Wordsworth's *Poems*, published in 1815, give an insight into the differences between the two poets in their understanding of the qualities of the imagination. Blake was troubled by Wordsworth's emphasis upon the sympathetic natural landscape and his tendency towards the nostalgic.

> I see in Wordsworth the Natural Man rising up against the Spiritual Man Continually and then he is No Poet but a Heathen Philosopher at Enmity against all true Poetry or Inspiration. (E 665)

Paley interprets Blake's words as acknowledging Wordsworth to be a great imaginative poet hampered by mechanistic philosophy (*Energy* 230). Blake and Wordsworth read portions of each other's work (although Wordsworth probably only read poems from *The Songs of Innocence and Experience*).[194] Their different attitudes toward the imagination reflect the extent to which the mode can be variously interpreted. Blake sees Wordsworth's emphasis upon the natural landscape as working at odds with "true Poetry or Inspiration." While Wordsworth took inspiration from the surrounding landscape, Blake saw true inspiration as coming directly from the human mind without reliance upon the external world for an imaginative "spark." This difference highlights the extent to which Blake's work shuns the empiricist principles that had shaped eighteenth-century concepts about the relation between humans and the external world.[195]

Blake's greatest battle for the creative imagination is with the forces of rationalistic empiricism. During the late eighteenth century, Lockean or empiricist views were widely accepted as explaining the way humans perceived the world. John Locke (1632-1704) and later David Hume (1711-1776) argued that the imagination is wholly informed by the experience of the senses. Their work states that all forms of human thought and creativity originate from and are bound to material objects and contexts. Locke asserts, in Draft A of his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, written between 1671 and 1672:

> I imagin that all knowledg is founded on and ultimately derives its self from sense, or something analogous to it and may be cold sensation which is downe by our senses conversant…and thus we come to have Ideas of heat and light, hard and soft which are noe thing but the reviveing again in our mindes those

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[194] Wordsworth, having read *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, "consid'd B[lake] as hav'g the elements of poetry – a thousand times more than either Byron or Scott" (Crabb Robinson, diary of 24 May 1812, qtd. in Bentley, *Stranger* 133).

[195] There are many instances throughout Blake's poems in which he condemns the theorists of "Reason": "this Newtonian Phantasm / This Voltaire & Rousseau: this Hume & Gibbon" (*M* 40.11-12). "I turn my eyes to the Schools & Universities of Europe / And there behold the Loom of Locke whose Woof rages dire / Washd by the Water-wheels of Newton, …cruel Works / Of many Wheels I view, wheel without wheel, with cogs tyrannic" (*J* 15.14-18). See "Locke" and "Newton" in Foster Damon's *Blake Dictionary* 243-44, 298-99.

> imaginations which those objects when they affected our sense caused in us whether by motion or otherwise. (1)

David Hume, influenced by Locke, likewise takes a rational approach to human thinking:

> Man is a reasonable being; and as such, receives from science his proper food and nourishment: But so narrow are the bounds of human understanding, that little satisfaction can be hoped for in this particular. (*An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* 7)

Both theorists regard the human mind as being passive and limited to the reception of sense-based sensations. Northrop Frye argues that Blake's objection to Locke is that Locke extends involuntary action into the higher regions of the imagination and tries to make perceptive activity subconscious (*Fearful* 29-30).[196]

> Locke does not think of sight as the mind directing itself through the eye to the object. He thinks of it as the involuntary and haphazard image imprinted on the mind through the eye by the object. In this process the mind remains passive and receives impressions automatically. (Frye, *Fearful* 30)

Blake protests against the idea that the imagination is constrained by the limits of the external world (Frye, *Fearful* 31). Humans are not passively stimulated into maturity, but rather, he believed, they grow into maturity (Frye, *Fearful* 31). Thus, we require the imaginative freedom to order our sense perceptions, to appreciate and make decisions for ourselves. "Perception is self-development" (Frye, *Fearful* 30), and Blake seeks to prompt readers to an awareness of the process of self-development through his allegorical imaginative verse: “We are led to Believe a Lie / When we see [*with*] not Thro the Eye” (“Auguries of Innocence” ll. 125-26).

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[196] Northrop Frye's *Fearful Symmetry*, first published in 1947, was one of the first and most thorough modern investigations of Blake's work and transformed Blake studies by making the poet more accessible to students and scholars. *Fearful Symmetry* is still in print today, testament to the value of the text to the field of Blake criticism. For more information, and one of the latest editions, see Ian Singer's introduction to *Northrop Frye's Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake*, edited by Nicholas Halmi (2004).

Blake dismisses Locke’s narrow and mechanical explanation for the human imagination. Reasoning that focuses upon the senses can only be bound to sight, sound, taste, touch and smell. Without the creativity of the imagination, there can be no enlightenment of perspective, no awareness of divinity. This is emphasised by the concept of “four-fold vision” which provides an imaginative structure to Blake’s verse.[197] The lowest point in Blake’s structure is Ulro, the stage of materialism and delusion, dead matter or the basest level to which humankind can sink (Foster Damon 416-17). It is also the realm of isolated single vision, the area of “Single vision and Newton’s Sleep” (E 722), in which Blake places Locke, Hume and other “single-minded” scientists of Reason. It is not that Blake doubts the intelligence of Locke and Newton; he merely disagrees with their materialism (Foster Damon 298) and their misjudgement of the powers of the human imagination. Their lack of imaginative ingenuity is emphasised in their “single vision.” Condemning these intellectual men, Blake conveys a warning to readers not passively to confine their minds to rigid and abstract theories, but actively and creatively to think for themselves. The realm of two-fold vision is Generation, the world of “vegetation” in which we all live. Blake uses this world to illustrate an awareness of the complexity of earthly existence, while prompting us to look at it more closely. It is “two-fold Always” (E 722), as if guiding the reader to recognise life’s profound meanings, while further encouraging the extension of the imagination into “three fold” vision. The three-fold realm is that of Beulah – meaning “married land” (Isa. 62.4) (Foster Damon 42-44) – the name for Palestine, the promised land. It is a land of paradise, an “other” world which may only be attained by minds prepared to extend themselves beyond earth-bound material realisms. Lastly, "fourfold vision" is termed Eden, the dwelling place for the Divine Family of Eternals (Foster Damon 114; E 722). It represents the mental capacity to create and live in a visionary realm separated from the confines of materialistic existence. In this state, Blake argues, "Mental Things are alone Real" (*VLJ*, E 565). It is only in "throwing off the Temporal that the Eternal might be Established" (*VLJ*, E 555). Blake uses the concept of "fourfold vision" to promote a radical form of imagination that looks beyond the constructs and confinements of the material and pre-constructed. This form of imagining is allegorically imaginative. It guides and challenges the reader to be individually creative when reading Blake's verse. It is only by acknowledging and then transcending the narrow views of the imagination expounded by philosophers such as Locke that readers can progress to recognise Blake's interrelated view of the divine workings of the human mind – "The Human Form Divine."[198]

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[197] Blake outlines this vision in a poem to Thomas Butts (E 722). On Blake’s concept of “four-fold” imagination, see Foster Damon, *Blake Dictionary* 42-44, 114-15, 150-51, 416-17. See Blake’s “A Vision of The Last Judgement” (E 554-66) for a detailed explanation of Blake’s imagination.

Blake is fully aware of contemporary preconceptions about the imagination, the extent to which it has been relatively ignored or regarded with suspicion. His art and poetry is involved in the investigation and necessary re-evaluation of the processes of the imagination.

> The Nature of Visionary Fancy or Imagination is very little Known and the Eternal nature … of its ever Existent Images is considered as less permanent than the things of Vegetative … Nature. Yet the Oak dies as well as the Lettuce but Its Eternal Image and Individuality never dies but renews by its seed. just so

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[198] Blake's phrase "Human Form Divine" echoes Milton's "human face divine" in Book Three of *Paradise Lost* (3.40-50). Here Milton laments that he cannot see any longer. The loss of sight perhaps reinforces the importance of the imagination to Blake, as it highlights the extent to which human beings must actively use their minds to perceive rather than relying upon their senses.

> the Imaginative Image returns by the seed of Contemplative Thought. (*VLJ*, E 555)

The creative capacities of the imagination have been studied by very few poets in depth. Blake, like Sidney, seeks to prove the divinity of the imagination. Like the soul that never dies but exists while the vegetative body decays, the imagination is eternal and ever renewing in human thought. Imaginative thoughts are godly because they are eternal. They are divine in their transcendental and inspiring capacity to exceed the physical transience of the body. Blake sees the imagination as a force that sets humankind apart from any other species, one which allows for empathy and compassion in the suffering of Jesus and of all mankind. Northrop Frye says of Blake's attitude towards the imagination:

> As imagination *is* life, no one is born without any imagination except the still-born, but those who cut their imagination down as far as they can, deny, as far as they can, their own manhood and their divinity which is that manhood. (*Fearful* 38)

Blake's works explore the processes of the imagination by calling upon readers to open their minds and recognise the extent to which they can rely upon "Contemplative Thought."

## Albion in *Jerusalem*: an allegory of the fallen mind

On one level, Blake's attitude towards the imagination meets that of Spenser in his effort to reflect the idea of a fallen world redeemed by imaginative vision. To repeat Blake's formulation: "The Nature of my Work is Visionary or Imaginative it is an Endeavour to Restore … the Golden Age" (*VLJ*, E 555). Like Spenser, he prompts the reader to recognise a visionary world with the potential for the incorporation of those who are imaginatively enlightened. As Spenser provides a fleeting vision of Hierusalem upon Mount Contemplation (*FQ* 1.10.46-68), Blake offers a new Jerusalem as a semi-apocalyptic model of a golden age. This Jerusalem is represented both by the city of Golgonooza and in the figure and representation of the woman Jerusalem who is both a character and a state in the poem *Jerusalem*. Instead of a mere glimpse, Blake creates a whole mythological world devoted to detailing the complexity of this golden realm and the ways in which human beings can create a golden space within the mind. In so doing, he teaches his readers to become aware of the subtlety of the allegorical imagination.

Like Spenser, Blake shows characters blind to insight (such as Albion or Urizen, who may be compared to Spenser's Redcross Knight or Calidore), and those struggling to enlighten others (for example, Los or Jerusalem, and Spenser's Una or Merlin). The four chapters of *Jerusalem* make readers aware of the special importance of Jerusalem to Albion, or imaginative thought to those who are dead to mental challenges and creativity. At the beginning of the poem, Albion, a figure for England, rejects Jerusalem, his emanation (his wife, or other half) in bitterness and jealousy.

> Albion in jealous fears, biding his Emanation
> Upon the Thames and Medway, rivers of Beulah:
> dissembling
> His jealousy before the throne divine, darkening, cold! (*J* 4.33-35).

Blake reverses Spenser's ultimate image of concord and male-female unity, the marriage of Thames and Medway which occurs in Book Four of *The Faerie Queene* (*FQ* 4.11.8-53). Instead of highlighting the unity of marriage, Blake's depiction expresses the extent to which marriage becomes a hiding place for secrets and disunity. As expressed in Blake's poem "London," arranged marriages can be filled with unhappiness, oppression, and exploitation. A forced marriage can be a "Dissembling" veneer of unity disguising the many differences between a couple. Harold Bloom in *Blake's Apocalypse* notes that the denial of unity on Albion's part is the denial of the reality of vision. An image of concord is transformed into the appearance of honesty and friendship. "To live by demonstration is to be imprisoned by Experience, by the self-closure of solipsism" (Bloom 370). Albion's "jealous fears" preclude the giving away of oneself, which finds fullest expression in his hiding his Emanation in Thames and Medway (Bloom 370). His rejection of Jerusalem displays his inability to give of himself, and also his blindness to her spiritual goodness. At least with his Emanation by his side he saw plurality. He is now left "darkening, cold," his imaginative senses closing and hardening into the singularity of vision that results in a deathly form of sleep. Albion represents the predicament of England, of a people bound down, oppressed or confined to perceiving on a single level. Albion's rejection of divine imagination and his languishing, sleepy state is the fallen position in which many in England exist and from which Blake must awaken and enlighten. Blake's disillusionment at England's fallen mental capacities parallels the disenchantment expressed by Spenser in the final books of *The Faerie Queene*. Instead of awakening allegorical imaginative abilities in his readers and having them realise a "golden" world, Spenser is aware of the social and economic tensions of the 1590s which stifle and limit creative impulses. The dark tone which concludes Book Six and the *Mutabilitie Cantos* reflects Spenser's personal frustration that, given the harsh reality of the political context of the late 1590s (Lethbridge 304; Pettegree 209), his intention to depict the glorious golden world of Gloriana would forever be forestalled. Spenser's England, like Blake's Albion, is thwarted by external concerns that blind imaginative possibility.

Blake goes further in his depiction of imaginative collapse. Albion's imaginative blindness is shown to affect the corporate, macrocosmic self and not just the individual, microcosmic self (Grimes 35). Albion's thoughts are warped to the point of perversity, highlighting the extent to which imaginative constructions can be pushed to illogical and delusional extremes. The human imagination appears to him as a phallic "Worm seventy inches long / That creeps forth in a night and is dried in the morning sun" (*J* 29 [33].6-7). It devours its selfish passage through life, seeing only what it wants to see and wrapping itself in the pleasures of the earth. What Albion mistakes for productivity is sterile and masturbatory (Grimes 35). In fact, Blake's image of the worm is founded upon enduring anxieties concerning the imagination's relation to desire, as highlighted above by Pico Della Mirandola's essay, warning of the perverse and troublesome nature of the imagination. The mind that merely seeks for itself, that is content to confine itself to earthly delights and that can wind fantasies for itself alone, is a frightening example of the potent misuse of the imagination. The breeding of false fancies produces further delusions. This form of "sterile" and self-orientated thought is what Blake seeks to avoid in his readers. The mind must be alert to its own interpretive activities rather than shut away if it is to learn to generate vision. Emphasising Albion's mental limitation, Blake stresses to his readers the importance of individual autonomy of thought in an effort to free the macrocosmic whole from Albion's imaginative blindness.

*Jerusalem* depicts the struggle towards enlightened vision through the allegorical-imaginative workings of the mind. Following Spenser, Blake reflects on the potential flaws of an imagination damaged by illusion or delusion. Like Redcross Knight's preference for Duessa over Una, the fallen figure of Vala is taken up by Albion to replace Jerusalem. "Vala" is "the shadow of Jerusalem," a gloomy dark counterpart who follows Jerusalem closely and imitates her actions, perverting and distorting them (*J* 12.19). Like Duessa who deceives Redcross or St George, Spenser's representation of England, Vala "spreading her scarlet Veil over Albion" (*J* 21.50) manipulates him with words and illusions. She smothers him, confining and narrowing his senses. Her "scarlet Veil," similar to Duessa's scarlet gown, is alluring but also dissembling. She uses her veil to disguise the truth, to blind Albion into believing her falseness to be truth, thus further dividing and fracturing any sense of unified vision in the union of Jerusalem with her husband. As with Spenser, what is already fallen falls deeper in Blake's epic before it can be renewed and elevated. It is only the active workings of the mind and its allegorical-imaginative processes that enable reunification and the redemption of vision, as we see represented by Los.

As discussed previously, Los has often been identified with the figure of the poet.[199] Los may be compared with Spenser's poet-persona, Colin Clout. Both figures depict the poets' frustrated struggle to guide readers to use their imagination in order to interpret the text allegorically. Los strenuously labours in Blake's books of *Urizen*, *Los* and *Ahania*, his hammer and anvil representing the tools by which he creates his text and attempts to inspire Urizen and the reader. Colin's creative talent is figured in his bagpipe, by which he calls the "Graces" or muses magically to dance for him (*FQ* 6.10.15-21). When Calidore stumbles upon the dancing Graces, causing them to vanish, Colin "broke his bag-pipe" in frustration (*FQ* 6.10.18). Spenser illustrates through Colin's encounter with Calidore the limitations of the imagination when it cannot be guided by allegory towards illumination. Colin's broken bagpipe represents Spenser's fear at the potential abuse of "imagination."

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[199] Much has been written on Los. For a selection, see: Cantor 42-54; Paley, *Energy* 57-60; Damon 246-54; Bentley, *Stranger* 150-57; Bloom, *Blake's Apocalypse* 370-74; Gleckner 110-12; Erdman, *Prophet* 232-37; Grimes 39-41.

Los also fears the reader's imaginative failings, as shown by his continued struggle to encourage Urizen towards vision. While Urizen "lay in a dreamless night," "Cold, featureless," "Los rouz'd his fires, affrighted / At the formless unmeasurable death" (*BU* 7.15, 17-19). Los works tirelessly to encourage energetic imaginative activity. As well as representing Blake, Los also characterises the reader's conscious struggle to form, understand and bring equilibrium to chaotic scenes. His efforts to hammer and create, to make sense of the dark matter surrounding him, parallels the reader's labours to comprehend the dense words and images of Blake's illuminated texts. As Ronald Grimes says, Los and his sons seem to present the total of imaginative possibilities in the poem (41). Los is an almost human figure. As a symbol for imagination, he is highly aware of his capacity for creation, delusion and weakness. He often despairs, feeling rage and pain. Like Colin, he is tempted to break the very tools that encourage imaginative creativity. "Los rag'd and stamp'd the earth …then he threw down his hammer in rage …then he sat down and wept, terrified!" (*J* 6.8-10). Paul Cantor describes Los's inner battle:

> The fact that all reality takes shape in images ensures that the imagination retains its central role even in the fallen world. But it also subjects the fallen imagination to great pressures. The psychic forces now at odds make contradictory demands upon the imagination. Reason seeks to purge the imagination of all emotions; passion urges the imagination to run wild. (44)

Los is a divided figure who struggles not only with the complex matter of the world surrounding him, but also with himself, his Spectre. As writer, reader and human being, he is aware of the limitations both of himself and of the text, as he says to his Spectre:

> I know that Albion hath divided me, and that thou O my Spectre,

Hast just cause to be irritated: but look steadfastly upon me:
Comfort thyself in my strength the time will arrive
When all Albions injuries shall cease, and when we shall
Embrace him tenfold bright, rising from his tomb in immortality (*J* 7.51-56)

The almost schizophrenic debating of Los with his Spectre suggests the complexity of the mind and an awareness that the imagination of the poet and the reader can be limited and troubled by daily cares. Bloom notes that the greatness of Los's oration to his threatening Spectre represents the greatness of Blake's own insight into everything within himself that threatened the emergence of his own poetry (374). Yet I believe Los's oration means more than this. The text may appear closed up and locked but the key to open it resides within the reader's mind. Los's speech is one of guidance and comfort to those who may be struggling with the text to look within themselves for the imaginative and allegorical strength to recognise that the most profound meanings are necessarily divided, troubled and sometimes obscure. These troubles need to be weathered in order to learn and thereby attain vision. Los's words contain the promise of re-creation. A mind that has mastered the daily impediments to imaginative functions and continues to develop insight no longer sees his world as a confining "tomb" but as a vastly expanding landscape "tenfold bright."

### Golgonooza: city of imagination

Frye argues that the central image of the imagination in Blake's work is the city (*Fearful* 43). Golgonooza is a version of the new Jerusalem. An example of an allegory inspired by the imagination, Golgonooza is a city of art built by Los among the material darkness of Ulro (Foster Damon 162; Ostriker 968) (*M* 24.50). It is assembled with "terrible eternal labour" (*J* 12.24). It is created from continual effort, akin to a lifetime of reading and learning. Love, kindness, tears, honesty, pity, compassion and devotion – the characteristics for living a godly life – have gone into building Golgonooza.[200] It is "fourfold" and perfect in its creation (*J* 12.45-6, 52), but surrounded by a painful, dark landscape of "death eternal" (*J* 13.29), "From the blue Mundane Shell, reaching to the Vegetative Earth" (*J* 13.32). The city can be seen as an allegory of the mind, cased within the "Mundane Shell" of the head and further extended to the shell of the atmosphere, the very shell of the Earth itself. The root of the word "Golgonooza" is "golgos," meaning a skull (Raine, *Golgonooza* 103).[201] Within what is normative (Mundane) and "Vegetative" (or bodily) lies something unique, creative and divine: the human brain in all its workings. The city of Golgonooza can be anywhere that "fourfold" imaginative-allegorical perception exists, thus transforming the mundane into the imaginary and eternal. "And every part of the City is fourfold; & every inhabitant, fourfold" (*J* 13.20).[202] It is an allegorical image for those living in London and regions throughout Albion's land to enable them to unlock the doors of their perception and see aspects of Golgonooza in themselves and in their own cities and landscapes. The "Eyes are the South, and the Nostrils are the East. / And the Tongue is the West, and the Ear is the North" (*J* 12.59-60). Golgonooza's gates are those of the senses, porous barriers peripheral to the city, which shield and reflect the seat of learning, the imagination. The city is a representation of the divinity in humanity, of the extent to which the human mind creates its own heaven and hell, and thus visions – "mini Jerusalems" – can be carried around within the brain to be taught and encouraged within the reader. Blake's golden age is truly within the human mind, to be shared and spread accordingly. His poetry endeavours "to Restore…the Golden Age" through the didactic workings of what we may now call the "allegorical-imagination."

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[200] "The City of Golgonooza is described, parallel to the description of the Temple of Ezekiel 40-43 and of new Jerusalem in Revelation 21" (Ostriker 1000).

[201] See John 19.17 Blake makes deliberate connections between Golgonooza and Golgotha, the place where the Romans crucified Jesus. "And he bearing his cross went forth into a place called the place of the skull, which is called in the Hebrew Golgotha." These connections highlight the divinity of Jesus even at his crucifixion, characteristics that should be borne in the human imagination, enabling a transcendence of the temporal and material. See also *J* 12.28 and *J* 38.54.

[202] Blake may have taken his notion of the "four-fold" from the Book of Revelation. "Four-fold" can literally be taken to mean "multitude." See Rev. 6.11-14 and Rev. 19 for instances of "four-fold" multiple voices and meanings. The Book or Revelation is allegorical. Its multiplicity encourages alternative readings and interpretations and thus it can be seen to have inspired Blake's work. Encouraged by biblical styles, Blake endows his words with rich complexity. For detailed descriptions of all stages of Blake's four-fold vision, see Foster Damon, 42-44, 114-15, 150-51, 416-17. See also Ostriker 1001.

Thus, even before Albion and Jerusalem are restored to one another, Blake presents the careful reader with the tools to enable him or her to attune their mental capacities and overcome the Fall independently. In his address to the Christians at *Jerusalem*, Plate 77, he writes, "I know of no other Christianity and no other Gospel than the liberty both of body and mind to exercise the Divine Arts of Imagination" (*J* 77.9-11). "What are all the gifts of the Gospel, are they not all Mental Gifts?" (*J* 77.22-23). Blake recognises the allegorical and imaginative capacity of the Bible, upon which he bases so much of his work. *Jerusalem*'s many apocalyptic elements are transposed from the books of Ezekiel and Revelation.[203] Like Spenser, he is aware of the didactic nature of a religious text that teaches by engaging the reader, necessitating the function of readerly response and interpretation (Auerbach, *Mimesis* 1-49).[204] Blake relied heavily upon the biblical stylistic habit of parataxis, the linking of elements with co-ordinate conjunctions rather than subordinate conjunctions, leaving readers to discover logical connections for themselves (Grimes 57). Blake makes it known that *Jerusalem* is a continuation of the didactic, allegorical and imaginative functions of the Bible.

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[203] See Ostriker in footnotes 200 and 202 above.

[204] Auerbach has written an insightful comparison of the narrative methods of the Bible and Homer's epic *The Odyssey*, showing that while all is explained and described in detail in Homer's epic, leaving no suspense and nothing to the imagination, the Bible is fragmented and sparse in its details, relying upon the reader to work to fill many gaps in the description.

Ronald Grimes perceptively suggests that biblical vision can be seen to be the breaking down of strict chronological and causal sequences (57). This may be so, but vision is also the recognition of meaning that lies between chronological events, meaning that exists within gaps and spaces. Thus, by the end of the poem, the spiritual, visionary form of Jerusalem is named and exists within all Emanations (*J* 99.5). The capacity for divine imagination lives within all who do not shun, hide or distort it as Albion does, but who freely embrace it as a vital component of humanity, a tool for allegorical understanding and fourfold vision. The allegorical function of Golgonooza in *Jerusalem* stresses the need for an awareness of imaginative perception. Furthermore, the depiction of Golgonooza highlights the extent to which readers must use their minds in new ways to see afresh. The gates of the senses that border Golgonooza (as mentioned earlier), if interpreted literally, would make a horrific image: the "Eyes" are "South" and the "Nostrils" are "East," the "Tongue" is "West" and the "Ear" "North" (*J* 12.59-60). Instead of representing a human face, Blake conveys a Picasso-like rendition of the human visage (De Luca 100). This is intentional. Through chronologically demanding depictions, Blake is enticing the reader to read anew, to make fresh mental connections and to form new images. Golgonooza is a metaphor for vision, the viewing of a world "in a grain of sand."[205] The visionary city is just one aspect within a complex poem that teaches the reader the precious and precarious nature of allegorical-imaginative reading.

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[205] Northrop Frye, describing the functions of the Bible in *The Great Code*, is interested "in the expanding of vision through language," especially when turning metaphorical structures inside-out. He notes the similarities between biblical structures and those of Blake's work. "Instead of a metaphor of unity and integration we should have a metaphor of particularity, the kind of vision Blake expressed in the phrase 'minute particulars' and in such lines as 'To see the world in a grain of sand'" (167).

## Blake's sublime imagination

Blake pushes the implications of the imagination beyond any that had so far been propounded by poets of his age. He did this by taking the concept of the allegorical imagination as set forth by Spenser, and developing it to highlight the range and power of mental capacities. Blake sought to show that thought was as real as material objects. He sought to illustrate that the imagination acts as a bridge to knowledge, illuminating what cannot be seen or heard, transcending the limits of the senses. I have said that Blake links this imaginative concept to divinity. Perhaps what makes the Blakean imagination "divine" is its sublimity.[206] Vincent De Luca's illuminating study, *Words of Eternity: Blake and the Poetics of the Sublime*, suggests that Blake's use of the sublime is the means by which he embellishes his use of the allegorical-imaginative in his verse.

De Luca notes that Blake certainly read Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*, and was probably aware of contributions to the developing theory by Joseph Addison, Hugh Blair and Robert Loweth (15). The theory of the sublime concerns the intensity of human feeling and reception in reaction to the surrounding material landscape. Blake refers to the sublime several times, as in *Jerusalem*, when Los is creating Golgonooza:

> Terrified at the sublime Wonder, Los stood before his Furnaces.
> And they stood around, terrified with admiration at Erins Spaces
> For the Spaces reachd from the starry heighth, to the starry depth (*J* 12.21-23)

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[206] Although much has been written about the Romantic or eighteenth-century concept of the sublime made popular by Addison and Burke, comparatively little material has been produced discussing Blake's immediate relation to the concept of the sublime. The sublime is an effect (a way of making readers feel or think). Paley notes that the "source of the sublime, to Blake, is the imagination" (*Energy* 229). As well as De Luca's study, see Otto, *Blake's Critique of Transcendence: Love, Jealousy and the Sublime in the Four Zoas*.

This passage encapsulates the eighteenth-century sense of the sublime, founded upon mixed and multiple feelings. It was held that objects of great and terrifying beauty should produce reactions of equal measure. Sublime feelings included complexly intermingling sensations of wonder, awe, surprise and fear. De Luca states that the favoured technical term in the eighteenth century for this state of disequilibria is "astonishment" (16). Blake uses the term *astonishment* more frequently than any other major poet in the period from 1660 to 1830. There are fifty-one uses of the terms *astonish* (*ed*) (*es*) (*ing*) (*ment*) in Blake's poetry, compared with six instances in Milton, seventeen in Wordsworth and eleven in Shelley's work (De Luca 18). The *OED* lists the term as meaning "stunned; made insensible, benumbed and paralysed" – even, in one sub-sense, to the point of being turned to stone or filled solid (hence, a*ston*(*e*)ishment) (De Luca 18). Blake uses the term to show the process whereby one becomes what one beholds. In *The Book of Urizen* when encountering Urizen's stony sleep, Los is "smitten with astonishment" (*BU* 8.1) (De Luca 19). *To smite* is to cut or to hit, while "smitten" is to be obsessed, infatuated or besotted by something or someone. These words convey the full force and sudden violence of bewildering amazement that strikes Los on beholding Urizen. Blake is representing the process and effects of the sublime, the powerful influence it has upon the human mind to feel and to become what is represented externally.

The notion of being "smitten" by someone and being forcefully cut or hit emphasises the paradoxical feelings inspired by the sublime. The concept has the complicated effect of being able to communicate fear and joy, power and helplessness, surprise and wonder. Given that the effect is to raise the mind to a state of heightened consciousness, the sublime has close similarities to the effects aimed at by allegory. De Luca notes the parallels between these two forms by recognising that the sublime, like allegory, forms a barrier to knowledge, which must be encountered and overcome by the reader.

> The barrier seems to flicker equivocally before the eyes, now opaque, now translucent, now forbidding, now yielding. The sublime text must be capable of provoking despair and desire simultaneously, stunned retreat and joyous elation. Such a text must appear hard to read; it cannot disseminate its meanings easily or transparently. But at the same time that it appears hard to read, it must also present itself as almost easy to read … The crucial sublime event takes place in the actual difficulties of the reading experience. (De Luca 31)

De Luca's formulation reveals the demands of allegory and the sublime to be closely related – allegory, that is, as Blake understood it, not as the thin clichéd mode of personification condemned by most eighteenth-century critics. Blake's poetry aims at attaining the sublime *through* allegory, and the sublime extends the powers of the imagination. Los's terror at his furnaces is reflected back upon him by the furnaces and spaces themselves which "reached from the starry heighth, to the starry depth" (*J* 12.23). Not only is he aware of the vast material forces that surround him, he is amazed and almost frightened at the power of his own capacity to create. The spaces are terrifying blanks, seeming barriers to knowledge, disjunctions that hinder the path to understanding. Yet, paradoxically, they call Los – and the reader – to create, to form what is seemingly invisible and formless into determinate shapes and meanings.

Describing the poem *Milton*, Blake wrote to Thomas Butts on 6 July 1803 that the poem is "a Sublime Allegory," continuing: "Allegory address'd to the Intellectual powers while it is altogether hidden from the Corporeal Understanding is My Definition of the Most Sublime Poetry" (Bentley, *Stranger* 243). Blake thus explicitly associates allegory and the sublime. He even goes as far as to say that allegory, when challenging “Intellectual powers” (or mental faculties), is the foundation for sublime vision, with allegory guiding the imagination. “Intellectual powers” must be attuned to guard themselves from “Corporeal Understanding.”

Blake thus does not use even the sublime in a conventional way. De Luca explores the disjunction between Burke and Blake’s concepts of the sublime by looking at the roots of fascination with the mode in the mid-eighteenth century.[207] Anxiety is at the core of this fascination:

> the anxiety of nothingness, or absence. In its more energetic renditions the sublime is a kind of homeopathic therapy, a cure of uneasiness by means of the stranger, more concentrated – but momentary – anxiety involved in astonishment and terror. (Weiskel, *Romantic Sublime* 18)

This unease is never really dispelled, which is why sublime poems of the period have to repeat their heightened moments again and again (De Luca 49). These repeated moments eventually give way to elements of despair as the ego strives to a greatness that does not actually exist (De Luca 49). The Burkean sublime is therefore strongly linked to the movements of the ego or “Selfhood,” as Blake terms it. “Selfhood” is an over-rated sense of self, a selfishness that makes the human self-orientated and narrowly focused, rather than looking to others and the surrounding world and opening doors to perception (Foster Damon 363). Alertness to the mind’s capacity for misjudgement and misinterpretation is always present in the work of Spenser and Blake, though their capacity is seen as the way, ultimately, to correct reading and imaginative creativity. Blake represents the destructive, despairing egotistical forces of the sublime in the allegorical figure of Urizen, fixed and frozen, his mental abilities stunned and halted in the presence of the sublime. His “shrunken eyes clouded over”

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[207] For more information on the concept of the sublime in the eighteenth century, see: Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime*; Shaw, *The Sublime*; De Bolla, *The Discourse of the Sublime*; and Hipple, *The Beautiful, the Sublime, and the Picturesque in Eighteenth-Century British Aesthetic Theory*.

(*BU* 25.31), “in darkness clos’d,” Urizen “wander’d on high” … “In weeping & pain & woe!” (*BU* 24.22, 25.5-6). Unable to decipher its densely profound meanings, his brain becomes clouded, he himself bound down and howling in torment, a torment he inflicts upon his people:

> The remaining sons of Urizen
> Beheld their brethren sink together
> Beneath the Net of Urizen;
> Perswasion was in vain;
> For the ears of the inhabitants
> Were wither’d, & deafen’d, & cold.
> And their eyes could not discern,
> Their brethren of other cities. (*BU* 28.11-18)

While Los’s encounter with the sublime challenges him to see and create the world in new ways, as suggested in the passages of *Jerusalem* above,[208] Urizen is shown to collapse in upon himself, to reduce everything to himself when confronted with aspects of the sublime. Organising material chaos around him, Urizen attempts to destroy or confine it, so fearful is he of its vastness and potential to overwhelm. He feels sublime moments of terror and exhilaration, and yet he seeks to make himself sublime master over matter, to enforce it to his command rather than to step away and appreciate its power.

> Sund’ring, dark’ning, thund’ring!

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[208] Other instances of Los’s creativity and inclusiveness when faced with the sublime are seen in the *Book of Urizen*, when he attempts to redeem Urizen’s world, with very mixed results. “In terrors Los shrunk from his task: / His great hammer fell from his hand: / His fires beheld, and sickening, / Hid their strong limbs in smoke. / For the noises ruinous loud; / With hurtlings & clashings & groans / The Immortal endur’d his chains, / Tho’ bound in a deadly sleep” (*BU* 5.1-8). Here, Los shows he reacts in fear of Urizen’s attack upon the freedoms of mental capacity and his attempts to make the sublime fearfully terrifying rather than terrifyingly beautiful or illuminating. Los seeks to liberate individual thought by binding the narrow and negative restrictions to that thought in chaining Urizen (or Reason).

Rent away with a terrible crash
Eternity roll'd wide apart
Wide asunder rolling
Mountainous all around
Departing; departing; departing:
Leaving ruinous fragments of life
Hanging frowning cliffs & all between
An ocean of voidness unfathomable (*BU* 5.3-11)

The energy of this verse highlights the potential in Urizen for greatness. However, he uses his power to destroy rather than to create, to divide rather than to unify. His actions speak of his heightened sense of self, of his grandiose displays of control. Yet this power is born of fear. He must destroy and entrap because he feels threatened by the beauty and potential of the material that surrounds him. He must re-order so as to assert his control and dominance. He is reacting to the sublime by attempting to promote himself as "the" sublime – the only one by whom terror or awe may be inspired. He thus imprisons the senses, demanding that imaginative capacities be directed towards him rather than towards liberating and transcendental thoughts. In destroying this world, he beats his imagination into submission, together with the capacities of those who must now serve him. In him, Blake gives an account of the dangerous tyranny of a Selfhood in the process of capturing the sublime for itself, and of the extent to which it warps all imaginative capabilities. Urizen is an allegory that warns against the damaging misuse of the imagination and the extent to which, in limiting their own imaginations, readers will not progress beyond Urizen's deadly confining nets and snares.

## The Vortex: using the sublime to guide readers to new perspectives

Combining the forces of the allegorical imagination with elements of the sublime, Blake creates a new plane of textual challenges. Vincent De Luca argues that in erecting barriers, curbs and verbal bedazzlement, Blake encourages readers to engage in a complex process whereby they may recognise "eternal salvation" (101), or sublime divinity. Yet, in doing so, he makes himself vulnerable to the reader's judgement. He does not hide in self-protective conventionality. He is prepared to risk exposing the most experimental and unsettling reaches of his poetic conception to possible embarrassment and scorn (De Luca 101). The difficulty of his verse can be seen in his conscious use of the vortex in the poem *Milton*, an epic that, as Morton D. Paley notes, is focused upon regeneration through the use of the imagination (*Energy* 244).

> The nature of infinity is this! That every thing has its
> Own Vortex; and when once a traveller thro' Eternity
> Has passed that Vortex, he perceives it roll backward behind
> His path, into a globe itself infolding; like a sun:
> Or like a moon, or like a universe of starry majesty,
> While he keeps onwards in his wondrous journey on the earth …
> Thus is the earth one infinite plane, and not as apparent
> To the weak traveller confin'd beneath the moony shade.
> Thus is the heaven a vortex passd already, and the earth
> A vortex not yet pass'd by the traveller thro' Eternity. (*M* 15.21-26, 32-35)

The notion that every thing has its own vortex suggests that every thing has its own energy field, a way of perceiving and being perceived, both vertically and horizontally in space and time.[209] At different points across the vortex the same object will be seen differently from an altered angle. Human beings are perceived and perceive variously, interacting and crossing vortices, radiating and reflecting spheres of energy, imagination and perception which cross and intersect. Each human being journeys through life as if crossing through a vortex, noting the changes along the way. A text, too, is a vortex (or vortex[t]), just as a grain of sand is a complex earthly creation. The text is a minefield of words, gaps and images that strike the reader's senses, being both barriers and aids to knowledge as readers tread the pages of the manuscript. The vortex is a sublime image in its tumble of words, directions and artefacts, a construct that frightens and exhilarates by its magnitude and pace. It acts as a whirlpool of information, as De Luca explains:

> We are plunged into a spatial tangle that involves spirals, globes, linear paths, infinite planes, limited acres, directions backward, forward, north, south, east, west. There are too many terms and too few logical connectives between them. We are thus drawn in, teased, disorientated by a system that appears always on the verge of perspicuity without ever quite coming into rational focus. … We have passed the verbal vortex and have experienced, with Milton, what it is like to negotiate the difficult passage between Eternity and the Corporeal world. (83)

The reader, like the character Milton, is sucked in and drawn through the vortex of the text, guided by the few connections there are. Some readers may be confused and overwhelmed by its density of information and then suddenly, by its deathly lack of words or connectives. Reaching the eye of the storm, with only seemingly empty spaces between words to guide them, many readers may take the wrong path. The vortex requires an enquiring mind and a strong imagination in order for its spirals to make sense. The associations between the round domes of the eye and the globe are important for connecting reading, vision and imagination – the "Sublime Allegory" – and thereby coming to a perspective from above the vortex looking down, while simultaneously striding through or across it. Multiple perspectives are paramount in Blake, perspectives that can only be generated by careful reading, imagination and attentiveness directed to the didactic or allegorical implications of the text.

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[209] For more on Blake's notion of the "vortex," see Foster Damon, *Blake Dictionary* 440 – "A man's private universe is such a Vortex." Ostriker notes: "In B[lake]'s adaptation, a vortex is any idea or philosophy which makes a whole world to itself, and each is a form of human experience" (972). See also Bloom, *Blake's Apocalypse* 324.

The image of the vortex is an instance of Blake's visionary insight. His deliberately challenging images prompt the reader towards interior realms of vision. Instead of merely snatching glimpses of Hirusalem, as in *The Faerie Queene*, Blake's whirling verse of images and words encourages the reader to enter into the continued vision as it unfolds before them. The vortex in its multi-dimensional construction illustrates the multiplicity of perspectives available to the reader. In striving to read through it, while also above it, readers gain an insight, a complex impression of the whole. Passive readers of the words never unlock the totality of the vision. They will be caught up in the whirlpool of words and swirled about, disorientated, and unable to comprehend the substance of the text. Blake's vortex is a visionary microcosm of the world. It reflects the endless stream of information and matter and the extent to which this world is viewed from different planes. Yet in its very construction it also provides a key to visionary illumination. Bravely mastering the storm of bodies, vegetation and words, striding through the vortex with fourfold vision, the reader gains an appreciation of the complex and divine workings on earth. Blake is visionary in inspiring a constant awareness of illumination in his readers. As stated above, the visionary does not necessarily predict events of the future, but displays the situation as it is in the present, while showing how readers can improve themselves.[210] In this sense Blake is truly prophetic. His poems reflect the hopes and despairs of the present, while providing the reader with the means to transcend doubt and uncertainty, using allegorical and imaginative mental capacities to perceive the creative and divine beauty of human beings.

### Spenser and Blake: the limits of the allegorical imagination?

Forming the notion of "Sublime Allegory," Blake challenges the allegorical imagination to seek new heights, guiding the reader from Ulro or Generation towards Beluah and Eden. Perhaps inspired by Spenser's use of the allegorical imagination in *The Faerie Queene*, Blake has extended its didactic and creative principles in his own poetry. Both Spenser and Blake's verse can be seen to focus upon the psychological aspects of the allegorical imagination. As suggested above by Isabel MacCaffrey, Spenser's poem mirrors the very structure and properties of the mind. His allegory represents the function of the imagination (*Spenser's Allegory* 6-7). Blake's work also follows this principle. The struggles between Los and Urizen in the *The Book of Urizen*, or between Los and Albion in *Jerusalem*, or the stages of Milton's journey towards imagination in *Milton* – all these represent the functioning of aspects of the mind. Through these characters, Blake gives a detailed depiction of despair and delight, of delusions and insights, of the very struggle to know, to determine and to judge right from wrong. The vortex itself is an image of the mind and its crowded and dense store of information, while the gaps reveal where learning or insight is required, where misunderstandings or varied interpretations may occur. Therefore, the psychological principle for both poets is the same as their method of conveying ideas through the process of the active workings of the mind – both didactically (allegorically) through learning, and imaginatively in the engagement and creativity of the mind.

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[210] See Taithe and Thornton 1-14; Fletcher, *Prophetic Moment* 3-6.

Where the poets diverge in their attitudes is in the potential limits of the imagination. As I have demonstrated in chapter three, the allegorical format of Spenser's *Mutability Cantos* breaks down, becoming almost literal, that is, barely allegorical, dwindling into passivity and eventually into silence as the verse itself ceases. MacCaffrey argues that Spenser uses the *Mutability Cantos* to confess the limits of his art and the human limits of imagining.

> Having accomplished his highest flight, he descends again to the realm of Time, where the imagination can make sorrowful truth beautiful, but cannot negate it. Imagination can transfigure wretched fate – yet in *Mutabilitie* Spenser acknowledges all golden words are substitutes, alluding to a loss that no merely human power can repair. (*Spenser's Allegory* 431)

Spenser presents a vision caught between the harsh realities of human existence and the ability of the mind to transcend suffering and pain. As change and decay take place in nature, so must the human mind be ready for alteration and death. This is summed up in the final prayer before the words of canto eight cease: "O that great Sabboath God / graunt me that Sabboaths sight" (*FQ* 7.8.2). MacCaffrey says this prayer is as close as Spenser comes to a Miltonic seeking of visionary insight (*Spenser's Allegory* 432), yet it further suggests the vast difference between Spenser and Blake. Here Spenser is calling upon God (or the monarch, as Elizabeth's name meant etymologically, the Sabbath, or "Peace of the Lord" [*FQ* 712n]), for the provision of insight, strength and vision. In doing so, he acknowledges the frailty of his own vision, its limitation and, ultimately, its separation from God's insight.

Spenser regards human beings as having their source in the divine but as having to work to achieve divinity, a concept that is anathema to Blake. For Blake, divinity is humanity; there is no separation. To call upon God for insight is not to recognise the visionary capacity within oneself. Where Spenser finally collapses into silence, Blake sees the potential for a deeper connection with the development of imaginative insight. With struggle comes further illumination. Perhaps Spenser's final words in *The Faerie Queene* act as a spur to Blake to insist that there are no limits to the imagination other than the ones we construct for ourselves.

## Chapter Five: Allegory and the Visual

> The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled.
> (Berger 7)

This chapter explores the imaginative visuality of Spenser and Blake's work and investigates a selection of Blake's illuminations in order to reflect upon the ways in which visual allegory generates cumulative didactic meaning in the text. Although Spenser's *Faerie Queene* contains no authorial illustrations, his allegorical language encourages the visual imagination. Jane Grogan writes in *Exemplary Spenser*:

> The field of the visual is crucial to the poetic work of *The Faerie Queene*. Visual metaphors govern the poem's self-presentation, language, didactic intention, conception of reading, allegorical mode and even its relation to Queen Elizabeth, its dedicatee. (69)

The visual is another element of the fourfold nature of language which this thesis has been developing, and which as discussed previously, involves the word, the reader, the imagination and the visual to recognise the extent to which language is allegorical. John Pierce notes that the "interpenetration of the written and the spoken, the graphic and the oral is fundamental to Blake's verbal production" (27), and this can be seen also in Spenser's work. The visual embellishes allegorical aspects of both poets' verse by offering yet more subtle and substantial ways of reading the text, as I will show.

There are various ways of emphasising the relation between language and the visual. John Berger notes: "seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognises before it can speak" (7). Therefore, he argues, "it is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world; we explain that world with words, but words can never undo the fact that we are surrounded by it" (Berger 7). We are encircled by images. They play a crucial part in the way we think and communicate. As observed in chapter one, George Puttenham states in *The Arte of English Poesie* that allegory is an "extended metaphor" – the extension of meaning by way of thoughts or images. Metaphor fuses both word and image (or imagination) to create a (mental) visual impression. That is, allegory thought of as "extended metaphor" has significant visual implications. Robert Essick further notes, "Vision is not distinguishable from allegory, for the latter must also depend on representation" (*Language of Adam* 98). Spenser calls Elizabeth I "heauenly bright / Mirrour of grace and Maiestie diuine" (*FQ* Proem 1.4), his metaphorical embellishments likening her to a star, a sun, a mirror reflecting pure heavenly light, indicating that she is blessed, appointed and ordained by God. *The Faerie Queene* as a whole acts as a mirror. Grogan asserts that the poem is "offered to the reader – whether Elizabeth or anyone else – as a corrective visual image to be 'read' and 'tackled'" (88). The glimpsed depictions of the Faerie Queene within *The Faerie Queene* convey a "Mirrour of grace and Maiestie diuine." Allegory, like all forms of language, calls for representation, and each representation, literal or figurative, demands interpretation and understanding. "Every image embodies a way of seeing" (Berger 10), just as allegorical metaphors demand investigation and interpretation. The relationship between allegory and vision, or the visual, is more entwined than perhaps first presumed.

This association is developed in W.J.T. Mitchell's discussion of Blake's relation to art and writing: "writing makes language (in the literal sense) visible" ("Visible Language" 48). The same may be said of Spenser in his use of etymology, linguistic word play, and self-conscious application of language.[211] In drawing attention to his own use of language, Spenser causes it to reflect both upon its subject and upon itself, thus transforming his text into a self-conscious or self-reflexive mirror. Mitchell pushes this connection further by highlighting the metaphorical/allegorical aspects inherent in language: "[w]riting is thus the medium in which the interaction of image and text, pictorial and verbal expression – *ut pictura poesis* … seems to be a literal possibility" ("Visible Language" 47-48). I will return to Mitchell's use of the phrase "*ut pictura poesis*" later, but for the moment it is important to pause and realise that Spenser and Blake are similar in their use of linguistic media to create visual or visible sensations, or what I call "allegorical visualisation."

## Spenser: the "Poet of the Painters"

Spenser has traditionally been regarded as a poet who presents his scenes in a painterly way (Gottfried 204). In Busirane's castle, tapestries are described and presented as seen through Britomart's eyes, providing a tactile impression of the artwork as if we are scanning the coloured embroidery (*FQ* 3.11.28-45). Spenser himself reflects upon the painterly quality of his art in the Proem to Book Three, when he states that no representation could do justice to his Queen's image.

> Ne Poets witt, that passeth Painter farre
> In picturing the parts of beauty daynt,
> So hard a workemanship aduentre darre,
> For fear through want of words her excellence to marre (*FQ* Proem 3.2)

Spenser acknowledges his belief that the poet exceeds the painter in "picturing the parts of beauty daynt" (*daynt* meaning "excellent" or "exquisite," *FQ* 287n). He displays an attitude common to his era which regarded poetry as more prestigious than painting (Bender 10). Although an awareness of the magnificent workmanship of the Italian Renaissance was beginning to permeate England and Ireland by the late sixteenth century, very few replicas of this art would have been known and still fewer seen by any but the truly elite.[212] Rudolf Gottfried further emphasises the limited influence of Italian and high Renaissance artists upon poets such as Spenser:

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[211] See Quilligan, *The Language of Allegory* 33-41 for examples of Spenser's word play; "Etymology" in the *Spenser Encyclopaedia* 255-56. See Deneef, *The Motives of Metaphor* 91-117ff, on Spenser's use of language.

> Spenser cannot, in his time and country, have known much of what we call the Fine Arts … The Elizabethans placed a typically Anglo-Saxon emphasis on portraits, the best of which were then miniatures; and the great influx of foreign paintings of other types did not begin before the seventeenth century. (208)

Thus, the reputation of a painter or artist was probably not held in high esteem in Elizabeth's kingdom during the sixteenth century and therefore did not receive great attention or investment. Sixteenth-century artists were reliant upon religious or small-scale domestic commissions, patrons paying for materials used (such as gold leaf and colour concoctions), rather than the skill or quality of the artist.[213] As discussed in previous chapters, the status of the poet in the sixteenth century was also a matter of debate. But in the knowledge that poet figures such as Orpheus, Virgil and Homer had been highly esteemed by the ancients, Spenser, in mimicking their epic feats, feels justified in setting his position above that of the painter. In fact, Spenser combines both practices to show that the poet can be a painter in metaphors, and therefore is more talented as his verse is an art that "passeth Painter farre / In picturing the parts of beauty."

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[212] Spenser makes a comment in a letter of April 1580 that the woodcuts in the *Shepheards Calender* surpassed the art of Michelangelo (Gottfried 209). Even if this comment is intended humorously, it reveals both Spenser's awareness of the Renaissance painter and his ignorance of the true brilliance of Michelangelo's work.

[213] Tessa Watt in *Cheap Print and Popular Piety* notes that artists were commissioned to cater for the demand for religious or quasi-religious figures (135), but that the predominant emphasis during this period was upon the "decorative arts" involving craftsmen of all kinds, not just painters (137). During this era the painter was often regarded as just another tradesman, and was paid and treated as such.

In combining both forms, Spenser actively demonstrates the multi-talented nature of the Renaissance man or Elizabethan courtier who, in Puttenham's words, may "dissemble" well, displaying an aptitude for many activities, not least rhetoric, verse, and polite etiquette, and making them seem effortless when they are not (Javitch 59-68; Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* 162-63). Spenser strives to justify the imagistic nature of poetry to his Queen. He is aware of the powerful way in which allegory's dynamic metaphorical process generates images in the reader's mind. Perhaps in so doing he was stressing the brilliance of good poetry which combines metaphorical elements of word and image. This argument may have been a conscious justification for the virtues of Elizabethan poetry and the status of the poet in the sixteenth century (Helgerson, *Self-Crowned Laureates* 3-5, 22, 57-59). By promoting his poem as a self-conscious mirror, Spenser was taking up the trend for miniatures in art, popular at Elizabeth's court,[214] and presenting the Queen with a detailed poetical miniature of herself in verse.

> Thus far forth pardon, sith that choicest witt
> Cannot your glorious pourtraict figure playne,
> That I in colord showes may shadow itt,
> . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
> But if in liuing colours, and right hew,
> Thy selfe thou couet to see pictured,
> Who can it doe more liuely, or more trew,
> Then that sweete verse, with *Nectar* sprinckeled (*FQ* Proem 3.3-4)

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[214] See Strong, *The Cult of Elizabeth* 48-9, on the Elizabethan trend for miniatures.

Spenser conveys the process of allegorical visualisation through this shadowed or mirrored depiction of his Queen. He "mirrors" Elizabeth I through constantly deferred depictions, "colord showes" and likenesses to many different female characters from pious Una to proud Lucifera, to the heroic "mayd Martiall" Britomart (*FQ* 3.3.53), in whom traces of Elizabeth's determination and vigour as a woman in a male-dominated world can be seen (Montrose, "Shaping Fantasies" 77-80). As well as an encapsulated miniature of the Queen, shrouded and enclosed by the pages of the text, Spenser's poem functions as a prism. Each allegorical portrayal reflects scattered shafts of light on the mythical figure of the Queen, but from different angles. Readers are given glimpses of the Queen of Faerie which accumulate and diversify as the poem progresses, paralleling the cumulative function of Spenser's allegory as a whole. A complete representation of Elizabeth is never given, but various characters, both good and evil, reflect her multi-faceted regal appearance. Just as Elizabeth addressed her public in different female modes, as mother, wife, servant, and in guises from goddess to vestal virgin in order to appeal to her subjects,[215] so Spenser reflects upon her ever shifting persona through the many figures displayed in *The Faerie Queene*. His "miniature" of the Queen is therefore more accurate than first assumed, and the prism-like effect of multiple and ever-shifting scenes and presentations reflects not only his use of visual elements in the poem, but the relation of these visual elements to the allegorical complexity of the text's meaning.[216]

Spenser's deferred presentation of the Queen reflects the subtlety of his allegorical visualisation. We do not see a definitive picture of the Queen but rather catch glimpses of her which build upon the complexity of her allegorical presentation. Therefore, rather than call Spenser's approach "pictorial," I prefer the term "visual" as Spenser here encourages a more delicate and complicated realisation of the Queen than straightforward pictures may suggest. Instead of seeing the Queen directly, we are encouraged to visualise her for ourselves using impressions snatched and received as we read, rather than perceiving her image as fixed upon a canvas. This way of seeing allegory reflects upon its dynamic process of informing. Instead of being confronted by a complete and whole image, the reader has to work through the stanzas, methodically building upon a cumulative set of impressions, in order finally to see the allegorical "image" or "images." However, before progressing further, we need to investigate the legacy that has built up around Spenser's "painterly" qualities, to enable a thorough understanding of the process of his allegorical visualisation.

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[215] See *Elizabeth I: Collective Works* (Marcus, Mueller, Rose) for speeches, poems and prose that show the Queen in various and multiple guises. For a selection see 53-58, 70-73, 116-17, 302-03, 325-26, 340-41.

[216] Spenser's use of continual deferral was an important technique in evading critical comments that supposed his work to be "iconoclastic." On iconic and iconoclastic interpretations during this era see Gilman, *Iconoclasm and Poetry* 11, 31-32, 81-82, 91-93; King, *Spenser's Poetry* 48-109. I discuss Spenser's iconoclasm in chapter two and touch upon it again in the concluding afterword.

Leigh Hunt's *Imagination and Fancy*, published in the mid-nineteenth century, claimed that Spenser was a "Poet of the Painters" (101, 105), providing equations between scenes in *The Faerie Queene* and their similarities with representative painters such as Raphael, Titian, Michelangelo and Rembrandt (101-30). Hunt was voicing what many critics and commentators before him had noted about the "pictorial" nature of Spenser's verse. In the 1750s Joseph Warton compared the author of *The Faerie Queene* with Rubens (Gottfried 204). The eighteenth-century critic John Hughes in his "Essay on Allegorical Poetry" notes that in Spenser's allegorical poem the "embellishments of description are rich and lavish … beyond comparison" (6). Hughes later comments that "allegory … is a kind of picture in poetry" which "conveys instruction to the mind by an analogy to the senses, and so amuses the fancy, whilst it informs the understanding" (9, 8). Although terming Spenser's visual allegory "pictorial," Hughes's interpretation of Spenser's work is profound. He was aware of the didactic capacity for the pictorial in verse and the extent to which it intensifies meaning within the text. The pictorial engages the senses of readers, challenging them to visualise the scene in their mind's eye while elucidating its significance and determining alternative ways in which it may be viewed. Hughes concludes his essay on a rather nostalgic note:

> it must be confessed that excepting Spenser, there are few extraordinary instances of this kind of writing among the moderns. The great mines of invention have been opened long ago, and little new ore seems to have been discovered or brought to light by latter ages. With us the art of framing fables, apologues, and allegories, which was so frequent among the writers of antiquity, seems to be like the act of painting upon glass, but little practiced, and in great measure lost. Our colours are not so rich and transparent, and are either so ill prepared, or so unlikely laid on, that they often sully the light which is to pass thro' them, rather than agreeably tincture and beautify it. (27-28)

Hughes captures an essence of Spenser's verse with his analogy of "painting upon glass": the reader can see the colours and the vision depicted, and yet he or she can also see *through* this vision. It is "transparent" and therefore "rich" in content. Like stained glass, paint on glass allows light to escape through it in all directions, enabling the reader to see both beneath and across its surface. The effect is one of multi-dimensionality. The vision is luminous in its allure and self-conscious transparency. Spenser's text may be visually beautiful but its very multi-dimensionality points towards its visual complexity. Hughes's criticism can be interpreted as presenting Spenser's text as a prism which scatters images and light, rather than conveying whole, neat and complete pictures in words. Spenser's work requires active reader participation in order to realise or visualise the many images and meanings spread throughout the poem. Just as there are allegorical ways of reading a text, so there are allegorical methods for interpreting textual visions. I will return to these methods of reading later in the chapter.

By the mid-nineteenth century, there was an outpouring of debate about the extent to which Spenser was copying the pictorial techniques of prominent artists. Hippolyte Taine writing in 1856 declares:

> Spenser's characteristic is the vastness and overflow of his picturesque invention. Like Rubens, whatever he creates is beyond the region of all traditions, but complete in all parts, and expresses distinct ideas. As with Rubens, his allegory swells its proportions beyond all rule, and withdraws fancy from law, except in so far as it is necessary to harmonise forms and colours … here are finished pictures true and complete, composed with a painter's feeling, with choice of tints and outlines … This reclining Acrasia has the pose of a goddess, or of one of Titian's courtesans. An Italian artist might copy these gardens, these flowing waters, these sculptured loves, those wreathes of creeping ivy thick with glossy leaves and fleecy flowers. (*History of English Literature* 314-19)

As John Bender notes, this description is charming and enthusiastic in its analysis of Spenser's text, but it is impressionistic, indiscriminate and vague in its comparison of Spenser with other painters (17). Taine does not say what "distinct ideas" Spenser's pictures form, nor in what ways "his allegory swells its proportions beyond all rule." This passage takes Spenser criticism in the "pictorial" mode to its extreme, bringing us back to Leigh Hunt's many parallels between Spenser's verse and the work of artists from Michelangelo to Poussin.[217] While Spenser can be seen to be "pictorial" in a sense, this is too literal a translation of his use of the visual. Spenser was a poet and never, as far as we know, turned his hand to painting. The term "visualisation" is thus more accurate when we consider notions of Spenserian "pictorialism," as Rudolf Gottfried's study of the pictorial elements in Spenser's poetry makes clear.

Gottfried's pointed and efficient essay strips Spenser of his misplaced title as "Poet of the Painters" and highlights the reality of Spenser's situation and the fact that many critics have been deluded by elements of the pictorial, and led to read into the poem aspects of the painterly which are not necessarily there. Gottfried notes that Spenser's verse has been seen to parallel the work or technique of nearly every major European painter (Gottfried 203-13; Bender 17). A re-analysis of Spenser's pictorial "legacy" needs to take place particularly when we consider that he was not acquainted with the work of Titian, and that Rembrandt was born after he had died. Misinterpretation was something Spenser was most conscious to avoid. As Gottfried concludes, Spenser would probably be aggrieved at this misrepresentation of his work (213). Any aspect of the visual which happens to lie within the realms of his poetry is there for a definite and distinct reason. The visual is a pointer to the reader to be wary of reading incorrectly; to be aware of the potential for true and false appearances within the text (Roberts 14-16);[218] and to be open to multiple allegorical meanings within the verse rather than closed to a single way of seeing. As Paul Alpers states,

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[217] See Gottfried for twentieth-century critics who have added to Hunt's voice in commenting on the pictorial nature of Spenser's verse (205-06).

[218] Roberts notes that Spenser delays naming characters in the poem while we read pictures and signs and produce a meaning. This is seen in the encounter with Error: "it must be with deliberate irony that the first character to be named in the poem is identified by her name as 'mistake'" (16) (*FQ* 1.1.13). The process of allegorical interpretation often comes before a character's naming, altering the way in which we read the text. A prominent instance of "delayed naming" is seen in the Bible when Adam does not name Eve until after the fall (Gen. 4.20). This characteristic may also be noted in *Paradise Lost*, when Eve only refers to herself by her name after she has seen her reflection in a pool of water and "pined with vain desire" (*PL* 4.466, 481). Likewise, in *The Faerie Queene*, Una is only named after the creation of her false counterpart by Archimago (*FQ* 1.1.45).

Spenser's "pictures" are not descriptive at all in the sense of rendering actual visual experience. Rather, they employ the "rhetorical use of pictorial diction" to convey the moral and "psychological" impact of what is seen (Alpers 9-13; Gilman 79). No sooner is the tapestry of images held up, then it is pierced, rendered by an inward thought that tears it apart (Gilman 79). Thus, as stated above, rather than being traditionally "pictorial," Spenser's text is mirror-like or prism-like in its reflective fragmentation of images, encouraging reader "visualisation" – realisation of the multiplicity inherent in textual allegorical meaning.

## The Bower of Bliss as a process of allegorical visualisation

This technique of allegorical visualisation is highlighted prominently in the description of the Bower of Bliss, which Taine has inadequately classed as "picturesque."

> And ouer all, of purest gold was spred,
> A trayle of yuie in his natiue hew:
> For the rich metal was so coloured,
> That wight, who did not well auis'd it vew,
> Would surely deeme it to bee yuie trew: (*FQ* 2.12.61)

Within the lavish description of the bower and its beautiful maidens, Spenser deliberately includes a warning to his readers not to be drawn in and deluded by scenic depictions. He cautions his readers not to allow their sense or "spright" to be dis-empowered, as Verdant is in surrendering to Acrasia's alluring beauty (*FQ* 2.12.73). Spenser's detailed description of the Bower and its powerful allure for the reader, as graphically represented through Verdant's immobility in Acrasia's arms, highlights the extent to which the visual can potentially misguide and misinform.[219] Appearances can be as alluring as they are deceptive. Well informed judgement and integrity are vital when interpreting the visual. The passage above conveys one such warning concerning the deliberate artificiality of the scene. Nature has been coated in gold and this metal has been "coloured" so that only the most watchful viewer can see that it is not as natural as it appears. Spenser reveals to the vigilant reader that the text's mirror is distorted. What seems utterly perfect and beautiful may be false and unnatural. Spenser uses images in the Bower to encourage careful seeing and reading. He helps his readers by noting that those "not well auis'd it vew" would deem the Bower's beauty natural and its "yuie trew." Spenser calls upon his readers to see beneath exterior colouring to experience other ways of seeing, hence Hughes uses the analogy of painted glass. The surface is picked and torn to reveal glimpses of an alternative "truth" beneath the gilding. As he does with language, Spenser prompts his readers to be cautious of the visual elements of his verse and not immediately to trust what is before them. The bower, while being one of the most prominent examples of his "pictorialism" within *The Faerie Queene*, also conveys one of the most pertinent warnings against the potential delusion that accompanies it. Spenser's cumulative warnings concerning what "seems" or "appears" to be benevolent guides readers through the text, making them watchfully aware of the potential for visual deceit.

Thus in relation to the complex, prism-like notion of "allegorical visualisation," the "pictorial" is too literal a reading of Spenser's allegory and tends to lead to the confining of verse and meaning within artificial and obstructive limits. As we saw in the chapter on imagination, concepts of the visual, vision, and seeing are

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[219] For more on the Bower of Bliss see: Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* 147-92; Nohrnberg 358-59, 370, 491-512; "Bower of Bliss" in the *Spenser Encyclopaedia* 104-07; Hamilton, *Structure* 108-22; Giamatti, *Earthly Paradise* 267-90. See chapter one above for my initial discussion on the visual allure of the bower.

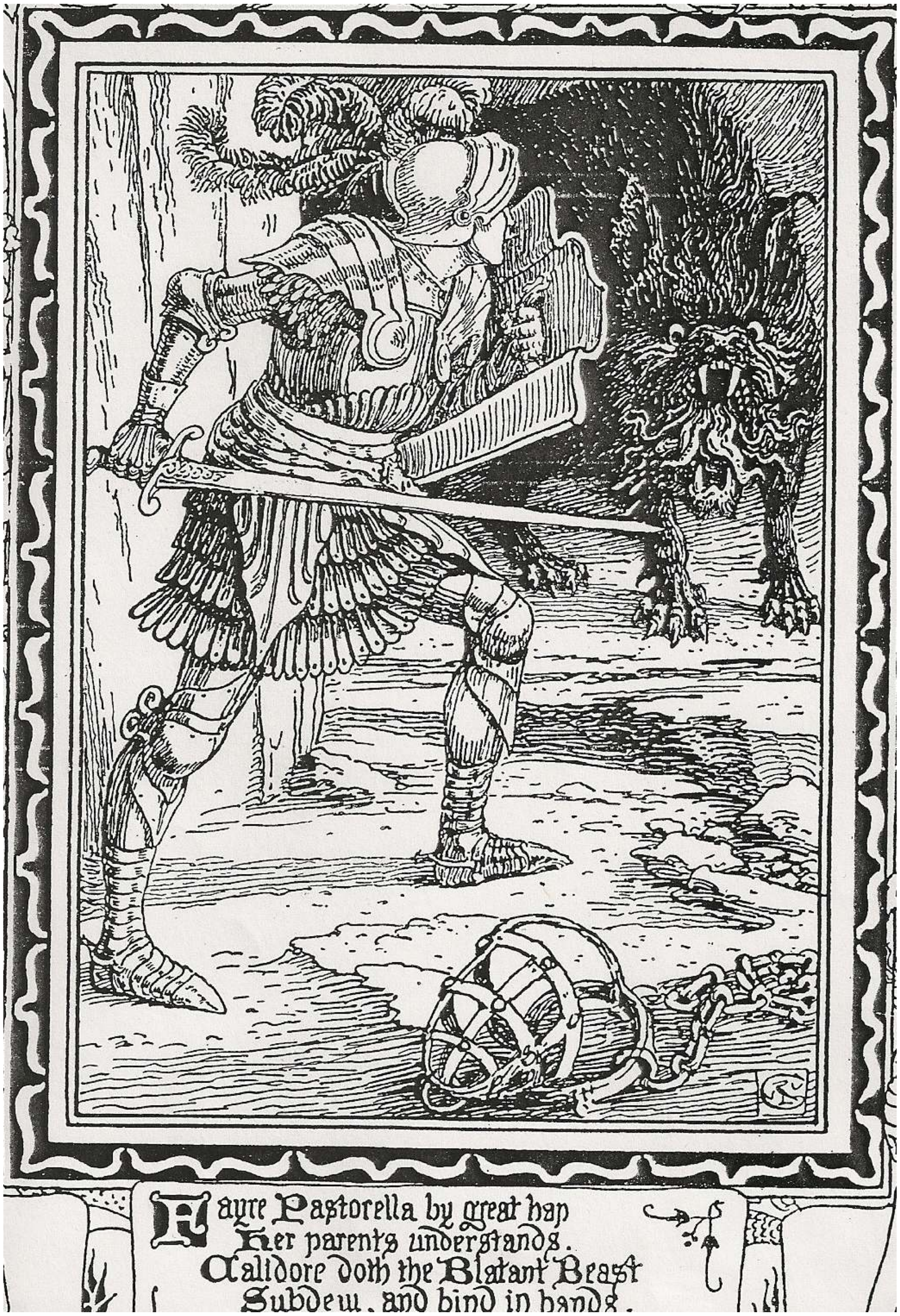
Fayre Pastorella by great hap
Her parents understands.
Calidore doth the Blatant Beast
Subdew, and bind in bands.

Fig. 13 The Blatant Beast from *Illustrations and Ornamentations from The Faerie Queene*, page 131, by Walter Crane, edited by Carol Belanger Grafton, Dover 1998. Reproduced by permission of Dover Publications

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crucial to the structure of *The Faerie Queene*. Spenser does not necessarily give us neat little pictures within the text. His characters and scenes are often disturbingly obscure, changeable and confusing. Gottfried notes that very few readers have attempted to illustrate *The Faerie Queene* (208) (see fig. 13).[220] Its imaginative scope along with shifting and confusing depictions of characters renders illustration almost impossible.[221] How would we depict the Blatant Beast? He is at once a braying dog composed of many howling biting tongues (*FQ* 5.12.41), and a hybrid "Monster bred of hellishe race" (*FQ* 6.1.7). He is a dark thing, not completely describable, a creature that plays upon imagination and sparks terror. Here Spenser's technique is not "pictorial" but visual. We cannot completely see the Beast as he is not fully described, but Spenser's vision of the creature allows us just a few glimpses to get a notion of his being, enabling us to carry an impression of him forward in our minds. It is enough to enable us to recognise him but not enough to let us pinpoint his exact form. He remains a sinister figure within the text, his name an allegory for human fears about the unknown, a vision of dark forces within the poem.[222]

Allegory, rightly understood, is *necessarily* "dark." Isabel MacCaffrey tells us that "Allegorical darkness is a reminder of allegory's didactic purpose" which "is best served when the reader is forced, by the poet's rhetorical manipulation to enter and participate in the fiction" (*Spenser's Allegory* 45). Using figures such as the Blatant Beast, Spenser encourages the reader's own sense of visualisation to complete the scene in his or her head, to be aware of parts of the visual tapestry which are torn or pierced. Important elements conjured in a scene will often extend beyond the scene itself to develop into wider implications and meanings. This is where allegory acts as a vital component to the visual. The Blatant Beast's escape from Calidore is ominous. His flight from the confines of the text reflects upon the dangers and condemnation that the biting tongues of slander and scorn represent to prominent individuals and the moral fabric of society.[223] From Elizabeth I to Spenser to persons reading cheap popular pamphlets, no one is immune from the deformation of words.[224] Thus, all words and visions built upon those words are liable to warping and decay. Despite the lavish description of the Bower of Bliss (*FQ* 2.12.42-82), Guyon manages to erase it in one quick stanza.

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[220] Only about twenty illustrated editions of Spenser's verse have appeared in print. "The truth is that Spenser's poetry is not easy to illustrate, presumably for reasons inherent in the poetry itself" (Gottfried 208). For an example of illustrations inspired by *The Faerie Queene* see Walter Crane, *Illustrations and Ornamentation from* The Faerie Queene. Fig. 13 is a page reproduced from Walter Crane's book, showing the Blatant Beast. This depiction of the muzzled Beast can be compared to Blake's portrayal in the *Characters from Spenser's* Faerie Queene (fig. 4 on page 27).

[221] See Blake's depiction of *The Characters in Spenser's* Faerie Queene (fig. 4 on page 27). Grant, Brown, and Gleckner debate as to the identity of characters in Blake's procession. See Grant and Brown, *Blake Newsletter* 56-85; Gleckner, *Blake and Spenser* 163-95.

[222] What is "unknown" is as much an opportunity as it is something to be feared. This is seen in the many quests into the "unknown" undertaken by the knights of Spenser's epic in order to prove their virtue. This sense of opportunity is also carried forward into Blake's poetry and graphically represented in the frontispiece to *Jerusalem*, depicting the traveller stepping boldly through a doorway into the mysterious and unfamiliar (fig. 20 on page 361). This image calls to mind Rev. 3.20: "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him."

> But all those pleasaunt bowres and Pallace braue,
> Guyon broke downe, with rigour pittilesse;
> Ne ought their goodly workmanship might saue
> Them from the tempest of his wrathfulnesse,
> But that their blisse he turn'd to balefulnesse:
> . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
> And of the fairest late, now made the fowlest place (*FQ* 2.12.83)

The vision carefully created has now been reduced to rubble. Its quick elimination emphasises the potential instability upon which visions are built. No depiction is stable and all are susceptible to taint and ruination. The speed with which the Bower is destroyed highlights the extent to which perception of the visual is unstable and impermanent. What is most interesting about Guyon's reaction to the Bower, as critics have often observed, is just how intemperate it is, countering the temperance that defines his knighthood in Book Two.[225] He appears to fall in the last canto, at the final challenge. The devastating extent of Guyon's "rigour pittilesse" emphasises his passionate reaction to the Bower, suggesting that he is threatened by it. The Bower's vigorous allure endangers his moral sense of temperate continence (Tilmouth 52-58). Vision is subjective and dependent upon the workings of the mind of the viewer. Spenser's "goodly workmanship" is potentially torn down by any reader who disagrees with his argument and rejects his visual world. That Spenser was aware of this possibility is reflected in the self-consciously mirror-like status of his poem. His Bower is a record of the power and limitation of vision, its ever shifting transience, and the extent to which it is reliant upon readers who are prepared to open their minds to appreciate the meanings enclosed within it.

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[223] See Gross, *Shakespeare's Noise*, especially chapter two on the Blatant Beast and the effects of slander on reputation, 33-67. Slander affects not only the famous, but those who read and spread gossip. Defamation has a debilitating effect upon society as a whole.

[224] See Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety* for a guide to the context of pamphlet production and circulation in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, 257-320.

### John Bender's visualisation of Spenserian "pictorialism"

One of the most detailed and still valuable studies of Spenser's use of the visual is John Bender's *Spenser and Literary Pictorialism* (1972). In this study Bender argues that Spenser's images are integral to the allegory, and that it is the subtle interplay between statement and image that makes Spenser's visual capacity so powerful (20-21). In this sense, Spenser's verse reflects the influence of the culture of emblems, prevalent during the sixteenth century (and into the early nineteenth century, impacting in Blake's work), as discussed in the introduction to this thesis.[226] Bender explores Spenser's creation of pictorial effects by dividing them into three distinct bands: those that "Focus," those that "Frame" and those that "Scan" (4). "Focusing" occurs when encrusted images and metaphors accumulate around a complete visual phenomenon. Focusing divides the visual experience into small, intense visual moments (Bender 40-41). An example is Acrasia "arrayd" or "disarrayd" in the Bower of Bliss (*FQ* 2.12.77). "Framing" defines images that suspend the reader's attention within the narrow visual range of a formally coherent spatial configuration. They are similar to emblems in their function (Bender 69). "Scanning" involves a wider and more general sweep of the scene. It entails movement from a distant or general view to a closer observation of a figure or scene. The motion is often across or through a scene as different parts are encountered separately, examples being descriptions of the Cave of Mammon or the Bower of Bliss (Bender 105).

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[225] For a selection of comments on Guyon's destruction of the Bower see: Dolven 64-65; Roberts 66-69, 81; Suttie 152-57; Hamilton, *Structure* 108-22; Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* 170-92; Nohrnberg 498; and "Bower of Bliss" in the *Spenser Encyclopaedia* 105-06.

[226] For the relation of emblems and emblem culture to the work of Spenser and Blake see Bath, Freeman, Nanavutty and Alpers.

Bender is careful to argue that while Spenser creates fine images, his visual phenomena are not fixed and cannot be easily contained and categorised. This is where I feel Bender's study to be most useful. While his description of the various methods of visualisation can be confusing, often melding into one another (especially when he attempts to distinguish "Focusing" from "Framing"), Bender continually stresses that Spenser's visual phenomena cannot be rigidly defined. "Spenser does not create pictures; he makes images that are like pictures in significant ways" (Bender 92). His significance lies rather in the metaphorical power of suggestion. Bender's work illuminates Spenser's reliance upon his readers to form mental images from prism-like imagistic glimpses, traces and suggestions. Gilman's work agrees with Bender's in noting that Spenser's pictures seem to be "fragmented, discontinuous and splintered, rather than fluid, whole and continuous" (Gilman 79). Spenser is constantly reordering and recorrecting the scene, readjusting its contents in order to prompt the reader's sense of allegorical visualisation. Acrasia is at once "arayd" and "disarayd" before her viewers, shifting from one pose to another, not clearly captured and continually moving before our eyes (*FQ* 2.12.77) (Gilman 81). She is at once visualised and "torn down," made and remade, or in allegorical terms, veiled and unveiled. As discussed in chapter two, Spenser is highly sensitive to the implications of iconography during the turbulent aftermath of the Henrician Reformation (Gilman 82). This adds to the ambivalence with which he uses metaphorical images and to his awareness of the visual as a tool for communication as a whole. As Bender notes, due to

> the diversity of Renaissance symbolic systems as well as Spenser's ambivalence toward traditional iconography, his allegory cannot count on instant and fixed symbolic recognition from the reader. (74)

Bender's study highlights the need to approach Spenser's concept of the visual with caution and care. Readers are encouraged to recognise alternative meanings or perspectives lying within the text and the extent to which an analysis of the visual is fundamental to Spenser's allegory. Spenser's use of the visual emphasises the allegorical impulse at its core: that of veiling and unveiling, that of recognising the tear or fissure within a seemingly "perfect" visual scene.

## Vision in Isis Church

Jane Grogan's recent study follows Bender in highlighting the importance of the visual to Spenser's work. While Grogan does not see the mechanisms of allegory and the visual as working in conjunction, she does make illuminating points about Spenser's use of the visual and its relation to pedagogy, a concept vital to the self-conscious and didactic impulse of Spenser's verse. In a vein similar to that of Alpers when discussing Spenser's unconventional use of emblems, Grogan considers Spenser's overturning of conventional wisdom:

> Far from validating his culture's taste of sententiousness and emblem-spotting, Spenser suggests that any such facile moralising – whether by the fickle narrator or his heroes – is precarious and misguided … Again and again in *The Faerie Queene*, Spenser is … usurping the old and transforming the very mode of its address to readers into something more expansive, more precarious, and far less programmatic or controllable (95-96).

This way of seeing and transforming is conveyed in Britomart's vision at the Temple of Isis in Book Five. Here, Spenser foregrounds the strength of the imagination to convey latent thought and the power of the mind to create, interpret and understand the meanings instilled in the dream. The dream is visionary, akin to the prophetic force of Blake's illuminations. The description of the Temple and the images conveyed within it are not just reflective of biblical sources, they seem to prefigure a Blakean notion of vision. The Temple's construction has parallels with the building of Golgonooza (*J* 12). Britomart wonders in awe at "the workemans passing skill" when "gazing" at the "goodly building," "Bourne vppon stately pillours, all dispred / With shining gold, and arched ouer hed" (*FQ* 5.7.5). The "Idoll" of Isis is "framed all of siluer fine," crafted of gold and clothed in beautiful garments, with a Crocodile "rold" at her feet, "as could with cunning hand be wrought" (*FQ* 5.7.6). Blake depicts the construction of Golgonooza, the fourfold city of creativity, as a place of adornment and the worship of human qualities:

> The stones are pity and the bricks, well wrought affectations:
> Enameld with love & kindness, & the tiles engraven gold
> Labour of merciful hands: the beams & rafers are forgiveness:
> The mortar & cement of the work, tears of honesty: the nails,
> And the screws & iron braces, are well wrought blandishments,

And well contrived words, firm fixing, never forgotten,
Always comforting the remembrance: the floors, humility (*J* 12.30-36)

Both structures offer ultimate (though different) visions of human truth and divine insight. Golgonooza is a version of the new Jerusalem (Rev. 21), but a Jerusalem that is built of the best qualities of human nature. In this sense, Blake encourages his readers to recognise the divine in humanity. Spenser's vision is similar in showing that despite Reformation criticisms of the worship of the false "Idoll," there is a relevant and genuine need for the appreciation of human virtues within a sacred or divine setting. Like Blake, Spenser makes a point of showing the divine and the human working in conjunction, as stated in his Hymn to Beauty: "For of the soule the bodie forme doth take: / For soule is forme, and doth the bodie make" (st. 19, *Shorter Poems* 712). Both visions promote and celebrate the material and conceptual forms of human creativity and their potential to be divine.

However, the careful reader will also appreciate that the description of the Church of Isis is full of ambivalence. Spenser complicates all sites of vision. Having experienced Achimago's hypocrisy and read about Lucifera's palace, the Bower of Bliss,[227] and the House of Busirane, the reader would be forgiven for initially condemning what seems to be a site for the worship of a brazen idol.[228] The statue of Isis with the serpent-like Crocodile at her feet brings to mind the many coloured idols which were condemned and torn down during the Reformation. This idol is pagan. Isis is an Egyptian goddess, the goddess of Equity, who is also identified with the moon and is another figure for Diana/ Phoebe, and therefore representative of Elizabeth I. Carol Stillman notes that she is the goddess of childbirth, marriage and the female generative principle ("Isis, Osiris," *Sp Enc* 407). She is a potent symbol of the power and presence of women and thus encourages Britomart to recognise her full potential as a future queen. Isis was often represented with her small son, Horus, and therefore was regarded by Christians as another image of the Virgin Mary with baby Jesus ("Isis, Osiris," *Sp Enc* 407). The crocodile at her feet is Osiris, the Egyptian god of Justice (*FQ* 5.7.22). His presence displays the correct balance between Justice and Equity ("Isis Church," *Sp Enc* 408), or justice tempered by mercy, a balance the wrathful and proud Talus will never attain. Marilyn French notes that the Crocodile is the male, subservient towards and ordered by the female in Isis/Britomart: "the female represents order, control, restraint, as well as mercy. She also possesses a power higher than his" ("Gender," *Sp Enc* 327). And yet, the Crocodile is also a symbol of guile, sexuality and aggressive unreason, adding to the complexity of the image. In Britomart's dream the Crocodile is quick to devour flames. It threatens to eat Britomart/Isis and it impregnates her. Clifford Davidson relates the image of Isis to an emblem in Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia*, showing a nude Luxury (or Lechery) seated on a crocodile ("Isis Church," *Sp Enc* (408). The Crocodile is threatening and predatory. Spenser, again, is using a traditional image or emblem and embellishing and expanding its significance. Britomart's dream is akin to John's visions in the Book of Revelation with its chaotic and rich visuality. Britomart/Isis gives birth to a lion after her encounter with the Crocodile, paralleling the travails of the Woman clothed with the Sun, who fears that her newborn child will be devoured by the waiting dragon (Rev. 12.1-5). It is Spenser's use of allegory, combined with the visual, which produces such striking and multiple meanings for the viewer. The rich implications associated with the figure of Isis and her relation to Britomart create a multifaceted, prism-like, scene of viewing.

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[227] One may note the extent to which the language and description of the Bower (*FQ* 2.12.42-62) parallels that of the Temple and the idol (*FQ* 5.7.5-8), especially in the use of the words "goodly," "gold," "siluer," "framed," "dispred," "cunning" and "wrought" to describe both scenes. Spenser is emphasising the difference between truth and the appearances of "goodly" work.

[228] For more on the iconographic implications of Isis Church, see King, *Spenser's Poetry* 106-07.

As in the chamber at Busirane’s House in Book Three, Britomart struggles to read, understand and piece together the meaning of the vision. Its conflicting array of images and actions are difficult for most readers to fathom. Spenser is challenging both his heroine and his readers with this particularly complicated visualization, encouraging them not just to conclude in the conventional mode that Isis is a maiden threatened by lechery, or that she is an idol, unworthy of respect. Like Redcross and Guyon, the reader/Britomart is guided by a teacher. The Priest at the temple explains part of Britomart’s dream (*FQ* 5.7.21-23), unravelling its prophetic implications. He tells her that the Crocodile is Artegall, a “righteous Knight” and “faithfull louer” (*FQ* 5.7.22), who will settle disputes, the “raging flames that many foes shall reare,” and restore her to her throne (*FQ* 5.7.23). He will give her a “Lion-like” son, a new line of monarchs, the Tudors (*FQ* 5.7.23) (“Isis Church,” *Sp Enc* 408). The dream shows that Isis/Britomart/Equity is incomplete without her partner, Osiris/Artegall/Justice (“Isis Church,” *Sp Enc* 408). However, as always, Spenser leaves the rest for the reader/Britomart to think about. Gaps always remain in the fragmented visual scene. Despite the Priest’s explanation, the disturbing nature of the dream remains prominent. The many contradictions and ambivalences bound up in the representation of each of the characters pushes against neat definitions, defying categorisation and closure. Although Britomart is presented with a vision of her future, the underlying threats of violence contained in the dream suggest the extent to which she, and the reader, must remain closely guarded and alert to all implications. Britomart’s vision, like Blake’s constant call for his readers to shake off the “mind-forg’d manacles” of apathy and self-doubt, is one of struggle. Truth is not easily found. It requires the constant work and attention of patient readers, a willingness to accept that not all meanings can be traced and revealed, in order to come towards an appreciation of truth through the endless work of human energy and creativity.

## Medieval influences on Blake's illuminated verse

Having discussed some of the ways in which Spenser operates as a visual allegorist, it is important to place Blake's work in relation to the many sources and influences which inspired his illuminated verse. As is indicated by his awareness of emblems, Blake was fascinated by the artefacts and culture of the classical and medieval eras. He was bought engravings of famous classical models – the Dying Gladiator, Hercules, Venus di Medici – by his father (Hagstrum, *Poet and Painter* 24). He revered the engravings of Dürer, an artist who inspired him throughout his life, and with whom, Peter Ackroyd argues, he shared visionary clarity (29-30). He was apprenticed to Basire, one of the finest engravers specialising in the matter of classical antiquity in the period (Hagstrum, *Poet and Painter* 24; Bentley, *Stranger* 31-47). Blake's training took him to view and draw medieval sculptures and sepulchres in Westminster Abbey (Ackroyd 46-48; Bentley, *Stranger* 38-43). Traces of this influential mix of elements from both classical antiquity and the medieval era can be seen throughout Blake's work.[229] Going beyond the authority of emblems, the depiction of the eagle carrying the serpent in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, discussed above (see fig. 6 on page 49), recalls the twelfth book of *The Iliad* (ll. 200-07) (Hagstrum, *Poet and Painter* 26).[230] The battling snake and eagle reflect the bloodshed and futility of warfare. Although the eagle drops the bloodied snake, leaving it to die on the field of battle, the snake has bitten the eagle and its poison will rankle within its veins causing suffering and torment. The struggle for supremacy is paramount and battle is necessary to the protection of principles and values. Thus Menelaos, having lost his wife Helen to Paris, orders the destruction of Troy, Paris's home and the city to which the couple have fled. The depiction of the eagle and the snake is also relevant to *The Marriage* in suggesting that the viewer must follow his or her innate principles and passions. Blake was aware of the struggle over the human soul by institutions of church and state that sought to condition the human mind to rigid principles of chastity, obedience and conformity. The whole structure of *The Marriage* is based upon confrontation between the principles of goodness and evil, Angels and Devils. However, in this case, it is the energetic Devils who offer freedom for the soul, while the Angels seek to trap and incarcerate it. Blake's image of the snake and the eagle emphasises humankind's continual fight, not against itself and its body, but against social institutions that seek to bind body and soul to conform to socially prescribed conditions devoid of self-expression, energy and self-enlightenment.

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[229] See Raine, *Blake and Tradition*, for information on the many textual influences on Blake. There are fleeting references to Renaissance sources (the work of Spenser, Shakespeare and Milton, the early modern concept of alchemy, for example), but Raine's work is mostly concerned with classical, Neo-Platonic, exotic, Swedenborgian and eighteenth-century sources upon Blake's poetry. I have yet to find a study that looks specifically at medieval influences upon Blake.

[230] As they were urgent to cross a bird sign had appeared to them,
an eagle, flying high and holding to the left of the people
and carrying in its talons a gigantic snake, blood-coloured,
alive still and breathing, it had not forgotten its warcraft

While the influences of the ancients on his work are prominent, Blake's awareness of medieval manuscripts had a particular effect upon the creation of his illuminated poems. Hagstrum identifies this source of inspiration, noting that Blake must have been acquainted with the illuminated manuscripts of the medieval era as he termed his own illustrated work "Illuminated Books" (Hagstrum, *Poet and Painter* 30). In 1786 James Edwards, a wealthy bookseller, purchased from the Duchess of

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yet, for writhing back it struck the eagle that held it
by chest and neck, so that the eagle let it drop groundward
in pain of the bite, and dashed it down in the midst of the battle
and itself, screaming high, winged away down the wind's blast. (*The Iliad of Homer* 175)

Portland for £213 what is now one of the greatest treasures of the British Library, the Bedford Hours, an illuminated manuscript created by French or Flemish artists between 1430 and 1450. James Edwards was the brother of Richard Edwards, who commissioned Blake to illustrate Edward Young's *Night Thoughts*. He was a friend of Joseph Johnson, Blake's friend and early publisher. He is reported to have invited students, scholars and persons of taste to examine his books and manuscripts during the 1780s (Hagstrum, *Poet and Painter* 30-31). It is difficult to imagine that Blake was not invited, too. If so, he would have seen the Book of Hours, the owner's proudest possession, along with other illuminated manuscripts (Hagstrum, *Poet and Painter* 31). There are elements within Blake's own illuminated work to suggest that he did indeed see these manuscripts firsthand. Blake's use of colour, from delicate shades to deep blues and purples and golds, is similar to the panorama of colour used in the Book of Hours. As Hagstrum notes, the intertwining of flower, leaf, bird, tree and human figure in the guilloche that borders Blake's "Introduction" to *Innocence* stands indisputably in the tradition of medieval illumination (*Poet and Painter* 32).

The richness of Blake's illumination and the wealth of sources that infuse his verse demonstrate that he has been influenced by many sources, eras, contexts and texts from the Bible to popular English commonplaces and sayings. The distinctive way in which he weaves these sources together and allows their interaction to generate meaning is fundamental to allegorical visualisation. The influences upon his visual media bring added depth to his texts and further propound allegorical meanings of vivacity and complexity. Blake's famous medievalism is reflective of Spenser's. *The Faerie Queene* is indicative of a trend in the resurgence of chivalric traditions from the middle decades of the reign of Elizabeth I.

The medieval tales of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table were first made popular by the likes of Mallory and the Gawain poet in texts and poems of the thirteenth- and fourteenth-centuries. However, it is a common misconception to think of chivalry as exclusive to the Middle Ages (Davis 202). In fact, chivalric courtly pomp and ceremony thrived at the courts of Henry VII and Henry VIII (Young 21-27). Banquets, tournaments and pageants were held to celebrate births, marriages and coronations, including courtly holidays (Young 25). The Tudors were aware of the extent to which chivalric displays bolstered the kingly image of magnificence (Young 25). While tournaments declined in the last years of Henry VIII's reign and were virtually non-existent during Mary I's years on the throne, Elizabeth I re-established them, realising that they promoted royal prestige (Young 31-33). As Alan Young says, "Elizabeth discovered how to exploit the tournament as an instrument of propaganda to her maximum advantage" (32). Established from around 1570, pageants, tournaments and tilts were held in the Queen's honour on the anniversary of her accession (Young 35).[231] These were known as the Accession Day tournaments and the whole country was encouraged to celebrate every 17th November as a public holiday (Young 36). Courtiers and lords dressed up as pastoral, chivalric or romance characters to joust for the Queen (Yates, *Astraea* 88-111). As mentioned in my introduction, each knight taking part in a tournament presented the Queen with an emblem or *impresa* – a motto and picture designed to express personal intentions and aspirations – painted on a small shield (Young 123). *Impresas* were largely compliments to the Queen, positioning her as the object of knightly devotion, shrouded among mechanisms of chivalric display (Young 136). Cultivating further images of devotion, Elizabeth nurtured the Order of the Garter, the oldest order of chivalry, which also emulated the knightly circle surrounding the legendary King Arthur (Strong 164-76). This resurgence in the culture of chivalry opened up a niche allowing Spenser to compose his poem as a further honour to his Queen, the queen of Faerie, for whom all knights quest. In so writing, Spenser made it obvious that he sought recognition for both his verse and his person (Rambuss 63-4).[232] In praising the Queen with love and flattery, poets and courtiers alike sought social and material gifts in the form of elevation and patronage (Marotti 396-428; Montrose, "The Elizabethan Subject" 305-26). Chivalric "love-talk" was a means of expressing male desire for advancement to a female monarch. This cultural moment of chivalric romantic discourse did not last long. By 1600 it was fading along with the Queen's health.[233] *The Faerie Queene* remains a testament to the existence of this culture of courtly praise and patronage.

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[231] For more on the practice of chivalry during the Renaissance, see Davis, *Chivalry and Romance in the English Renaissance* 76-98. For information specifically on tournaments, see Young, *Tudor and Jacobean Tournaments* 11-43, 101-86; Yates, *Aestrea* 88-111; Barber & Barker, *Tournaments: Jousts Chivalry and Pageants in the Middle Ages* 136-37.

Spenser, along with his contemporaries, therefore took advantage of chivalric and Arthurian literary modes in order to praise his Queen.[234] While seemingly "medieval" in origin, as Davis has noted and as explained above, many elements of courtly chivalry thrived at the Tudor court. Spenser's poem visualises the glittering display of the tournament through the depiction of brightly arrayed characters – Duessa's "tinsell trappings" (*FQ* 1.2.13) and Arthur, "gold full richly drest" (*FQ*

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[232] Rambuss notes that after the publication of the first three books of *The Faerie Queene*, there is a notable gap of six years before the next instalment, during which Spenser publishes his *Complaints*. Praise of the sovereign and of national identity is conspicuously neglected, suggesting Spenser's own frustration at his lack of personal recognition by the court and the Queen (63-64).

[233] Young notices that banquets, masques and tournaments were held during the reign of James I, but James's possible dislike of jousting and his shyness meant the chivalric tone of the tournament had shifted by the early 1600s. Also, the personal cost of participating in the tournaments "probably contributed more than any other factor to the demise of the English tournament" during this period (43).

[234] See *FQ* 2.10 and *FQ* 3.3.26-50 in which Gloriana and Britomart (figurative of Elizabeth I) are related to King Arthur through a long chronicle "of Briton kings" (*FQ* 2.10. Arg.). These lengthy chronologies indirectly praise Elizabeth by revealing her bloodline as seemingly descended from Arthur.

1.7.32). While Spenser utilised a discourse of praise specific to his Queen at the particular moment of his writing, Blake's use of medieval and early modern sources lends his illuminations a kind of agelessness. The strength of Blake's lines and his use of colour contrast the pointed and delicate techniques of engraving fashionable in his era (Bentley, *Stranger* 282-85). It is as if, in studying the vivid colours and seemingly simple lines of an older style of art and incorporating it into his work, Blake is creating a powerful, uniquely modern visual form which inspires artists today. His visualisation of early modern forms is little explored and requires a study in itself.

Blake's early poems are also little studied and would benefit from further investigation. His *Miscellaneous Poems*, including "An Imitation of Spen[s]er" and his play-poem *King Edward the Third*, point towards a thorough perception of early modern literature. Very little has been written concerning the relevance of these early pieces to the bulk of Blake's work. The extent to which the medieval and early modern era influenced his poetry and art has yet to be explored in greater detail. Like Blake imitating the colour and form of medieval manuscripts, Spenser sought to visualise the imagined colour and vibrancy of a mythical historical era through the visual descriptions of his poem. Images and perceptions of the past influence the way the poets and their readers perceive the visual. It is important to be aware of these potential sources when analysing both poets' work. To use Colie's words, Spenser and Blake's visually allegoric verse "works allusively, drawing in a whole area of association not necessarily explored directly in the poem" (38).

## ***Ut pictura poesis* – debating the integration of art and poetry**

So far, in discussing the function of metaphors and influences upon Spenser and Blake's formation of the visual, one prominent theme emerges: that of the relationship between texts and images. This relation has long been noted and debated by critics and commentators and has some considerable influence on the poetry of Spenser and Blake. Jean Hagstrum explores the relationship between poetry and art in detail in *The Sister Arts*, starting with commentary from classical philosophers and charting its influence on poets up to the eighteenth century. What comes immediately to mind is the fact that many comments relating to art and poetry have been misappropriated and misunderstood over time. Plato in *The Republic* states that "the imitative poet" is "as counterpart to the painter" (10.605a), or that the poet is like a painter (Hagstrum, *Sister Arts* 3). This phrase has been used to enforce the relation between poetry and painting. However, as Hagstrum states, in Plato's context it was music, not painting, which was the highest art form. Therefore, when he associates painting and poetry, the purpose is to criticise by likening poetry to the feigning nature of art (*Sister Arts* 4). However, in so doing, Plato was still associating both forms, even while ridiculing them (Hagstrum, *Sister Arts* 5).

Horace's *Ars Poetica* is most famously taken as representing the extent to which poetry and painting were affiliated. Horace's phrase, *Ut pictura poesis* (*Ars Poetica* 73), has come to represent the very union of painting and art and could well be seen to be implicitly alluded to by Spenser when he speaks of attempting to "pourtraict" his Queen in the "liuing colors" of his verse. While this phrase perhaps struggled to be conveyed during the sixteenth century for those unacquainted with the brilliance of Renaissance art, painting by Blake's era had achieved as prominent a status as that of poetry. Although Blake could not take a trip to Rome to see the beauties of Italian art for himself, Rome could be brought to him (Bentley, *Stranger* 77-78; Heppner 12). Increasing production and distribution of prints and copies of originals allowed artists and the English public glimpses of some of the most famous masterpieces of European painting and sculpture. The foundation of the Royal Academy by Sir Joshua Reynolds in 1768 indicated the growth in the interest and importance of the development of art in England (Brewer 204, 218). As Hagstrum notes, the eighteenth century saw the culmination of the literary man's sophistication in the visual arts. In no previous age did writers to the same extent see and understand paintings, possess such considerable collections of prints and engravings, and read so widely in the criticism and theory of the graphic arts. In no previous period in English literature could a poet assume knowledge of great painting and statuary in the audience he was addressing (Hagstrum, *Sister Arts* 130). For Blake, a former student of the Royal Academy, an artist, engraver and poet, the merging of pictures and prose in his illuminated verse is seamless. Influenced by Renaissance engravers and artists such as Dürer and Michelangelo, Blake stood firmly in the pictorialist tradition in his association of the two arts (Hagstrum, *William Blake* 9). He can be seen to be one of the most prominent examples of *ut pictura poesis* in action.

However, while the spirit of *ut pictura poesis* can be seen to have dominated the "sophisticated arts" of the eighteenth century, critics have noted that the understanding of this phrase has in fact been misapplied. John Dryden's 1695 preface to the translation of Charles du Fresnay's *De Arte Graphica* contains the commonplaces inherited from the Renaissance concerning the "sisterly" relationship between poetry and painting.

> Painting and Poesy are two sisters, which are so like in all things, that they mutually lend to each other, both their name and office. One is called a dumb poesy, and the other a speaking picture. (181)

Dryden's bold assertions are derived from the Renaissance application of the phrase *ut pictura poesis*. As Hagstrum explains, the earliest printed editions of Horace began as follows:

> Ut pictura poesis erit. Non erit dissimilis
> Poetica ars picturae (*Sister Arts* 59)

The punctuation of this phrase requires explanation. Horace's line is punctuated to read "ut pictura poesis erit": the verb is placed with the first clause (Hagstrum, *Sister Arts* 59). In the reading of most modern editions from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the meaning has been re-translated and the verb is placed with the second part of the sentence after a colon (Hagstrum, *Sister Arts* 59):

> ut pictura poesis: erit quae, si propius stes
> te capiat magis, et quaedam si longius abstes (Horace, *Ars Poetica* 73 [ll. 361-62])

When we read the first clause, the verb makes Horace's meaning seem more dogmatic than it actually is: "a poem *will be* like a painting" (emphasis is Hagstrum's). When read with the second clause, meaning becomes much looser and more suggestive: "it will sometimes happen that a poem will be like a painting." In the editions of Horace that appeared during the fifteenth and up to the middle of the sixteenth century, the verb was placed in the first clause. Only around the middle of the sixteenth century did the punctuation begin to change. This had no immediate effect upon the reading of the lines and the commentary, probably because the cumulative effects of Renaissance cultural history were much weightier than the position of the full stop, which became more, not less dogmatic (Hagstrum, *Sister Arts* 59-61). John Bender likewise notes the way in which Horace's phrase has been distorted. The import of *Ars Poetica* is that poems, like paintings, vary in mood and type, and that our interest in a good poem is *similar* to our interest in a good picture. Bender translates Horace's Latin phrase to reveal that a poem, like a picture, varies according to the sight of the viewer. Some works strike us more the closer we stand, others look better from further away. Some will be best seen in the shade and others in the light (Bender 7). Ultimately, our appreciation of either art or poetry depends upon the stance and the attitude we take. It is a subjective reaction, entirely dependent upon the mood and perspective of the viewer. This principle is fundamental to the ethos of Spenser and Blake's verse, to its visually allegorical nature.

What bearing does this clearly complicated and variously interpreted notion of *ut pictura poesis* have on Spenser and Blake? As we have seen, both poets are aware of and in many ways play upon the parallels between art and verse. The ability to view their texts verbally, visually and imaginatively has an enormous impact upon the understanding and interpretation of their complex allegorical work. Once the dogmatic interpretation of Horace's phrase during the sixteenth century has been recognised, it is easy to understand why the phrase continued to be interpreted in this way, despite later alterations in punctuation. Following Lessing's attack upon *ut pictura poesis*, there has been much criticism attacking the parallels between pictures and poetry.[235] I feel that regardless of critical recognition of the misinterpretation of this statement, scholars have been overly dismissive of the nature and the useful benefits that this idea has brought to poetical thought.

Rosemond Tuve counterbalances attacks based upon the idea that the Renaissance only adhered to a dogmatic, rather clumsy and unwavering stance upon the notion of *ut pictura poesis*. She acknowledges the assumptions that have grown up around the phase: "it is generally assumed that the injunction 'poetry should be like painting' would lead to ornament-like pigment applied to meanings to decorate them" (*Elizabethan* 50). Tuve argues that we must disentangle *ut pictura poesis* from "word painting."

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[235] Lessing in *Laokoön*, 1766, asserts that the arts are a means of imitation: painting being confined to the representation of objects in space, and poetry to the narration of progressive actions. Lessing argued that descriptive poetry was not necessarily poetic (Bender 14-15).

> When we recognise the demand for expressiveness that lay behind their [the poets'] demand for lifelikeness, and remember the parallel demand for significant abstractions portrayed through the vivid concretions in a poem, it does not seem to me that we can think of *ut pictura poesis* as inducing either decorative or appliquéd images. *Ut pictura poesis* emphasised the 'individual frame of reference' which characterises both those arts, and it emphasised graphic liveliness in poetry when that was proper to the poet's ends. … It is possible that the Elizabethan 'decorative' image, mere 'separable' ornament, is a reader's rather than a writer's phenomenon, and that it is the child not of *ut pictura poesis* but of nineteenth century expectations and of twentieth century rebellion against them. (Tuve, *Elizabethan* 60)

Poets of the Renaissance perceived *ut pictura poesis* as being more subtle and complex than we today, who have experienced the phenomenon of naturalism. Instead of the rather gaudy impression of "dumb poesy" and the "speaking picture" pulled together to create a bedaubed impression of poetry, Tuve suggests that elements of the artistic in verse were used in sensitive and experimental ways to convey clearer, more lifelike representations of the world. These experiments, like those of modern artists attempting to see and convey the world in fresh and new ways, were not necessarily explicit and simple, but were complex, their meanings implicit.

> Recognition of the incompleteness of explicit statement is … the traditional explanation for the *necessity* of metaphor. This acceptance of the co-operative rather than competitive functioning of statement, metaphor, and graphic detail

> runs straight throughout the period, from the earliest Elizabethans through the Metaphysical poets. Although it depended similarly in all of them upon the unabashed acceptance of clear meanings as poetic subjects, it also prevented *ut pictura poesis* from vulgarising 'a poem' into 'an idea plus a little picture.' (Tuve, *Elizabethan* 58)

The use of *ut pictura poesis* was developed by poets as a means of exploring and describing the phenomena of the world more closely and more accurately. It was not simply a means of depicting poetry in static or emblematic formulations, although this was certainly one aspect of the union of text and image, as seen above. It can hardly be argued that Spenser and Blake use the visual in obvious ways or that meanings supplied by their visual media are in the least bit clear cut or straightforward. Their use of the visual deliberately complicates meanings, making the reader aware of the many ways in which a scene can be viewed and interpreted. This use of visualisation emphasises the allegorical nature of both poets' work in supplying yet another form of discourse – a "Language of Art," as Blake terms it – to the language of the text as a whole.[236]

### The hidden or veiled within the process of unveiling and enlightenment

As Spenser does, Blake uses the gaps within his texts to prompt the reader towards allegorical visualisation and further illumination. Commenting on the Argument in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (plate 2) (see fig. 14), Erdman highlights a "puzzling object, or non-object" being exchanged from hand to hand between a woman in a tree and a girl standing at its foot (*Illuminated Blake* 15). Erdman notes that the article "is manifestly meant to be beyond our ken, an enigma to

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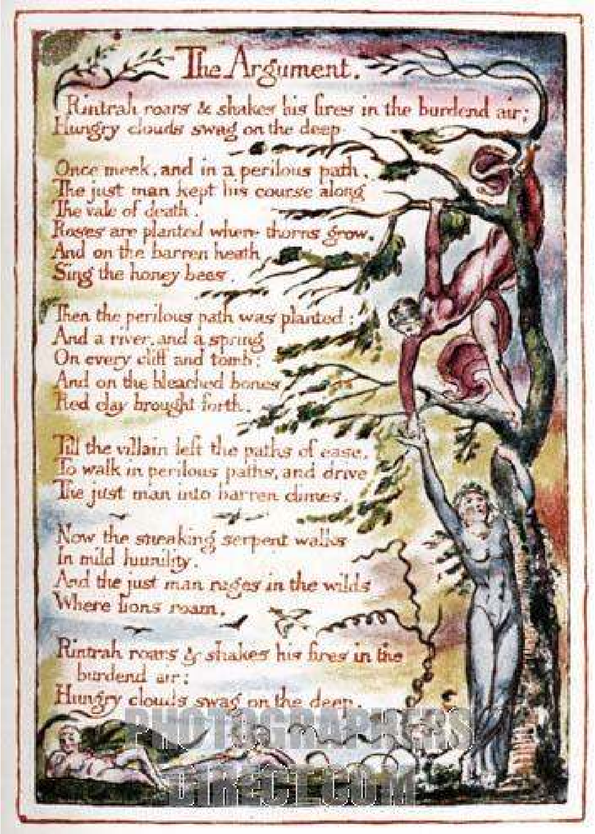
[236] Blake's phrase "Language of Art" comes from annotations to Reynolds (E 636). This phrase can be useful when exploring Blake's illuminations as they can be seen to convey another mode of allegorical "language" when interpreted alongside his verse.



The Argument.

Rintrah roars & shakes his fires in the burdend air;
Hungry clouds swag on the deep

Once meek, and in a perilous path,
The just man kept his course along
The vale of death.
Roses are planted where thorns grow,
And on the barren heath
Sing the honey bees.

Then the perilous path was planted:
And a river, and a spring
On every cliff and tomb;
And on the bleached bones
Red clay brought forth.

Till the villain left the paths of ease,
To walk in perilous paths, and drive
The just man into barren climes.

Now the sneaking serpent walks
In mild humility.
And the just man rages in the wilds
Where lions roam.

Rintrah roars & shakes his fires in the
burdend air;
Hungry clouds swag on the deep.

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Fig. 14 *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. Plate 2, by William Blake
Morgan Library and Museum

tempt or test us" (*Illuminated Blake* 15). The reader strives to be able to see or recognise the item. Erdman ponders whether it is a bunch of grapes, a package, or a bird's nest, before concluding that had he wished, Blake would have shown us what it was: "in nearly every copy this detail is retouched or repainted – to keep us from seeing" (*Illuminated Blake* 15). While they illuminate, Blake's pictorial details also mystify, prompting readers to focus upon their own senses and means of interpretation in order to read the text. Like Spenser's reflective mirror-like glimpses of the visual, Blake is inviting his readers actively and creatively to use their minds to seek to know what is hidden. His hiding of this object within the illustration shows readers that they still have much to learn, and without mental engagement reader illumination is not possible. Blake's texts guide readers, taking them on an allegorical journey intended to inspire their senses to new forms of visualisation.

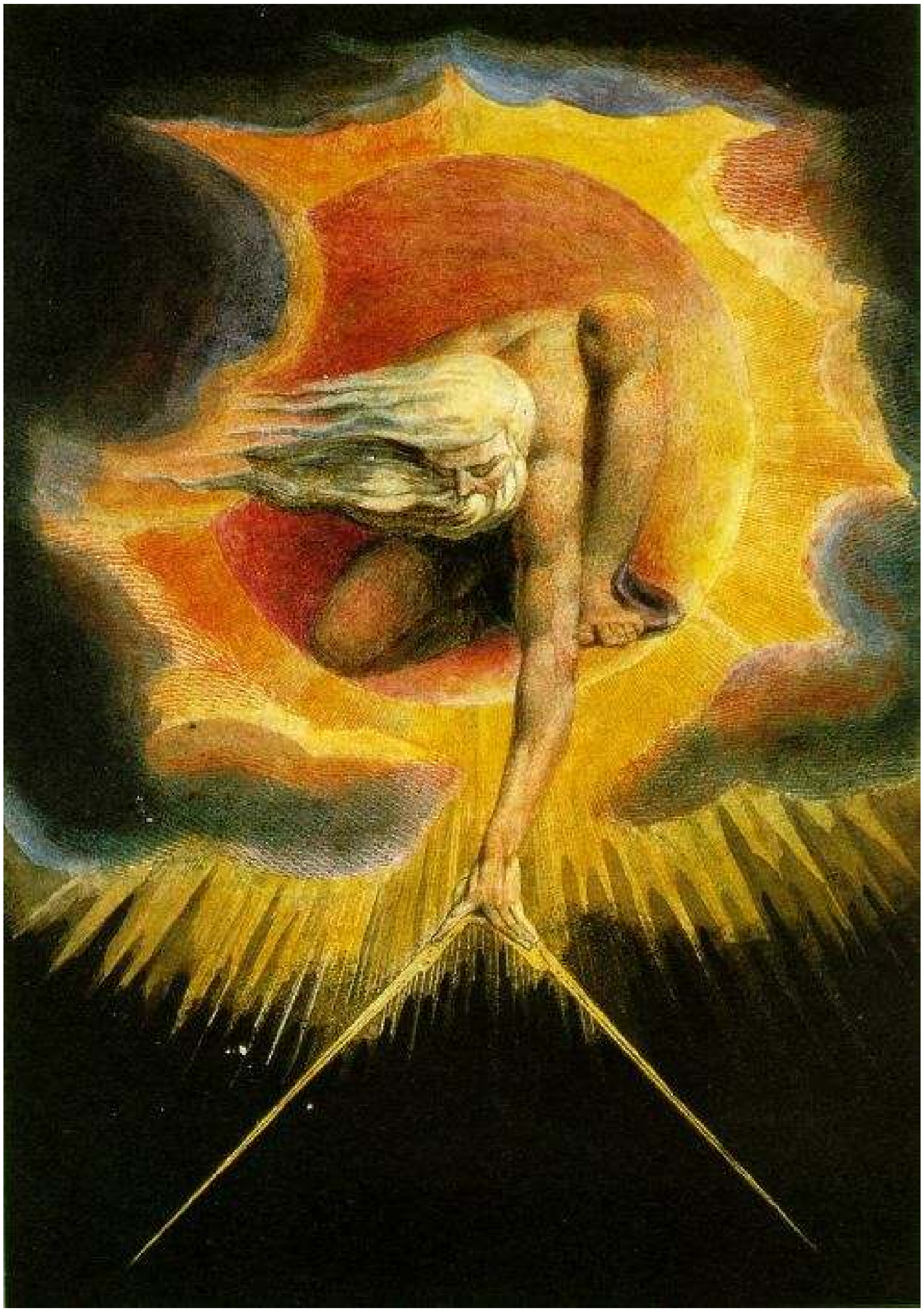

Fig. 15 The frontispiece to *Europe a Prophecy*, by William Blake, by permission of the University of Glasgow Library, Department of Special Collections

One such journey towards allegorical visualisation is conveyed in the illuminated frontispiece to *Europe: A Prophecy* (see fig. 15). In this image meaning is densely compounded. Here we are presented with one of the most famous of Blake's textual illuminations. A bearded man seemingly sitting in the circumference of the sun bends down with a pair of compasses to measure the region below. Inspiration for the scene probably came from Milton's *Paradise Lost*, when the Son of God "took the golden Compasses" to measure the universe and its creatures, "One foot he centred, and the other turn'd" (*PL* 7.224-28) (Erdman, *Illuminated Blake* 155). The reader therefore assumes that the figure in the picture is Urizen, sitting in characteristic solitude, dividing, measuring and calculating as the god of Reason would. However, the reader has to have had knowledge of *The Book of Urizen* to appreciate this characterisation, especially as the frontispiece comes before any introductory text in *Europe*. Here we realise Blake's developmental use of characterisation, images and meaning as he creates his poems, and thus the reader's ever expanding armoury of allegorical knowledge and experience as she/he progresses through Blake's texts. As we have noted before in Spenser, Blake builds upon words and images, carrying them forward laterally as nodules of allegorical meaning that gather pace as the text progresses. This I will return to in a moment. For the time being, we must concentrate on the main character "circumferencing" time and space. While he is Urizen, he has links to the "the Almighty" of *Paradise Lost*, to the God who created the world, the God who is not merely authoritarian and wrathful but also loving towards his only son.[237] Not only this, but Urizen's identity is further complicated by his use of the compasses and his association with men of science such as Newton. *The Book of Urizen* is the alternative Genesis story. Instead of advocating creation, it emphasises the outbreak of stale conformity and earthbound rigidity and confinement. Urizen is seen attempting to divide, segregate and categorise all matter, thus restricting it to particular functions. His creation is debilitating. This Blake also saw reflected in the work of men of science, men who promoted the sort of "Reason" he associated with Urizen and thus despised. Newton in particular was singled out for his calculating compartmentalisation of matter, which Blake viewed as being too restrictive. Blake saw scientists as truth's jailors, encouraging "destruction" and "Torture"; these "Frozen Sons" were "Bacon, Newton & Locke" (*J* 66.10-13). Thus, only through careful and diligent readings of the text, being mindful of its compacted allegorical revelations, are we given a full illustration of Blake's Urizen and his Godlike and Newton-like powers upon the world.

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[237] See *Paradise Lost* 7.136-528: God creating the world out of chaos. This long passage within the poem conveys both the loving and authoritarian presence of Milton's God, with whom Blake's Urizen shares common elements. Compare the language and imagery from the *Book of Urizen* with extracts from *Paradise Lost*: "thus the Earth, / Matter unformed and void: darkness profound / Covered the abyss: but on the watery calm / His brooding wings the spirit of God outspread… Throughout the fluid mass, but downward purged / The black tartareous cold infernal dregs / Adverse to life: then founded, then conglobed… And earth self balanced on her centre hung." (*PL* 7.232-42)

This explanation would not be possible without analysis of both the text and the illustration. Blake requires his reader's "fourfold" use of interpretation which includes bringing together imagination and sensory perceptions in order to analyse the image and the text, as well as being aware of what has come before in other works. However, there is one area still left to cover. Blake, like Spenser, was deeply aware of the ways in which his texts could be read. This is reflected in his self-conscious representations. The image of a Urizenic God is also suggestive of the powers of the poet. As Erdman states, "the artist is not outside the picture but in its core" (*Illuminated Blake* 156). Despite his abhorrence of the rationalism that sought to contain, calculate and quantify all, Blake is highly aware that in his writing and illustrating, he himself is attempting to qualify and describe his world in presenting it to his reader. The pointed compasses could well be converted to the sharp tools of engraving designed to etch into copperplate and thus produce a template from which Blake may be able to print his texts. Blake too uses lines to delineate. From here, the

Urizenic figure is transformed into an image of Los, a reflection of the poet, attempting to create from surrounding darkness and chaos.[238] His bright sun-like radiance contrasts with the usually cold, wintry greyness associated with Urizen. He can be seen to be a centre for hope and creative energy. As Los in *Jerusalem* says,

> I must Create a System, or be enslav'd by another Mans
> I will not Reason & Compare: my business is to Create (*J* 10.20-21)

The figure on the frontispiece to *Europe* promotes many interpretations. It refers not only to the immediate poem, but to other works from *Urizen* to *Jerusalem*, and calls to mind the figure of the Artist at the centre of Blake's panel depicting the *Characters of Spenser's* Faerie Queene (fig. 4 on page 27), illustrating the cumulative and expansive effect of Blake's creative allegory.

Other images that recur throughout Blake's verse and flow laterally are the sun and globe-like symbols, images which build upon and embellish substance and meaning. We have already seen a sun-like disc in the frontispiece to *Europe*, encircling the Urizenic figure, its beams spreading outwards, attempting to break up the clouds surrounding it. It can also be seen as a space, an enclosed globe or bubble in which Urizen sits and shuts himself away from the darkness below. The globe shifts from being life-giving to becoming a stifling constrictive place which shapes Urizen's narrow viewpoints and from which he makes his decisions. He thus imposes upon the earthly space below the conditions of the only realm he is familiar with. In some illustrations of the frontispiece, the sun itself is ominously dark, blood red in places. It is a disc radiating Urizen's will towards conformity and containment rather than life-generating beams of natural sunlight. Blake's careful use of colour and detail alerts the reader to other possibilities beyond the superficial. He is encouraging readers to forget the usual associations that accompany common symbols and attempt to see the image from a different perspective. In so doing, Blake is providing his viewers with tools to enable the comprehension of a new allegorical language of word and image.

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[238] For an image of creation within chaos see *Paradise Lost* 1.19-26. The hopeful energetic tone of this passage compliments the creative imaginative intentions of Blake's Los.

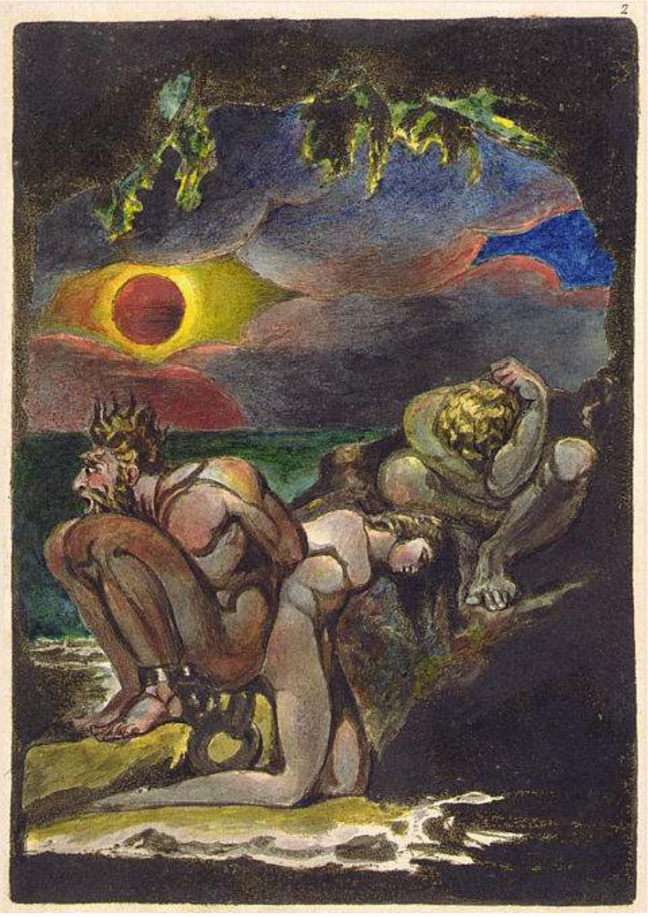

Fig. 16 *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*. Plate 2, by William Blake
Houghton Library, Harvard

The illustration of the sun peeping through clouds recurs in plate 2 of *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (see fig. 16). Again, the sun is a dark ruddy orange colour, lighting up the scene in a cave where three naked figures are crouching in torment and despair. The female, Oothoon, is bound back to back with her captor Bromion while her lover Theotormon holds his head in his arms in broken grief and shame. If we return to look at the sun in the background, we may see a human face in the sky. The sun shines from an eye-like opening in the clouds, while in many copies another break in the clouds to the right of the picture reveals a second "eye" of blue, suggesting that a face is looking angrily back at us.[239] Erdman even proposes that the straggling clusters of leaves that hang from the roof of the cave above the figures resemble locks of hair (*Illuminated Blake* 125). Blake is offering multiple perspectives to his reader: those of the figures within the scene, those of the all-seeing sun-like eye, that of the self-conscious artist, profoundly aware of his work, and that of the viewer being stared back at through the text.[240] Upon discovering such a fiercely staring eye, we are taken aback. Eyes are traditionally seen as windows into the soul and in glimpsing this gazing eye, the reader is given an insight into the essence of Blake's poetry. It is as if Blake, while scrutinising himself through his text, is also peering at us, making sure that we are reading attentively. It is as if he is watching us from afar, a diligent teacher overseeing our studies and prompting us towards greater understanding. Like Spenser's self-conscious texts, Blake's work often acts as a mirror, reflecting meaning back upon the viewer and asking us to make sense of his work, rather than actively telling us what to think.

The globe-like sun is represented in diverse ways in Blake's texts. It appears twice in *The Song of Los*. Firstly, as a mottled, potted site, increasingly dark while struggling to radiate some light in the frontispiece (fig. 17), worshipped and prayed to by a figure bowing before a stone alter, whom Erdman tells us is Urizen (*Illuminated Blake* 174). It again appears in the final plate of the poem (plate 8) (fig. 18), now strongly radiating beams in warm, red splendour, looked upon by Los who leans upon his hammer. Los's eyes are drawn and fatigued as if he has just been labouring intensely to finish the sun. Here Blake is again making lateral connections and calling

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[239] This second blue "eye" is perhaps blind as it has no iris or centre for seeing.

[240] For more on the use of eyes and on the activity of "gazing" see: Krier, *Gazing on Secret Sights: Spenser, Classical Imitation, and the Decorums of Vision*, especially chapters 2-5.

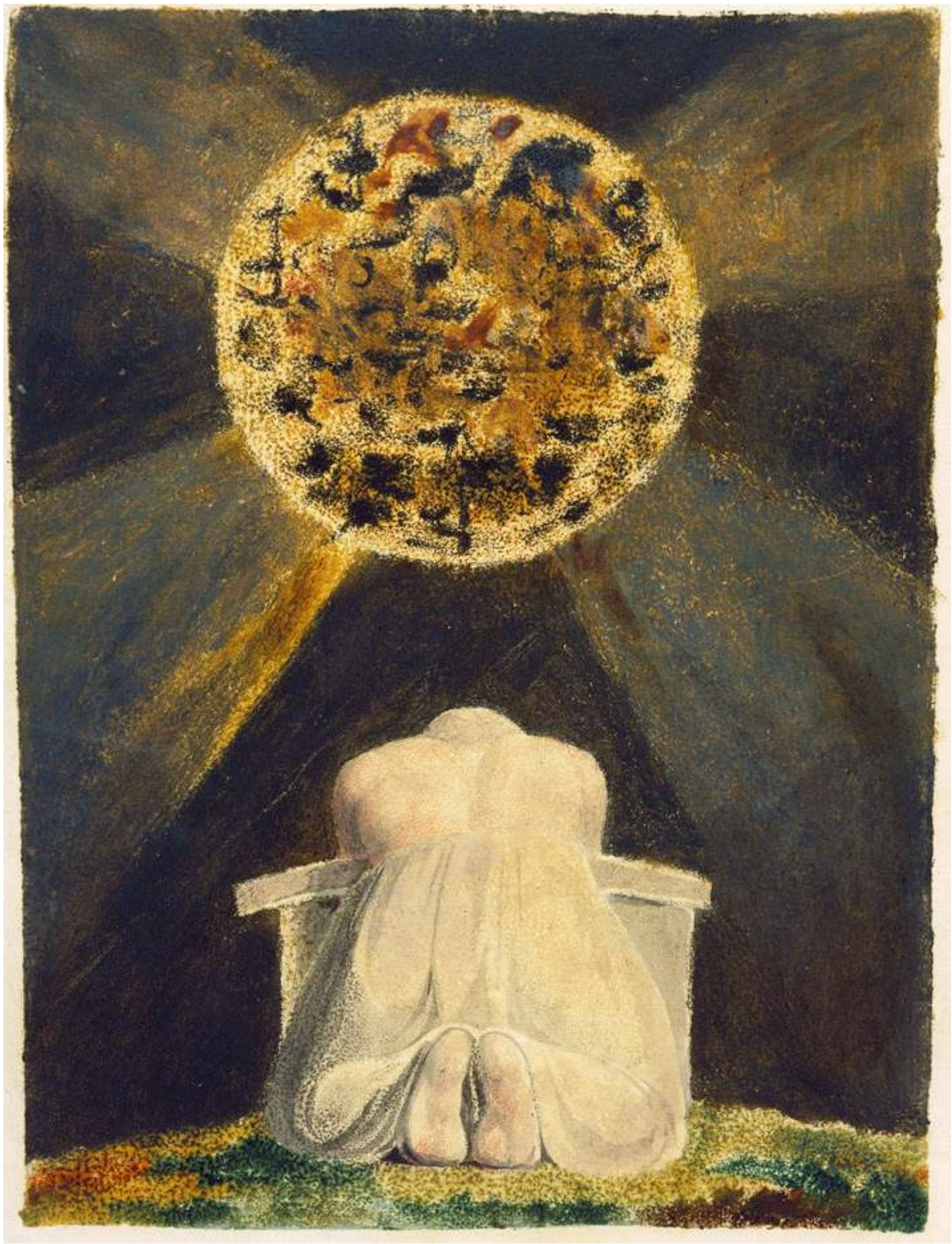

Fig. 17 The frontispiece to *The Song of Los*, by William Blake
British Museum, London. ©The Trustees of the British Museum

for his readers to compare the first image in the *Song* with the final image. The reader is encouraged to see the contrast in the two plates between the darkening, cold and restrictive rule of Urizen, and the energetic and creative workings of Los. Los is battling against the dampening forces of Urizenic codes of law, religion and science. Again, the final image reflects Blake's own intellectual and physical industry. He, like

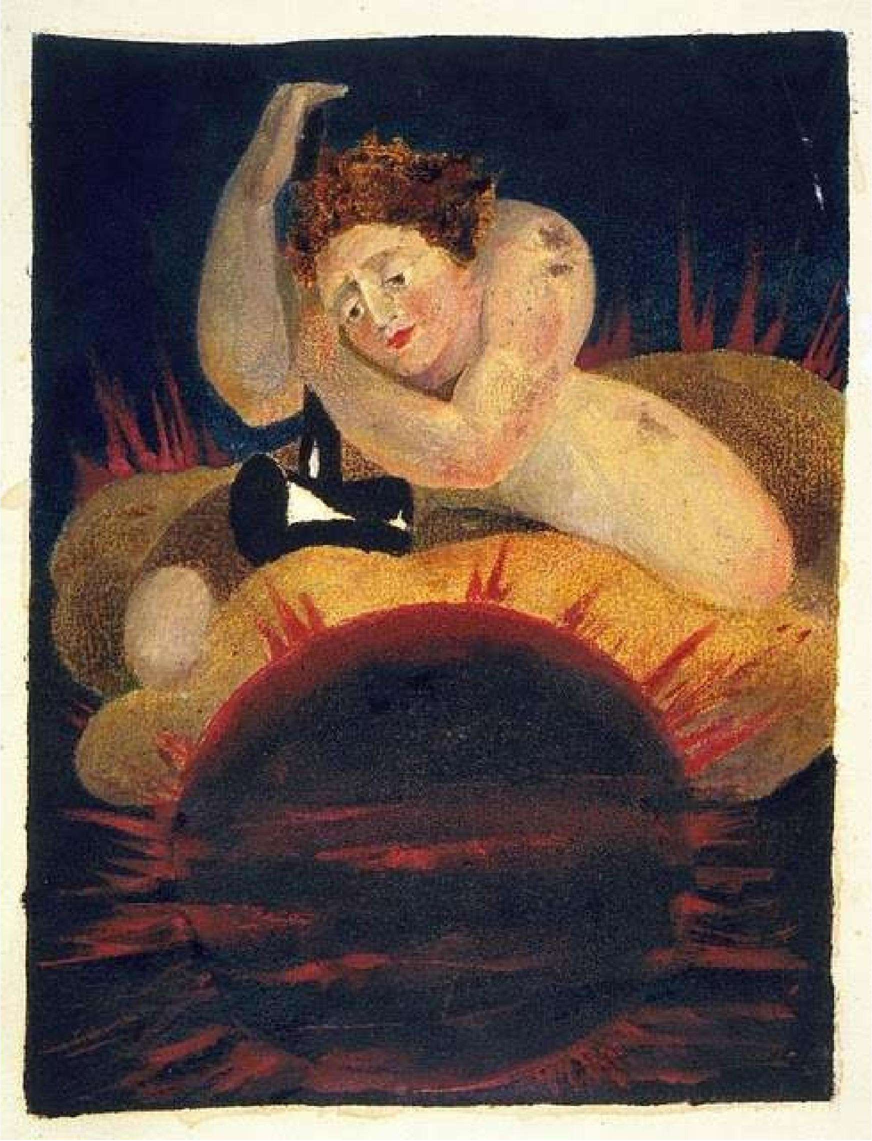

Fig. 18 *The Song of Los*. Plate 8, by William Blake
British Museum, London. ©The Trustees of the British Museum

Los, works skilfully with tools to hammer and forge words and images during the engraving process, thus creating illuminated ways of seeing and reading. If we look closely at plate 8 (fig. 18), the beams of sunlight radiate beyond the clouds upon which Los rests. This radiant piercing of cloud highlights the extent to which vision can transcend and overcome darkness. Instead of the depressed state of Urizen, Blake urges his readers to see that with imagination, hard work and diligence, everyone may be able to grasp forms of visualisation or allegorical illumination.

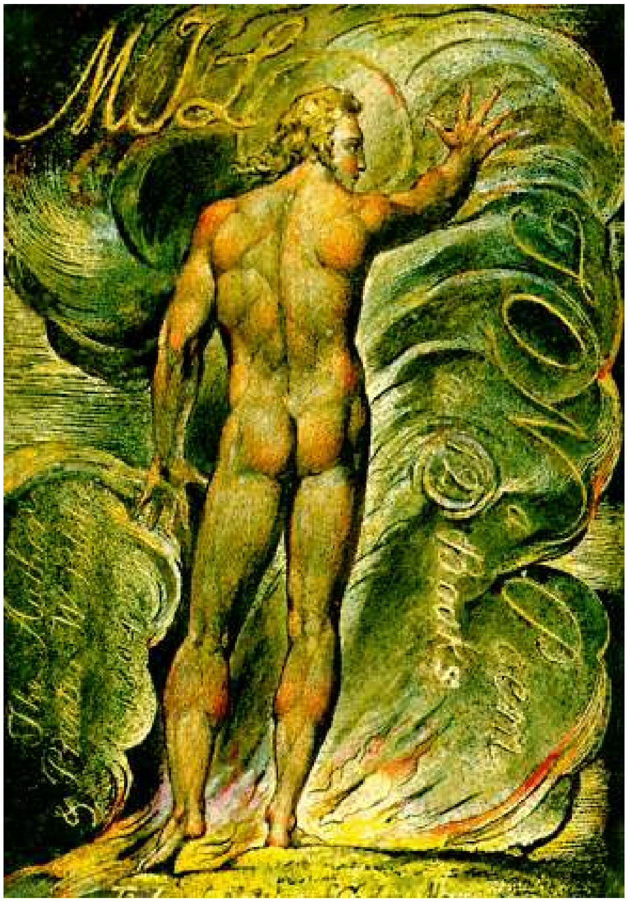

Fig. 19 The frontispiece to *Milton A Poem*, by William Blake
New York Public Library

As with images such as the sun, there are marked parallels between various plates in different poems which call the reader to compare and analyse them. Blake's lateral allegory is not confined within single poems. Like the sun, it is expansive, transcending the seeming boundaries of individual texts to show that Blake's world is one and the same and that the poems are pieces that make up the huge map of Blake's dense and complex and mythological globe.[241] One prominent example is the likeness between the frontispiece to *Milton* and the poem *Jerusalem* (see fig. 19 and 20). Comparing the two characters in these images, we first note that their stance is similar; both individuals are in the process of moving forward, one hand outstretched, opening a door, or pushing through billowing clouds, smoke or a storm, as in the case of *Milton*. Both figures are travellers on a journey, like Spenser's questing knights, enticing the reader to enter into their world and follow them. Yet there are many contrasts between the two images. In *Milton*, the form is naked, exposed to the challenging elements surrounding him. He pushes through the centre of his name, dividing it exactly into two: "MIL / TON" (Erdman, *Illuminated Blake* 217).[242] This presentation is highly suggestive of the nature of the poem as a whole. The figure is shown to be searching for and rediscovering the essence of his identity. The breaking up of his name highlights the ways in which Milton will be deconstructed, looked at in a different light and constructed anew. The poem is based upon Milton's voyage towards greater and more enlightened viewpoints, while inspiring those along his journey, such as Blake and Los. The frontispiece shows the character of Milton to be vulnerable in his nakedness, observed and judged by outsiders, but ever determined to shift perspectives upon his identity, to convey his name in full, and thus ally himself with the great poets in bestowing poetical and imaginative inspiration to his readers.

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[241] See Quilligan, *Language* 33-36, 227 concerning lateral allegorical flow in Spenser's text.

The figure in *Jerusalem*, in contrast, is fully clothed. He wears a traveller's hat and cloak, paralleling that worn by the journeying man in *Gates of Paradise* 14 (Erdman, *Illuminated Blake* 281). Instead of walking out into an untamed wilderness, as in *Milton*, this traveller is stepping across a threshold, the doorway of which frames him. Erdman associates this figure with Los (280). The figure carries a glowing lamp or sphere of light which could relate to Los's burning creative energy as discussed

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[242] See my discussion on Blake's division of the word "met-als" in chapter two.

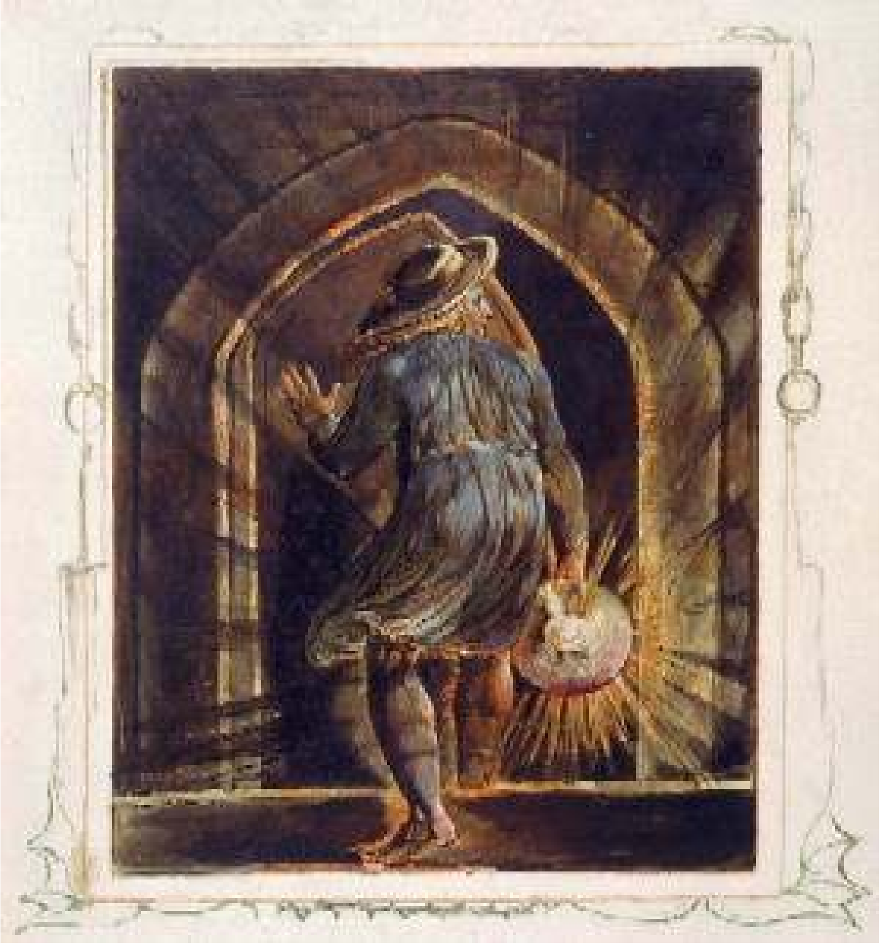

Fig. 20 The frontispiece to *Jerusalem*, by William Blake
Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection

above in plate 8 of the *Song of Los*. The impression is that the figure is carrying light to dark places. We do not know what is behind the door, and Blake deliberately does not show us. We are made to imagine, to ponder the scene that Los sees. In not providing us with all the answers, Blake is attempting to keep his readers open-minded. Has Los seen Jerusalem, Vala, or the languishing landscape of Albion? Has he just walked through Death's Door and seen mysteries that only await us when we die? Is he entering Hell? Or, as text that accompanied original copies of this picture, and which in subsequent copies has been erased, is the traveller about to step into the dark "Void, outside of Existence"? (Erdman, *Illuminated Blake* 280; Keynes, "New Lines" 115-21). Blake gives us no clear answers. Both figures are seen entering dark and unknown spaces. Both show an awareness of the challenges that lie before them. Los brings a lamp in order to illuminate scenes as he passes by, to spread and share enlightenment. Both frontispieces reflect upon the complexity of the poems, the realms in which readers, like both the heroes, are about to step into. They are guiding figures and didactic warnings to the reader of the dense intricacy of the poems and the extent to which patience, attention to detail, and imagination are vital to the comprehension of the complex flow of the text and its meanings.

As represented by the figures in the opening plates of *Milton* and *Jerusalem*, Blake's allegory presents as many seeming obstructions as it does revelations towards the understanding of each poem's meaning. As noted above, critics have often commentated that certain images placed at particular moments in a poem do not relate to the illustration beside them (Frye, "Poetry and Design" 36-37; Erdman, *Illuminated Blake* 13; Makdisi, *Impossible* 163). I would argue that this function is deliberate. Blake's work, like Spenser's, is unconventionally didactic. Blake urges readers to draw upon everything they have seen and learnt while reading his texts in order to recognise characters and comprehend the nuanced meanings conveyed by the images. He pushes viewers to make their own connections, to read laterally in order to make sense of the verse that comes before and after a scene. His pictures are tools to jog readers, encouraging them to pause and take another look. They are didactic markers pointing towards alternative readings, signposts to those who find his verse particularly difficult. Using his illustrations, Blake encourages readers to use not only their eyes but also their interpretive capacities to imagine his visual scenes. He is fusing word and image with the senses and the imagination in order to generate a multidimensional vision. He therefore requires his readers to work just as hard – to use all their mental capacities to join with him in realising this fourfold vision.

## Blake and Spenser's "fourfold vision"

As discussed at the start of this thesis and developed through investigations into the text, the reader, the imagination and the visual, Blake's work encourages his reader towards fourfold vision and thus an awareness of the complexity of creation. Another way of looking at Blake's notion of the "fourfold" is to look at the important function of human senses, thoughts and responses. W.J.T. Mitchell highlights the extent to which the senses and sensory openings are important when reading Blake ("Style as Epistemology" 155). He argues that Blake's language provides "a way of reading the pictures in relation to one another, as cumulative moments in a visionary exploration of the perceptual world" ("Style" 163). When one looks at Blake's images, it is important to note the extent to which human senses are embellished. Plate 6 in *The Book of Urizen* shows a body tormented by the heat of flames, his mouth open to express a howl, his eyes bulging with horror, his hair on end. The very physicality of Blake's illustrations draws the reader into a world of tactile senses and emotions. Blake emphasises the extent to which the senses play a part in the way readers comprehend the poems. The process of reading is as allegorical as the text itself. Blake's verse is an exploration of all the sensory, emotional and intellectual phenomena that can be rendered in pictorial form (Mitchell, "Style" 163). Using dramatic images, such as the frontispiece of bound torment in the *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, Blake encourages an active response from his readers. Yet this response is continually checked and monitored, as highlighted by the angry peering eye which looks directly back at viewers as they analyse this powerful illustration (fig. 16 on page 355). The image calls for our engagement while prompting us constantly to pause and check that we are using all our senses and abilities to read, in

Spenser's words, "rightly" (*FQ* 5.9.26).[243] The more agile, attuned and flexible the reader's response to the text, the more profoundly he or she will be able to see and read its allegorical language.

Yet, truly to experience Blake's allegorical sense of "fourfold vision," the reader, like the traveller in *Jerusalem*, has to be comfortable engaging with elements of the unknown. As suggested above when discussing Spenser's visual depictions, an appreciation of uncertainty is necessary to reader interpretation. Both Spenser and Blake at times deliberately avoid conveying full descriptions or images of creatures and scenes. Much is left to challenge the reader's imagination. Thus, we can only guess at how the Blatant Beast will look, and as to what is lurking behind the door to the frontispiece to *Jerusalem*. We have to ponder and debate what exactly has passed between the couple in the Argument opening *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. These are deliberate obscurities that engage the reader's analytic imagination. Self-conscious, mirror-like glimpses make up the allegorical texture of both poets' verse. Spenser and Blake encourage readers to recognise the multiple allegorical implications of what they are reading. Profound meaning may come in the violent form of the Blatant Beast's slanders or in the imposing darkness beyond the door to *Jerusalem*. It may be in the space or gap between *MIL – TON*'s name, or caught within Redcross's glimpsed account of *Hierusalem* upon Mount Contemplation. It is something that can be revealed, as it is through the pages of *Jerusalem*, or it may remain forever hidden, as represented by the unidentifiable object passed between two young girls in *The Marriage*.[244]

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[243] I wish to stress that there is no "correct" or "incorrect," "right" or "wrong" reading in Spenser and Blake's work. What one retrieves in terms of meaning from these texts depends, of course, on the level of reader engagement. Likewise, I do not wish to over-emphasise Blake's didacticism. Blake is an unconventional "teacher." I feel his texts do not *tell* readers what to think, but rather guide them to alternative ways of looking at verse. The same can be said for Spenser, who, again, never tells readers how to read the poem, but rather encourages them to read it for themselves in order to understand the potential mistakes made by mis-reading.

Just as the complex, dark or unknown is fundamental to allegory (MacCaffrey, *Spenser's Allegory* 39-40), so it is vital to each reader's textual exploration of Spenser and Blake's verse. It is a form of opportunity as well as a potential menace. It is an important and necessary aspect of vision and understanding in both Blake and Spenser's work. Janet Warner has commented on the carefully maintained ambiguity of Blake's images, arguing that many seem to be deliberately ambivalent. Like Spenser, Blake realises that readers must potentially err in order to perceive and learn from readerly mistakes (Warner 24).

> Blake was always aware of the paradox that we are prisoners of form even though the line the artist draws upon chaos is his deliverance. Blake's solution was his conviction that the line must be made to work for man, as well as delineating his fallen form, hence his system of using the same visual image with either a regenerate or a fallen meaning, depending on the context of his writing. (Warner 21)[245]

Warner's theory can be seen in Blake's use of imagery surrounding the garment, which is depicted as being both a fallen and a resurrected symbol.[246] In *Jerusalem*, the female looms seem to denote a terrifying conformity to the bound and repressed human body.

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[244] Auerbach's first chapter in *Mimesis* comments on what is known and unknown when comparing *The Odyssey* with the Bible. Whereas *The Odyssey* explains every detail, the Bible leaves gaps between timeframes, sections that are not completely described. The Bible calls for interpretation, whereas the tidy plotline of *The Odyssey* leaves nothing a mystery and prevents reader intervention (3-49). The reader, therefore, is actively engaged in investigating biblical mysteries and the Bible encourages this process of readerly interpretation. It is possible that Spenser and Blake learned of this process of readerly textual engagement from the Bible.

[245] Warner's argument is also noted by Frye when discussing the Bible: "each apocalyptic or idealised image in the Bible has a demonic counterpart." Frye emphasises the good and diabolical inherent in most biblical images which add to the complexity of reading the Bible (*Great Code* 143-49). Biblical ambivalence would have undoubtedly been a source for Blake's poetry.

[246] For a discussion and explanation of the contradictory nature of the garment, see Morton D. Paley "The Figure of the Garment in *The Four Zoas*, *Milton* and *Jerusalem*" 119-39. Also, James Riegar, "'The Hem of Their Garments': The Bard's Song in *Milton*" 259-80.

> Daughters of Albion, your hymning chorus mildly!
> Cord of affection thrilling extatic on the iron Reel:
> To the golden Loom of Love! to the moth-labourd Woof
> A Garment and Cradle weaving for the infantine Terror
> For Fear; at entering the gate into our World of cruel
> Lamentation (*J* 56.11-15)

In this passage, Los is calling to the Daughters of Albion to make a garment of flesh that no un-born soul will be willing to enter into. Here, the "weaving" of the "garment," combined with the "iron Reel" of the spinning wheel, creates an impression of instruments of torture and confinement: a straightjacket and a rack upon which to stretch and break the body. The "Loom of Love" is one of terror and death. As soon as we are born into our human garments of skin and flesh, we are confined upon the earth and set upon a journey to death.[247] Here we see the ambiguity most clearly in the term "garment." It does not simply refer to clothing which may confine or hide the body, it is also the body itself and it shields and houses the brain and the human soul. From this point of view, the naked body is not necessarily a foil or opposite to the "garment"; it is another form of "garment" in itself. Within such a definition, the body is therefore as creatively energetic as it is constricted and confined. It is interesting to note that in many of Blake's illuminations, the depiction of clothing is sheer and fine, and that often we may glimpse the body beneath these costumes.[248] Blake is suggesting that the ultimate "garment" is the human body, and that no amount of woven material may hide it.

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[247] See Gen. 3.21: God makes clothes for Adam and Eve, marking his care and love of them, but the action also reflects their new sense of shame and their fall. Clothes are therefore seen as ambivalent in both a biblical and a Blakean context. The same conclusion may be drawn from Spenser's ambivalent depictions of Arthur and Duessa's finery (a topic discussed in the afterword below).

As seen by Los's words above, it is our attitude to this "garment" which is most important. Blake's images glorify the human body in all its strength and beauty. It is most free when unadorned and unrestricted. However, this interpretation of the "garment" struck fear into those who sought to shield and hide human physicality. Blake despised the "Veil of Moral Virtue, woven for Cruel Laws," which was so admired by the society of his day. This veil is shown upon Vala (*J* 23.22, 21.50). It is her tool, like Duessa's, for tricking and deceiving Albion into believing that she is indeed virtuous. This deceitful veiling of the true self is what Blake sought to highlight and condemn. He desired the pure, unadulterated "garment" of the human body to be glorified, and its codification and confinement to be seen as sinful and wrong. Blake was reversing the standard principles held by society, asking his readers to see civilised codes from alternative perspectives.[249] Ultimately, Blake's ambiguity stresses the extent to which the reader has to develop new ways of viewing the text and its images, and be prepared to be integrated into a new language of communication and understanding, an allegorical language of alternative possibilities.

## Turning full circle: The textual-imagistic nature of Blake's work

W.T.J. Mitchell has noted that Blake's linear patterns form a kind of "code," arguing that the cumulative effect of his illuminations is to suggest a whole system of figural correspondences and transformations. Mitchell has developed four principles which he feels define Blake's "curvilinear" forms ("Style" 156-57). There is the S curve or arabesque which is represented in waves, flames, leaves, vines and serpents, or by dancing, flying, climbing or leaping figures. There is the spiral or vortex form, which is expressed in whirlwind, whirlpool, or scroll-like forms. There is also the circle or the globe (O) which is represented by the sun, shell, moon, wheel, halo or bubble, and finally there is the rounded Romanesque arch (U/n), which is suggested by caves, arbours, arches, gateways, tablets and gravestones (Mitchell, "Style" 157).[250] Mitchell notes the extent to which Blake builds a cumulative language that is at once visual and linguistic, and analyses the degree to which it is designed to impact upon the reader on both levels to create an almost tactile language of image and word. While Mitchell's argument emphasises the parallels between recurring images in Blake's illustrations and letters of the alphabet, I am wary of this way of looking at Blake's work, as it suggests a totalising system or "code." Blake's illustrations may have deliberately or self-consciously paralleled the curves and forms of written words, as suggested earlier in this chapter, but I doubt he did this according to a designated system of neatly corresponding meanings. Having said this, Blake's images are reliant upon language in order to be fully understood. His visual world is not designed to be read apart from the text. Mitchell's findings reinforce this point. Linguistics strain into illuminations, just as illumination is woven into the written text (as is the case for *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, *Milton*, and *Jerusalem*). Blake is encouraging his reader both to read and see, to observe and make connections in order to understand his unique allegorical language.[251] The four forms defined by Mitchell can again be related to the Four Zoas and the extent to which the reader has to use "fourfold vision" in order to appreciate the messages woven within Blake's works.[252] Here, to use Milton's terminology, Blake and Spenser require a "fit audience," trained and therefore capable of reading carefully and diligently.

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[248] See *Jerusalem* 92; the frontispiece to both the *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*; dancing figures in the title page to *Thel*; and plate 4 of *Thel* for a few instances which show the naked body clearly beneath garments, to the extent that the reader may wonder if garments are there at all.

[249] This point relates to issues raised in chapter three concerning Spenser and Blake's relation to the dominant culture of their respective eras. Whereas Blake calls attention to his own anti-conventionalism, Spenser seems to accept convention while querying it.

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[250] See "Style as Epistemology: Blake and the Movement toward Abstraction in Romantic Art" 157 for a complete table detailing the characteristics and principles of Mitchell's curvilinear forms. Many of these shapes can be seen in Blake's artwork (refer to copies of Blake's illustrations included in this thesis).

It is not only Mitchell who notes the extent to which Blake relies upon textual pointers. Christopher Heppner remarks that Blake felt an increasingly strong urge to specify meanings verbally as the years passed (64). Heppner cites the example of his alterations to *The Gates of Paradise*, changing its title from *For the Children* to *For the Sexes* in the early nineteenth century (Heppner 65). This alternative title shifts the way in which we perceive the poem and its images. We move from viewing the poem from a child's viewpoint to seeing the differing perspectives from a male and a female stance. Heppner is correct in stating that by the alteration or addition of a line, the interpretation of the whole image or poem is altered. Yet Heppner's argument does not take into account such anomalies as Blake's erasure of the words surrounding the frontispiece to *Jerusalem*.[253] These words exist in a few of the earliest copies and disappear in later prints (Keynes, "New Lines" 115-21), suggesting that in this instance, Blake found the words unnecessary and felt that the image itself was strong enough to convey meaning to the reader without any textual addition. Here, we must be careful not to generalise about Blake. As Blake himself said, to generalise is to be an idiot. While taking into account the lateral flow of Blake's allegory, the reader must also analyse each word and image on its own terms.

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[251] Blake's emphasis upon reading may be compared with Spenser's awareness of the many connotations surrounding the verb *to read* in the early modern period, discussed in chapter two, and displayed by Una's warning: "I read beware" (*FQ* 1.1.13).

[252] The relation to the Four Zoas can be seen to be hinted at in Mitchell as he relates each curvilinear form with a principle which could be associated with each Zoa. For example, the S curve is associated with the tongue, a figure linked to Tharmas. For more on the Four Zoas and Tharmas see Foster Damon, *A Blake Dictionary* 399, 458-60. The circle or globe could be associated with Urizen and, as seen in the frontispiece to *Europe*, his attempts to circumscribe and define all with mathematical proportion. However, the globe could equally be linked to Los and his light-giving sunshine and visionary illumination. This is where characterisation can be multiple and strict associations break down.

[253] See fig. 20 on page 361. The frontispiece to *Jerusalem* has no writing around it. The earliest copies of this poem reveal eleven lines of verse surrounding the archway through which the traveller steps. See Ostriker 635 (or E 144) to view these lines.

In so doing, Blake, like Spenser, is motivating his reader's mental capacities. Mitchell states:

> Blake's style seems calculated to render or suggest precisely those sensations which a blind viewer could experience. Blake depicts a universe of 'mental things' which he expects us to find inside our own heads, not just in his paintings. Blake's paintings are in a very precise sense for the blind – for those, that is, who have been blinded by an excessive reliance on the purely visual. ("Style" 155)

This comment is not only relevant to Blake's paintings, but to his illuminated verse as well. Mitchell goes on to argue that Blake's style calls upon all our senses in order to comprehend and enter into the text mentally, imaginatively and visually. Perhaps in integrating figural and linguistic forms, Blake is aware that a combination of image and text leads to the greatest understanding of his principles. In this case, he is not so far from Spenser, who uses linguistic forms in order to convey the visual. One aspect that unites both Blake and Spenser is their insistence upon "mental things." Their challenging allegorical language is deliberately designed to appeal to all senses and mental capacities. Just as Blake leads his "blind" readers through the text towards enlightenment, Spenser's expansive language reveals a potentially illuminating realm of vision to those who are patient enough to take time to comprehend the words and to visualise the mental world around them. Both Spenser and Blake's allegorical verse relies upon reader visualisation. Readers have to recognise that they are initially blind at the entrance or gateway to these texts. Meaning is never completely or fully expressed, but is rather conveyed in snatched glimpses and reflections. Readers have to be aware that they will be prone to error and that the self-conscious recognition of misreading is a step towards correction and enlightenment. They have to trust in their mental capacities and in the texts themselves. Some meanings are hidden and others are tentatively revealed. Spenser and Blake encourage readers to catch glances of ultimate vision from a fourfold perspective: this may be revealed in the divinity of the human body or "garment," the complexity of the city of Golgonooza, the final realisation of Una's pure and beautiful truthfulness at the end of Book One, or the ethereal vision of the Graces upon Mount Acidale. With patience, we will be enlightened, and a diverse and complex allegorical world will be opened before our eyes.

## Afterword - Visual Allegory: Arthur's Shield and Albion's Sleep

The Truth must dazzle gradually
Or very man be blind
(Emily Dickinson, "Tell all the Truth but tell it slant")

What Kenneth Gross terms allegory's "veiling and … unveiling" ("Postures of Allegory" 171) gets to the heart of the allegorical workings of Spenser and Blake's poetry. Both poets place their readers in a position in which their allegories

> give form to our wish to know where the mystery sits, where the veil or mirror stands, what a hidden intention amounts to, what others cannot see. They seek to bridge gaps in our experience – between the known and the unknown, the visible and invisible, the human and the divine. (Gross, "Postures of Allegory" 171)

Gross shows how allegory parallels our efforts to learn, to know, to be aware of ourselves and the forms of matter surrounding us. Allegory is fundamental to human existence. We tend to think of it as strange, rigid and formulaic. On the contrary, allegory is inbuilt within the human psyche's need to know, understand and resolve mysteries. Allegory also highlights the inherent challenges of life by illustrating that not all workings can be revealed. It is necessary that some things remain forever hidden, always mysterious. This is important to our never ending struggle for enlightenment. If life were not challenging, there would be no point in attempting to investigate it. Allegory's fine balance between veiling and unveiling is reflective of the processes and mechanisms of life. Allegory assumes that we are continually learning new things and discovering mysteries that tempt our investigation, challenging our "need to know."

With this in mind, I turn in conclusion to explore Arthur's presentation and his shield in Book One of *The Faerie Queene*, which encapsulates the glimpsed, cumulative and self-conscious characteristics of Spenser's visual allegory. The shield is tellingly absent from Blake's depiction of the *Characters in Spenser's* *Faerie Queene* (fig. 4 on page 27). Arthur's representation is one of ambivalence. He appears unnamed and unannounced, his armour "glitterand" and shiny, dotted "like twinkling stars, with stones most pretious rare" (*FQ* 1.7.29). His existence is almost magical, divine. He conveys a concrete presence, one of wealth and stature. Yet, as Gross notes, emblems of royalty, grace and election are mixed with potential traces of falsehood and pride (Gross, *Spenserian Poetics* 132-33). This is especially marked by the precious stone "Shapt like a Ladies head" in the centre of his shield (*FQ* 1.7.30). As well as evoking implicit parallels to Gloriana,[254] it allows the reader to think of the beautiful displays of Duessa and her ultimate betrayal, or the glowing, glittering pride of Lucifera. Without a name, Arthur is yet another potential enemy on Redcross's journey, and Spenser's construction of Arthur's identity requests that the reader be open to this possibility. The description calls upon the reader to visualise the scene and to be aware of the multiple implications suggested by each item when judging Arthur. Spenser is testing us with this shiny display.

Upon Arthur's shield is the crest of a dragon in memory of his father, Uther Pendragon (Gross, *Spenserian Poetics* 134), and yet this dragon functions in relation to the reader in the same way that Blake's angry staring eye works in the frontispiece to *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*. As if alive, the "dreadfull hideous hedd" of the dragon seems to throw "sparckles fiery redd" from its "flaming mouth" and "suddeine horrour to faint hartes did show" (*FQ* 1.7.31). Anyone viewing the shield is overcome with terror at the sight of the dragon as it stares back at the viewer, catching him or her within its fiery glance. Kenneth Gross notes that the etymological root of the word for “dragon” is the Greek word *derkesthai*, meaning “watcher” (*Spenserian Poetics* 134). “He is called ‘the seeing one’ not because he can see particularly well… but because his stare commands attention” (Gross, *Spenserian Poetics* 134). Spenser, like Blake, has set up a complex scene of viewing. Readers along with Spenser’s characters are witnessing the entrance of Arthur, who in turn is viewing them. Added to this, the dragon, or watcher, is steadily staring back, his gaze commanding attention. Here the reader gets a sense of being watched, looked back at by the poet who is testing the reader, seeing if she or he will tread carefully through the passage and make astute judgements. Spenser’s watching dragon is a reflection of the self-conscious nature of allegory. Just as glimpsed images are reflected upon the reader, Spenser’s mirror-like text demands that readers reflect (back) upon the words and visions they see and read. Spenser, like Blake in his use of the angry eye, is attempting to keep the reader alert and attentive to the text. Both poets are guides, teachers, encouraging the progress of their students. Small details can be missed and all details are required to gain cumulative insights into the allegorical vision.

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[254] Arthur, of course, is later linked to Gloriana in terms of his quest and his private feelings (*FQ* 1.9.13-17). This "Ladies head" is another glimpsed reflection of the Queen. Knights usually carried pictures of the Virgin Mary upon their shields but Elizabeth's cult, combined with iconoclastic traces of the Reformation, often replaced this image with one of the Queen herself (Hackett 30-31; Montrose, "Shaping Fantasies" 66).

Arthur’s shield is an allegorical representation of the text as a whole. Using it, Spenser paints a portrait of his own poem; he conveys an *impresa* to his audience and his Queen. The shield is “closely couer’d” so “Ne might of mortall eye be euer seene” (*FQ* 1.7.33). It is veiled due to the “exceeding” brightness of its “glistring ray” that would “prouder lookes subdew” and blind any who gaze upon it (*FQ* 1.7.34-35). It reflects light in a similar way to that of a mirror and like the poem, it can only be momentarily glimpsed. All its bright reflections cannot be taken in at once. It thus requires reader visualisation or interaction in order for its allegorical potential to be understood. While the shield can be compared to Una’s bright goodness, it also holds a sinister magical power. Its light can be debilitating, its power deforming. Spenser illustrates the potent power of the visual both for informing the mind and for misinformation. Images, dangerous objects in sixteenth-century Britain, were powerful tokens of potential delusion. Spenser, using the shield, urges his reader to treat all visual scenes and images with caution and care. All necessarily has to be shielded in order for the viewer to learn and progress, and not to be blinded or deceived. Enlightenment comes from a careful analysis of the veils that cover and shroud illuminating objects.

Blake, likewise, uses the mythical figure of Albion as an allegorical reflection of Britain/England and of humanity as a whole.[255] The character of Albion is a reminder to readers to strip away the superficial and external paraphernalia of selfish materialism and focus upon the process of allegorical visuality as a means of discovering truth and finding enlightenment. There are suggestive parallels between Albion and Arthur. Arthur unites the various plots within Spenser's epic. If some critics are to be believed, he was destined by Spenser to marry the Faery Queen in Book Twelve of the poem (Kouwenhoven 49). Arthur's presence speaks of a strong and deep national and ancient mythology: that of the legend of King Arthur and the notion of perfect kingship (Raine, *Golgonooza* 162). Legend has it that instead of being dead, Arthur is sleeping in a secret cave with his knights surrounding him, waiting for his time to return and restore just rule to his kingdom (Raine, *Golgonooza* 163). The myth of King Arthur is deeply engrained within the English imagination, and Blake depicts his Arthur-figure in the form of the "Giant Albion." In "A Descriptive Catalogue," describing the artwork in his 1809 exhibition, Blake states:

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[255] See *J* 96 for an image of an aged Albion embracing "England."

> The giant Albion, was Patriarch of the Atlantic, he is the Atlas of the Greeks, one of those the Greeks called Titans. The stories of Arthur are the acts of Albion, applied to a Prince of the fifth century, who conquered Europe, and held the Empire of the world in the dark age, which the Romans never again recovered. (E 543)

Blake is referring to the mythical founding of Britain by Albion, who was a Giant son of Poseidon, the Greek god of the sea. Instead of Arthur, Blake uses Albion as an imaginative, mythical and allegorical motivator in his poetry. Not a prince, but a "Giant,"[256] he is not just representative of a lost age, he is figurative of the geographical and imaginative space of Britain itself.

> Then Albion rose up in the Night of Beulah on his Couch
> Of dread repose seen by the visionary eye; his face is toward
> The east, toward Jerusalems Gates: groaning he sat above
> His rocks. London & Bath & Legions & Edinburgh
> Are the four pillars of his Throne; his left foot near London
> Covers the shades of Tyburn: his instep from Windsor
> To Primrose Hill stretching to Highgate & Holloway…
> ………………………………………………………
> His right foot stretches to the sea on Dover cliffs, his heel
> On Canterburys ruins; his right hand covers lofty Wales
> His left Scotland; …
> ……………………….....................................................

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[256] Interestingly, when comparing the Giants of *The Faerie Queene*, we may note that Orgoglio, the Egalitarian Giant, Grantorto, and even large serpent creatures, such as the Dragon and Error, are all destructive characters, filled with pride. Blake's "Giant" is representative of the large proportion of the human population – those who think they are powerless and have no voice, those bound to apathy. Blake is again taking a conventional role and reversing its connotations. Instead of being a force for destruction, the "Giant Albion" is a constructive force of enlightenment and truth.

…………….………………………………his right elbow

Leans on the Rocks of Erins Land, Ireland ancient nation (M 39.32-45)

Blake allegorically represents an alternative form of national identity, uniquely bound to the literal and imaginative landscape of Britain. The mythical is combined with actual places, encouraging readers to re-imagine that which familiarity has made invisible. Albion, resting upon the landscape of the United Kingdom, calls to mind the propaganda and ideology of Elizabeth I, who in the Ditchley Portrait stands upon England's southern counties, her dress and body figuring England literally and metaphorically (fig.21). Likewise, Spenser's *Faerie Queene* utilises this powerful presentation of the Queen, her endlessly deferred arrival and constant glimpses propelling her into myth by suggesting her intangible power and omnipresence. Both poets use their allegories to blur the boundaries between myth and reality, combining real persons and places within an imaginative fantasy landscape. Yet both poets go further than this. They encourage their readers actively to engage with the text in order to reveal the full scope of the meanings presented. Albion is not just a figure for Britain. Blake's expansive allegory makes Albion, like Adam, representative of humanity as a whole. He represents a sacred and ancient British history, a history as much reflective of the past as it is of a prophesied future.

Arthur's myth is powerful because of the promise of his return. While few would admit to believing in his literal return, Raine notes that the ethos of Arthur's return is strong within the popular imagination (*Golgonooza* 163). People wait for a golden age, an age of renewal, just as religious Reformers wait for the return of the Messiah, or for a new age following the apocalypse. Like Arthur, who appears in every Book of *The Faerie Queene*, Albion features in several of Blake's prophetic and

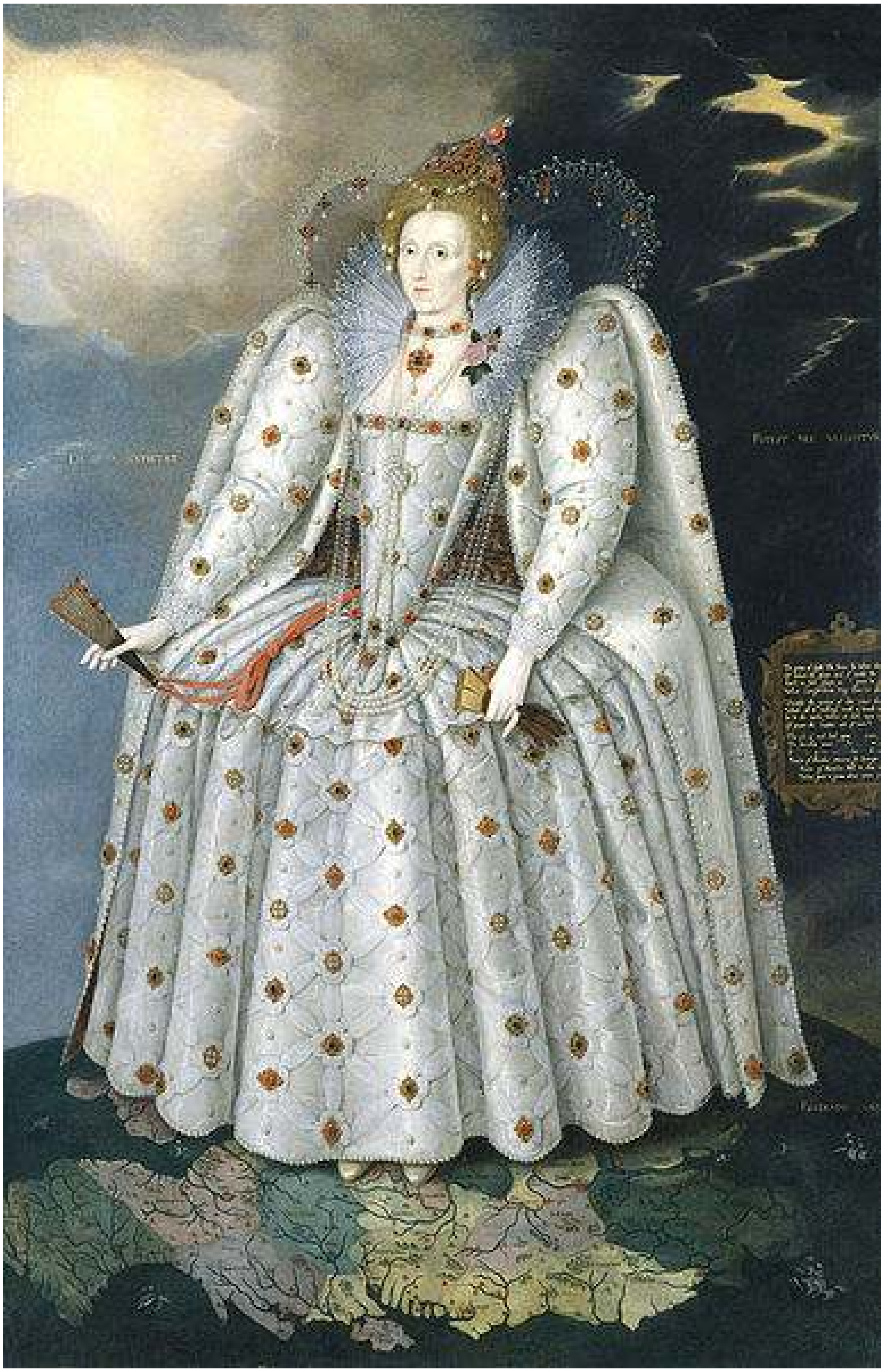

Fig. 21 *The Ditchley Portrait*, by Marcus Gheeraert. Reproduced by permission of the National Portrait Gallery, London

epic tales, especially *Milton* and *Jerusalem*. He is often represented as sleeping and as being called to awake and assume his position in a new age of enlightenment.

> First Milton saw Albion upon the Rock of Ages
> Deadly pale outstretchd and snowy cold, storm coverd:
> A giant form of perfect beauty oustretchd on the rock
> In solemn death (*M* 15.36-39; E109-10).

Albion is Britain, cold, deathly, and sleeping soundly, unaware of what changes may be taking place, unconscious of the energy of renewal and revolution. Los shouts: "Awake thou sleeper on the Rock of Eternity Albion awake" … "all Nations are awake / But thou art still heavy and dull: Awake Albion awake!" (*M* 23.3-5). As always, Blake takes conventional meanings and expands them in his work. Albion's sleep is not simply figurative of a forthcoming golden age. Such an age cannot return if no one prompts it to wake up. Albion's sleep is reflective of the apathy and drowsy "sleep" of the nation as a whole. It is the sleep of those who are bound to Church and King, to factory and charter. It is the sleep of the elite who twist morals and blind themselves to the suffering of others. It is the sleep of those who, in squalor and misery, cannot see a way out of suffering and instead resort to despair. It is the unconsciousness of a nation without the energy to rouse itself to change and enlightenment. As Raine says, Albion's sleep is the story of how a nation has lapsed into spiritual ignorance, deluded dreams and forgetfulness (*Golgonooza* 172). Albion's sleep is figurative of the allegorical gap between word or image, meaning and enlightenment. Hence, Blake's constant call for Albion to "Awake" (*M* 39.10; *J* 15.10). It is not just a call to wake citizens from an ideology of materialism and delusion towards energy and revolution, it is a call to make readers aware of the change that must take place in themselves for insight and vision to take place. Only when our perceptions are expanded can readers be made aware and self-conscious, and become alert to alternative ways of seeing the world. Blake’s allegory, fully read and understood,  accomplishes this opening up of the mind and expanding of perception and energetic vision.

The potential power within Albion, and within all human beings, is graphically displayed in Blake’s image, “The Dance of Albion” (also entitled “Albion Rose” and termed “Glad Day” by Gilchrist, Blake’s first biographer) (fig. 22).[257] The colour printed etching (c. 1793) was taken from a line engraving (c. 1790) by Blake, the original drawing dating from around 1780 (Foster Damon 13). Prints from this image were made during a period of intense energy and anxiety, when the British were reeling at the news of the overthrow of the French monarchy and the Revolution in France. The original drawing may have been partly inspired by the Gordon Riots of June 1780, and the American War of Independence, which began in 1775. The energy and unconventionality of the naked dancing figure captures the potential force, inspiration and vigour of humanity, unshackled and free from all cultural burdens and restraints. It displays the potential of the human mind and body, once freed from the forces of industrialisation, materialism and political and religious autocracy. It reveals the pure form, stripped down, and with it the basic principles and truth of the power and joy of humanity. The figure’s vitruvian proportions can be seen to hint at Leonardo da Vinci’s Vitruvian Man (c. 1487), referring to the creative genius of the human mind and the perfection of the human form. This is suggested in Blake’s almost symmetrical rendering of the arms and feet in Albion’s stance. It reflects

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[257] The plate takes the name “Albion Rose” from Blake’s black and white 1804 etching, to which he added the inscription: “Albion rose from where he labourd at the Mill with Slaves / Giving himself for the Nations he danc’d the dance of Eternal Death” (Foster Damon 13). The term “Glad Day” refers to the “sun-burst” effect in the picture, which Gilchrist thought referred to a quote from Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* (3.5.9-10) (Foster Damon 13).

Renaissance and medieval influences on Blake’s work, (in particular Dürer) and his preference for the purity of simple, single lines when drawing and engraving.

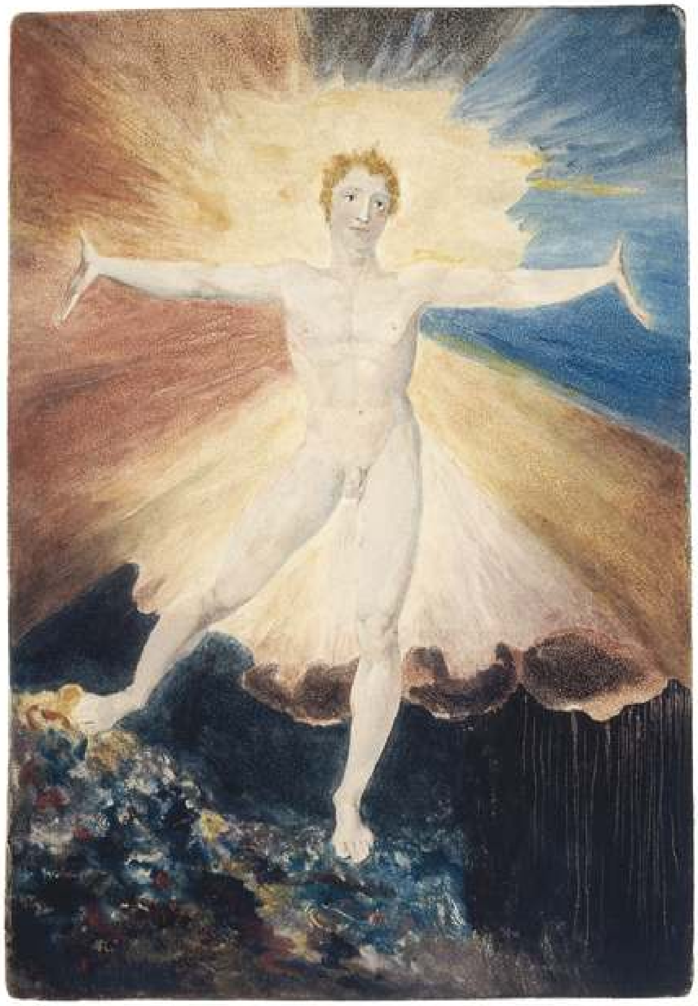

Fig. 22 *The Dance of Albion*, by William Blake
British Museum, London. ©The Trustees of the British Museum

In representing Albion thus, Blake’s seemingly simple picture presents the perceptive reader with a compounded set of multiple ideas and truths. The picture represents all of humanity, the human soul at its simplest and most exposed. In essence, Albion is the creative and mental energy of humanity. The human body itself is a work of art, a human form divine, a reflection of God’s will. Within it lies power and beauty, balance and creativity. In its basic form it should inspire awe, reverence and respect, and this reverence, Blake believed, should be accorded to all other living beings. Blake's inspiration should guide viewers to see more than just the surface in order to recognise the potent power of the human mind for imagination and vision. Thus, with the reductive forces of mechanisation, materialism and industrialisation stripped away, each human mind, Blake encourages us to see, possesses power. The "Dance of Albion" is therefore potentially revolutionary and rebellious. It demands that viewers recognise their own potential and act upon it. It is one of the most graphic examples of art in which Blake offers the human form for readers to contemplate in its basic and complete majesty. The viewer has to take time to pause and consider the image and why Blake would choose to represent it in such a way, and by asking us to pause and consider, Blake is attempting to open and awaken readers' minds to the presence of the truth within us. "The Dance of Albion" simply requires an active and engaged mind in order to make sense of its rich texture. This is the space in which allegory functions.

Spenser and Blake deliberately hold back revelation. One must work diligently, investigating and piecing together each reflection and trace of the visual in order to attempt to recover further meaning. The text's significance depends upon how readers work with and fill the space between the glimpsed reflections they are given. In so doing, readers may visualise bright illuminations without being scorched and blinded by its radiance. Thus, in the *Characters in Spenser's* Faerie Queene, Arthur is depicted without his glistening shield, but Una's bright face is revealed. Knowledge requires effort in order to bestow value upon meaning. Self-reflective knowledge of one's own reading practices and of the workings of their political and poetical-allegorical realms is what Spenser and Blake sought to bestow upon their readers.

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