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Review by Anne Lake Prescott

Chishty-Mujahid, Nadya Q. *Character Development in Edmund Spenser's The Faerie Queene*. Lewistown; Lampeter, Wales: Edwin Mellen Press, 2006. 242 pages.

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It is the plausible contention of this flawed but often interesting book that Spenser's allegory works through an ideal of heroic integration allegorized not only by the poem's hero, Prince Arthur, but also through images of monarchical fragmentation as reflected by the various figures representing Elizabeth and through the metamorphoses of one heroine, Britomart, and one villainess, Duessa.

Although studded with astute observations, and raising questions worth pondering, this is one of those books that get published too soon thanks, I assume, to our cruel profession's indecent pressure on younger scholars to hurry into print. Better advice might have taken care of the factual errors: it is wrong to say that Spenser never addresses the queen (p. 21), even if it is true that he never names her, and despite a few Lollards here and there in Chaucer's England it is wrong to say that Protestantism began in the Middle Ages (p. 159). Better editing might have also have corrected the overuse of "ultimately" and "level," the confusion of "ambiguity" with "ambivalence," the misuse of "unique," and the mistaking of Tudor England for "Britain." More important, with greater experience the author might have found her way outside the cacophonous multitude of critics with whom she believes she must explicitly engage. Bust them down to footnotes, Time might have taught her. No need to cite quite so many to prove the obvious or to position oneself. Develop a clearer line of argument. Use the text as evidence (surprisingly little of it is analyzed or even quoted here). If you describe England's geopolitical circumstance, do not focus so hard on Ireland that you almost forget the Netherlands and entirely forget France—whose king's 1593 conversion to Catholicism, allegorized in Book V, added to its terror of a Spain-dominated Europe.

Think harder about chronology, Father Time might continue. Is it likely that the metamorphosis of Duessa from Whore of Babylon to stand-in for Mary Stuart, dead before *any* of *The Faerie Queene* was published, reflects a move from Elizabethan religious fear to political fear in the few years between Book I in 1590 and the probable completion of Book V in 1593 or 1594? Don't refer to Spenser's "agenda" without saying what it is. Do not, after both the old New Criticism and the new Postmodernism, base a claim on Spenser's presumed "sincerity" (e.g., p. 22)—Shakespeare's Rosalind's observation that "the truest poetry is the most feigning" is feigned but true. Don't base an argument on the formation of "character" in Spenser's poem without explaining what you mean by "character." In what sense (modern? Elizabethan?) does Britomart, say, have a "character"? Is the concept as used here too novelistic? And don't modify your arguments with footnotes that read as if added only after receiving advice; complicate your negative and oversimplified view of Petrarchan beloveds (some of whom were wives, not cold virgins) rather than just adding a note to say you don't mean to disrespect Petrarch (p. 120).

Chishti-Mujahid is nevertheless on to something important. As Philip Sidney might say, her book's execution is poor, but its "foreconceit" is both clever and useful. To read Arthur as a figure of heroic integration is important, even if one believes that Spenser uses his various knights more to explore the virtues and their limitations than to illustrate them. Nor would the hero's projected integration have been easy: could Arthur himself be fully just and fully courteous in a fallen world? Although I am skeptical that Britomart and Duessa undergo a metamorphosis of *character* in the modern sense of personality structure, their shifting roles do parallel the poem's shift in focus from the personal to the public. More significant is the author's awkwardly made but intelligently perceived point that the conceptual puzzlements accompanying Spenser's knights, from the paradox of a Catholic saint representing a Protestant nation to the tragedy of a knight who fails Justitia because of his own ruler's inconstancy, parallel the puzzlements in English culture and history. The fragmentation of Elizabeth as she appears multifariously in *The Faerie Queene* does indeed suit the contradictions in any ruler's position; Machiavelli would applaud Chishti-Mujahid's perception.

True, there is more to be said: the postponement of St. George's wedding is surely more biblical (the marriage of Christ and his church is not yet) than political (the English were not yet fully Protestant), for example, and somehow the cosmological and apocalyptic aspects of the Book of Justice have gone missing (Spenser makes the very sun, one symbol of justice, a partial failure in the book's Proem). Still, Chishty-Mujahid spells out, with many an *aperçu* on the way, a truth about the poem: patterns of integration, fragmentation, and metamorphosis in Spenser's main figures mirror the confusions he witnessed and the heroics he longed for.

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