

CHATTERTON LECTURE ON POETRY

Edmund Spenser:
Art and The Faerie Queene

MICHAEL LESLIE
University of Sheffield

I

1990 is the four hundredth anniversary of the printing of the first part of *The Faerie Queene*, so it is appropriate that I should speak on Spenser's masterpiece; but it is less clear that the precise occasion should be a lecture bearing the name of Chatterton. What would Spenser have made of Chatterton? The latter clearly admired Spenser enough to write pastiche of *The Faerie Queene*, but one wonders how these dubious efforts would have been received by the sage and serious poet. Spenser would certainly have condemned Chatterton's suicide, which immediately recalls that of Sir Terwin as he lies in the cave of Despair in Book I of *The Faerie Queene*:

And him beside there lay upon the gras
A drery corse, whose life away did pas,
All wallowd in his own yet luke-warme blood, . . .
And made an open passage for the gushing flood.

(I.ix.36.4–9)¹

But as well as condemning that crime, one feels that Spenser might also have been offended by being associated with this image (Fig. 1), especially since it has so completely superseded the word. How many people actually read any of Chatterton's poetry? Yet Chatterton survives as an icon for despairing, disappointed youth. The attractive romanticism of the painting's depiction of self-destruction would surely have earned Spenser's

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¹ All quotations from *The Faerie Queene* are from the edition by A. C. Hamilton (Longman, 1977).

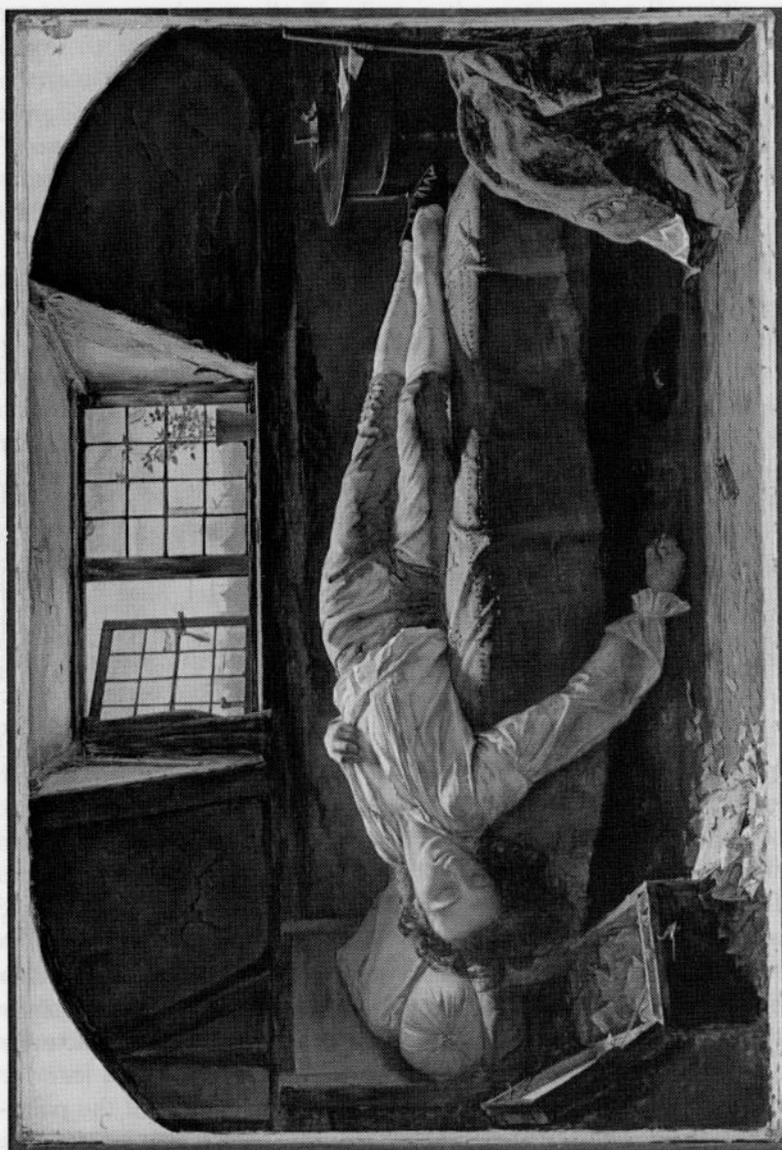


Fig. 1. Henry Wallis, 'The Death of Chatterton'. The Tate Gallery.

censure as much as Despair's seductive rhetoric, despite the poet's posthumous reputation as one of the pre-eminent celebrants of the visual image.

Like the old woman in Pope's famous story who found *The Faerie Queene* a gallery of pictures, readers and writers for centuries have praised *The Faerie Queene's* pictorial quality; and this sense of the importance of the visual to the great Elizabethan epic has provoked many critical studies. What I want to do this afternoon is to address some specific questions about the relationship between the visual and the verbal in Spenser's work through concentration on Spenser's *ekphrases*, the representation in the poem of works of visual art. Somewhat perversely when talking about *The Faerie Queene*, my attention will not be fixed on the allegorical import of these works of art, but on them as versions of potentially real objects. So where I discuss a statue of Cupid, I shall concentrate not on interpreting Cupid but on the fact that it is a statue. In doing so, I want to draw attention to Spenser's deployment of various different styles of art, and their various connotations; and to the interaction between the visual art Spenser includes (and the artistic theory he therefore necessarily implies) and the Protestant culture of iconophobia of which Spenser was the arch-poet and which is also a major influence on the poem. The creator of the gallery of pictures for Pope's friend was also the celebrant of a society which found the visual deeply suspect. In this discussion I want to use examples from a broad range of the arts, including not only pictures and tapestries, but also heraldry, ephemeral pageant decoration, gardens, and architecture, the last two particularly instructive for their welding together of so many different elements—statuary, buildings, fountains as well as plants and trees—into a coherent single work of art, the 'Argument most certain of a right nobl minde', as Robert Laneham describes the Earl of Leicester's Kenilworth garden in 1575, and which he associates with the virtue of magnificence, 'the perfection of all the rest' which 'conteineth in it them all', according to Spenser in the 'Letter to Raleigh'.²

The genre that Spenser attempts in *The Faerie Queene* repeatedly offers—indeed demands—*ekphrasis*, the verbal description of a work of visual art; and Spenser's participation in one of the great traditions of the epic, the set-piece description of the hero's shield, provides an immediate and telling example of the tense paradox of his task. The renown of Homer's description of the arms supplied by Hephaestos for Achilles

² R. Laneham, *A Letter*, ed. R. J. P. Kuin [Medieval and Renaissance Texts, vol. 2] (Brill, Leiden, 1983) p. 73; *The Faerie Queene*, p. 737. Laneham concludes his description of the garden with a passage of delirious appreciation of its owner: 'what may this express, what may this set out untoo us, but only a magnifyk minde, a singular wizdoom, a prinsly purs, and an heroicall hart?' (p. 75).

imposed a duty on the epic poet to provide his hero with arms which evoked and superseded their forerunners in beauty, universality, lifelikeness and miraculousness. Spenser duly supplies his pre-eminent hero, Prince Arthur, with a suit of armour designed to rival those of Achilles, Aeneas, and the heroes of the Renaissance romance-epics. The shield possesses the magical powers *de rigueur* by the sixteenth century; but unlike almost any other example of the epic hero's shield, or indeed any other shield in *The Faerie Queene*, Arthur's is remarkable not least for the absence of elaborate images. Or indeed any image at all; it is blank. The extraordinary richness of Achilles's shield, or that of Aeneas, is left unchallenged by Spenser. If we accept the vaunted pictorialism of *The Faerie Queene*, if the hero's shield is that which more than anything else in an epic demands an *ekphrasis*, why does Spenser so prominently fail to provide one?

What is more, the shield's miraculous power of routing whole armies when simply unveiled, raises further questions concerning Spenser's motives. This power clearly signals an Arthurian source; that source also urges Spenser in the direction of a visual image; and not just a lifelike image, but an image of the crucified Christ. In the *Tale of the Sank Greal* Sir Galahad obtains the shield of King Evelake and he is told that when the king,

was in the batayle there was a clothe sette afore the shyld, and whan he was in the grettist perell he lett put away the cloth, and than hys enemyes saw the vigoure of a man on the crosse, wherethorow they all were discomfite.³

Now these are clearly the powers of Prince Arthur's shield; but equally clearly they are associated with precisely that tradition of sacred imagery that generated a violent reaction in Spenser's contemporaries. In one of his most powerful denunciations, leading to the condemnation of the whole of the Roman Catholic cult of the visual, Calvin states that,

The root of their error is not believing that they can create a divinity, but rather thinking that they can harness divine power through visual representations.⁴

And this is precisely what Galahad's shield does in the Arthurian tale, and what Spenser simultaneously suggests and denies through the allusion in *The Faerie Queene*.

Calvin's assumption that his enemies did not believe themselves to be

³ See M. Leslie, *Spenser's 'Fierce Warres and Faithfull Loves': Martial and Chivalric Symbolism in 'The Faerie Queene'* (Boydell & Brewer, Woodbridge, 1984), chap. 1.

⁴ Institutes I.11.9; quoted in C. M. N. Eire, *War against the Idols: the Reformation of Worship from Erasmus to Calvin* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1986), p. 214.

creating a divinity may be too generous, however, in the context of this tradition of the hero's shield. So famous was it that George Chapman published in isolation his translation of Homer's *ekphrasis*; and his prefatory letter to the Earl Marshall is astonishingly eloquent of the perils of such a poetic version of the visual, which he describes as this,

Divine Rapture, than which nothing can be imagined more full of soule and humane extraction: for what is here prefigurde by our miraculous Artist but the universall world . . . And all . . . so lively proposde as not without reason many in times past have believed that all these thinges have in them a kind of voluntarie motion, even as those Tripods of Vulcan and that Daedalian Venus⁵

The offence to good Calvinists in these lines is so brazen that one wonders whether Chapman set out to tease. Spenser avoids the association of image and effect, by omitting the image; but the tension still remains within *The Faerie Queene*, indeed heightened by awareness of what is omitted from the sources.

Spenser explicitly draws on both the classical and Arthurian traditions in describing Arthur's shield; and yet within both he clearly found the attitude to the image indigestible: on the one hand the urge towards supremely deceptive lifelikeness; on the other the attribution to the image—and its creator—of powers proper to God alone. Spenser simultaneously participates in and distances himself from the *ekphrastic* tradition; his solution, the blank shield, highlights the dilemma, drawing attention to one of the contradictions so stimulating in his epic. In a context remarkably similar, and perhaps influenced by *The Faerie Queene*, precisely the same problem, equally prominently, is represented in a posthumous portrait of Queen Elizabeth as St George conquering the dragon of her enemies (Fig. 2). Despite the fact that this is itself a work of visual art, the principal place for an image within the engraving, the shield so centrally displayed, is entirely bare. As in *The Faerie Queene* the invisible worm of anxiety concerning the image gnaws away even as the visual is embraced.

II

The paradoxical *ekphrasis* of an image-less shield occurs in circumstances which partly explain Spenser's ambivalence. In the battle to which he is

⁵ *Chapman's Homer*, ed. A. Nicoll, 2 vols (1956; second edn, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1967), vol. 1, p. 543.



Fig. 2. Queen Elizabeth as St George. *The British Museum.*

called, Arthur is opposed not only by Orgoglio but also by the latter's newly acquired and extravagantly ornamented paramour, Duessa:

He gave her gold and purple pall to weare,
 And triple crowne set on her head full hye,
 And her endowd with royall majestye:

(I.vii.16.4–7)

Contrasting with Una, the one true reformed Church, Duessa is every inch the Scarlet Whore of Rome—these lines are, so to speak, Spenser's Vatican Stanze. Duessa is all that Spenser distrusts in images: she is a fabrication, forever changeful, false, usurping, richly ornamented and devilish attractive.

But the example of Duessa establishes that visual art is not hermetically isolated in *The Faerie Queene*. Here likeness to a work of visual art, an Idol as her close relative the false Florimell is called later in the poem, is

evidence of Spenser's multivalent analogy between art, sexuality, and the female, an analogy which is the basis of Spenser's expression of his ambivalence concerning each of these things. The greatest concentration of works of art in *The Faerie Queene*—the tapestries of the Castle of Malecasta; those of the House of Busyrane; the statues there, in the Temple of Venus, and in the Temple of Isis; the Garden of Adonis; and the Bower of Bliss itself immediately before the opening of Book Three—occurs in and around the story of Britomart, in books of the poem devoted particularly to matters of sex and gender.

At the outset of her career Britomart is wounded by the personification of the sense of sight, Gardante, while staying in the Castle of Malecasta. Her vulnerability is clearly sexual; and her wounding is set in the middle of Malecasta's 'sumptuous array' of tapestries. As in Leon Battista Alberti's architectural treatise and also his handbook on love, the *Ecantofilia* (incidentally, the only one of his books translated into English by 1600 though the *Ten Books of Architecture* were already well established in Elizabethan libraries), there is an insistent and intimate connection between sight and sexual desire in *The Faerie Queene*.⁶ That connection manifests itself particularly clearly in Spenser's many references to architecture (the poem is a buildings-, if not a *bildungsroman*); and in Book Three and its associated episodes, appropriate metaphors, present throughout the poem, are intensified: that of art as female, the body as a building (and vice versa), and the processes of aesthetic attraction and exploration as equivalent to those of sexual desire and consummation.

The metaphoric association of buildings and bodies is ancient, stretching back at least to Vitruvius.⁷ But Spenser had access to more recent works which consolidated and developed the association of buildings, gardens, and visual art in general with gender and sexuality, and which stressed and explored the psychological drama of eye and mind in the contemplation of the visual. Francesco Colonna's beautifully illustrated *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, even in its partial, distantly derived English edition, is in all senses a spectacular book, since the emphasis throughout on the visual arts is even more on the hidden meanings of sight itself—indeed historians are surely correct in seeing the architectural theory as the

⁶ For the presence of Alberti's books in Elizabethan architectural collections, see L. Gent, *Picture and Poetry 1560–1620: Relations between Literature and the Visual Arts in Renaissance England* (James Hall, Leamington Spa, 1981), p. 81.

⁷ For a summary, see L. Barkan, *Nature's Work of Art: the Human Body as Image of the World* (Yale, New Haven, 1975).



Fig. 3. Temple of Priapus in [Francesco Colonna], *Hyperotomachia Poliphili* (Venice, 1499), f. m6^r.

motivating force behind some, if not all of the text.⁸ The Dreamer's quest for his beloved involves, like Britomart's, a journey; and both are constantly confronted by visual art and the necessity of interpretation and judgement. There is an ever-present sense of being watched, one's performance—one's minutest responses—judged, not only at the text's obvious liminal moments, when Colonna's Dreamer or one of Spenser's characters passes through gateways and arches; but equally when passive, merely contemplating what the eye presents. These are often the moments at which the inner mind is revealed, moments when the spectator stops, reflects, interprets . . . then judges, acts, and moves on; and these moments of stasis, gaze, judgement and action frequently contain the crucial elements in the drama of understanding and acceptance that is the intention of the spectacle.

Early on, Colonna's Dreamer encounters an arch decorated with sexually stimulating, but also sexually disturbing scenes from the *Metamorphoses*: Europa and the Bull, Pasiphaë and the Minotaur, precisely the range of images Britomart encounters in the castles of Malecasta and Busyrane, and like contemporary works of art outside fiction such as the fountain in the Privy Garden at Kenilworth or the overall decoration in the grounds of Nonsuch Palace. The Dreamer is frightened by monsters, but it is striking that he remains intense and anxious in the face of *any* visual art: as a profoundly sympathetic spectator, he is aware that no image is neutral, that all contain meaning, and particularly that the experience of art is intimately connected with sex, to which his response is betrayed by his gaze. Bas-relief after triumphal arch reflects the Dreamer's own desires and anxieties, as he encounters supine nymphs or Temples of Priapus (Fig. 3)—though in some issues, the obviousness of the obsession and the challenge is more than others (Fig. 4). The English edition of 1599—*The Strife of Love in a Dream*—contains omissions and silences as telling as that of Arthur's shield—there the whole illustration, not just the erect penis, is absent.

Spenser too deploys 'love's architecture'. Within the Castle of Busyrane the maiden Amoret is held captive by a wicked enchanter trying to force her sexual compliance; without the castle lies the poor Scudamour, her betrothed, who has been trying and failing to force an entrance. The patroness of Book Three, the female knight Britomart, offers to help him:

⁸ *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* (Venice, 1499); *Hypnerotomachia: The Strife of Love in a Dream*, trans. R. D. (London, 1592). See J. Onians, *Bearers of Meaning: the Classical Orders in Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1988); p. 208: 'Yet, however inconsistent is the evidence, the basic function of the architectural part of the work as an exercise in the recovery of Classical architecture and its theoretical background is clear and unambiguous'.



Fig. 4. Temple of Priapus in [Francesco Colonna], *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* (Venice, 1499), f. m6^r; another impression.

There they dismounting, drew their weapons bold
 And stoutly came unto the Castle gate;
 Whereas no gate they found, them to withhold,
 Nor ward to wait at morne and evening late,
 But in the Porch, that did them sore amate,
 A flaming fire, ymixt with smouldry smoke,
 And stinking Sulphure, that with griesly hate
 And dreadfull horrore did all entraunce choke,
 Enforced them their forward footing to revoke.

(III.xi.21)

After being initially disconcerted Britomart enters, the flames parting for her where they remain firmly closed upon Scudamour.

That the building in some way represents Amoret herself, and her captivity her emotional or psychological state, is beyond doubt. When she is released at the end of the canto, at least in the original version of that ending, Spenser talks of 'her body, late the prison of sad paine, / Now the sweet lodge of love and deare delight' (xii.45a.3–4). And the reason Britomart can gain entry, whereas Scudamour cannot, is that she makes no sexual demands, represents no sexual threat. Scudamour's repeated attempts to force an entry bearing his phallic spear and the shield depicting an aggressive Cupid can only exacerbate her fear, and thus her resistance:

But cruell *Mulciber* would not obey
 His threatfull pride, but did the more augment
 His mighty rage, and with imperious sway
 Him forst (maulgre) his fiercenesse to relent,
 And backe retire, all scorcht and pittifully brent.

(III.xi.26.6–9)

The insistence on masculinity in the initial words of those lines confirms the sexual conflict. The Castle has no gate, but that fiery porch denies Scudamour entry; and Spenser seems to be drawing an analogy between the Castle of Busyrane and the female body, in which the fiery porch at which Scudamour repeatedly throws himself represents the vagina.

Spenser was far from being alone in making this analogy: it underlies Donne's Holy Sonnet, 'Batter my heart . . .'; and in a fantasy architectural design by Giovanbatista Bracelli from 1624, the entrance to the city is through a strategically positioned arch (Fig. 5).⁹ The powerful and pervasive association of architecture with sex, the male architect and the female building, has been charted by a number of scholars.¹⁰

⁹ See D. K. Hedrick, 'The Ideology of Ornament: Alberti and the Erotics of Renaissance Urban Design', *Word & Image*, 3 (1987), 111–37, especially p. 119.

¹⁰ See especially Hedrick, 'The Ideology of Ornament', and Barkan, *Nature's Work of Art*.

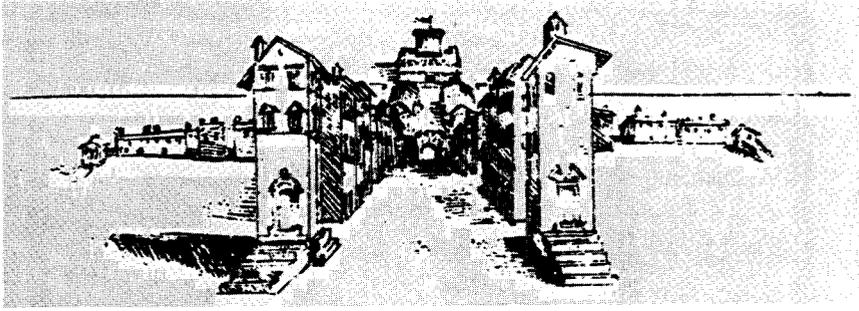


Fig. 5. Giovanbatista Bracelli, *Bizzarrie di varie figure* (1624).

The allocation of gender roles is again echoed in this episode in *The Faerie Queene*. In the original version of the ending of Book Three, the liberated Amoret is reunited with her betrothed; the body ceases to be a prison, becomes the lodge of delight, and in so doing melts into that of Scudamour. But that melting is not on equal terms; there are limits to liberation: Amoret is ‘overcommen quight / Of huge affection’; and her reuniting with Scudamour is cast as a ‘sweete ravishment’. No such words are used of the male. And in Scudamour’s final appearance in the poem he describes how he gained Amoret, once more in a significant architectural surrounding. The lady is held protected in the Temple of Venus into which Scudamour makes his way across,

a bridge ybuilt in goodly wize,
With curious Corbes and pendants graven faire,
And arched all with porches, [which] did arize
On stately pillours, fram’d after the Doricke guize.

(IV.x.6.6–9)

The entrance to the House of Busyrane refers to the female sexual organs; it comes as no surprise that this bridge into the Temple of Venus has similar connotations. But what is surprising is the gender of the bridge, so to speak: the Doric style, as has often been pointed out from Upton onwards, is defined by Vitruvius as being particularly masculine; and indeed in John Shute’s book of architectural doctrine of the 1560s the column is shown proportioned to the male body in true Vitruvian manner with a warrior as its original (Fig. 6). Shute confirms his incorporation of the antique and modern European architectural tradition by saying that this style is ‘called Dorica, being ascribed to Hercules and Mars, for his strength’. But why give this style to a Temple of Venus, which Vitruvius

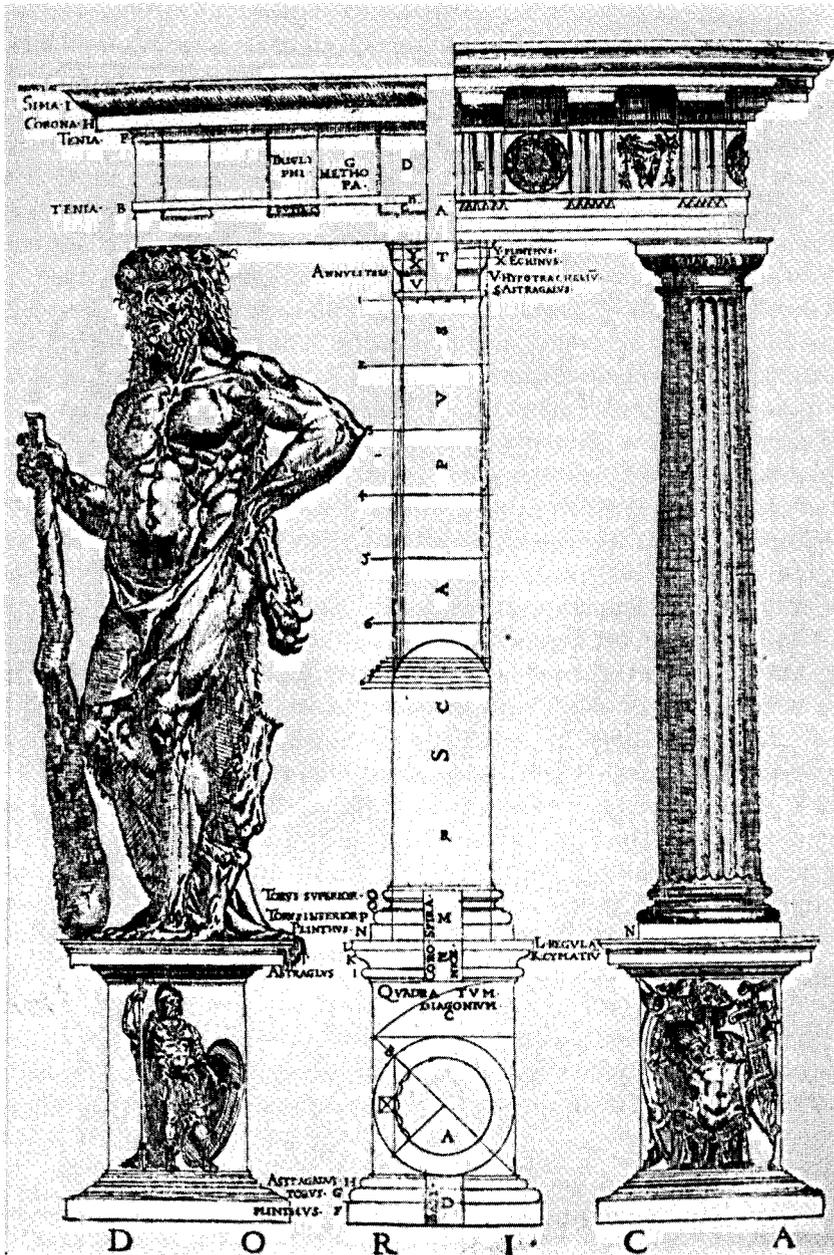


Fig. 6. John Shute, *The First and Chief Groundes of Architecture* (1563), 'Dorica'.

says should be Corinthian?¹¹ Shute again confirms that gender association with his analogy between the Corinthian column and the most feminine of his figures (Fig. 7).

Spenser on the other hand may be reading Vitruvius with an eye to the sexual pun: the actual Latin offers the fleeting possibility of interpreting the Doric pillar as itself phallic;¹² and the emphatic 'stately pillours' supporting the bridge in this stanza, together with the pillar on which hangs the shield of love that Scudamour must capture in order to gain access to Amoret, and the 'hundred marble pillors round' which support the roof of the temple itself, would tend to confirm the association of the column and the penis; so too does the spear-dominated battle in which Scudamour engages to obtain the shield. Spenser makes his most certain location for the celebration of sexuality acutely masculine, despite the presiding goddess. Once more he was far from alone in doing so: in another design for an imaginary building, the erect penis obviously forms the basis for a Temple of Love by Claude Nicholas Ledoux.¹³ While scholars have for generations, if the pun can be forgiven, recognized that the Garden of Adonis, where Amoret was raised in tranquility, takes its physical form from that of the female sexual organs, a perception that has crept bashfully out from the footnote in the last quarter of a century, we should also note that the location for Scudamour's triumphant seizure of Amoret, her rape literally, has this masculine architectural style.¹⁴ The style seems chosen to emphasize the dubiousness of the experience, at least for Amoret.

Again, the example of the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* lends support to the weight given here to the interpretation of an architectural style. There, the hero Poliphilus also arrives at a Temple of Aphrodite, in which similar songs to the goddess are heard, and the entrance to this temple is flanked by four Doric columns; the text comments specifically on the appropriateness of the Doric order for this temple, precisely on the sexual grounds I have suggested for *The Faerie Queene* but emphasizing that the temple is dedicated not just to the female love deity but also to her dangerously active son, Eros.¹⁵ It may well be that Spenser constructs his Temple of Venus from the various locations in the *Hypnerotomachia* dedicated to the goddess: like the 'deliciosa insula cytherea' to which Poliphilus and Polia

¹¹ Vitruvius, *The Ten Books on Architecture*, trans. M. H. Morgan (1914; Dover, New York, 1960), p. 15.

¹² The passage is again quoted by Upton: 'Dorica columna virilis corporis proportionem et firmatam et venustatem in aedificiis praestare caepit' (Vitruvius, Book 6, Chapter 16).

¹³ See the discussion and illustration in Hedrick, 'The Ideology of Ornament', p. 122.

¹⁴ For the brave move of the *mons veneris* in *The Faerie Queene*, Book III into the body of the text, see Barkan, *Nature's Work of Art*, p. 244.

¹⁵ See the commentary and quotation in Onians, *Bearers of Meaning*, pp. 210–11.

sail, Spenser's Temple of Venus is on an island, and it is a garden paradise, 'delitiosa & amoenissima insula' (t8^r); like that in the *Hypnerotomachia*, there are multitudinous 'walkes and alleyes dight / With divers trees' (IV.x.25.1–2); and, as in the *Hypnerotomachia* the ostensible dedication of the place to a goddess is corrected to include her male counterpart, so in the Temple of Venus the promenading lovers walk, 'praying their god, and yeelding *him* great thanks' (25.8; my emphasis). At the heart of the island in the *Hypnerotomachia* stands a shrine of Venus, circular, with a statue of the goddess at the centre of a round of figures; and this again is precisely the arrangement of the Temple of Venus in *The Faerie Queene*, the only difference being that there is one fewer figure in Spenser's version, unless one counts Amoret herself.

But whether or not Spenser is directly imitating Colonna, it is clear that his descriptions of the Castle of Busyrane and the Temple of Venus are similarly motivated, drawing upon an ancient, but still vital complex of analogies between buildings and bodies, between human interaction with architecture and the processes of sexual intercourse.¹⁶ These analogies could, as with the *Hypnerotomachia* and parts of *The Faerie Queene*, produce literature which celebrates the complementarity of the sexes and their harmony—Colonna interprets the 'rope' forms nestling in the fluting of the columns of his temple as an image of sexual union;¹⁷ but the analogy between art and sex, aesthetic and sexual pleasures, could release less reassuring male attitudes.

III

Richard Lynche, in the *Fountaine of Ancient Fiction* published in 1599, places Venus last of all the gods he treats; and he includes this story:

It is read with *Pausanius*, that Marcellus erected and dedicated a most sumptuous temple unto this goddes Venus: which he caused to be built two miles off from Rome, that those kind of humors & wanton pleasures ought to bee remoted a farre off from the minds and thoughts of all the chast virgines of Rome. (Cciiv^r)

In Giovanbatista Bracelli's vision (Fig. 5), both building and female are imagined as responding with supine passivity to the superior male's

¹⁶ In one way the motivations are radically different, however: Spenser allows Scudamour to avoid a full *ekphrasis* of the Temple of Venus, 'whose goodly pride / And costly frame, were long here to relate' (IV.x.16.2–3); such descriptions are never avoided in the *Hypnerotomachia*, of which they are the essence.

¹⁷ See Onians, *Bearers of Meaning*, pp. 210–11.

penetration; but Marcellus displays an altogether more anxious attitude to 'the minds and thoughts of all the chaste virgines of Rome'. The metaphor of gender as used in architectural handbooks to describe the relationship between the visual artist and his creation, as opposed to the frequent metaphor of paternity to describe writers and books, often betrays a fear of the promiscuity of the resulting building once it escapes the control of its designer and satisfies a thousand pairs of eyes, as Scudamour fears Amoret will do in the continuation of their story in Book Four of *The Faerie Queene*. Visual art inspires fears of independence and autonomy equivalent to those engendered by female sexuality. And when he wishes to define a wholly virtuous work of visual art, Spenser finds himself having to deal precisely with these issues of the sexuality implicit in the analogy between buildings and bodies, and also with the related, disconcerting autonomy of art—even verbal art—once it leaves its creator's hands.

The *locus classicus* in *The Faerie Queene* for the analogy between body and building is the House of Alma in Book Two. Since Sir Kenelm Digby printed his account of this episode in 1644, there has been no question but that the House of Alma is based upon the proportions of the human body, as Spenser makes clear at the outset:

Of all Gods workes, which do this world adorne,
There is no one more faire and excellent,
Then is mans body both for powre and forme,
Whiles it is kept in sober government

(II.ix.1.1–4)

The description covers most of the organs we would expect; but fearful of the sexuality of architecture, and in striking contrast to the buildings of the story of Amoret and Scudamour, the sexual organs are completely absent, presumably as not responsive to 'sober government'.

What is more, Spenser seems to have gone out of his way to dehumanize the human frame as much as possible. Digby concentrates on the numerological significance of the proportions of the building, as is encouraged by the famous twenty-second stanza:

The frame thereof seemd partly circulare,
And part triangulare, O worke divine;
Those two the first and last proportions are,
The one imperfect, mortall, foeminine;
Th'other immortall, perfect, masculine,
And twixt them both a quadrate was the base,
Proportioned equally by seven and nine;
Nine was the circle set in heavens place,
All which compacted made a goodly diapase.

(II.ix.22)

I do not propose to add another word to the sophisticated discussion of the specific meanings of Spenser's numerological design; instead, I simply want to note that Spenser's assimilation of the body to geometry, even to these divine mathematics, draws one away from a recognizable human or even architectural form. A comparison of this stanza with Marvell's apparently similar description of Appleton House confirms the extent to which Spenser seems deliberately to have repressed emotional involvement with building or body. In *The Faerie Queene* all that renders the human body living, all that is genuinely figurative about the human frame and which so clearly and powerfully informs the descriptions of the House of Busyrane, the Garden of Adonis and the Temple of Venus, is exiled from this abstract realm of geometry. The contrast is perhaps all the more powerful with the Bower of Bliss, description of which concludes Book Two, a work of landscape art, however evil, vivid with humanity.

But it is not only that the building does not resemble the human body: as an *ekphrasis* the House of Alma is characterized by Spenser's extraordinary care in reducing so far as possible the extent to which the reader can visualize the building. As with the absent device on Arthur's shield, the poet paradoxically refuses to permit the evocation of a image, apparently essential to an *ekphrasis*. Once more the analogy with attitudes to non-fictional architecture helps to explain: by rendering the object of visual art unvisualizable, he precludes the potential promiscuity of the eye, limits the independence of the work of visual art, or even the verbal representation of it. The House of Alma never escapes its literariness, even in our imaginations; to allow it even the illusion of space, shape and volume would imply also emancipation. To cast this in the terms of the most influential challenge to the analogy between the visual and verbal arts, that of Lessing's *Laocoön*, Spenser's strategy is to embed the account of the House of Alma so within the temporal medium of language that it ceases to have the spatial qualities we expect in an *ekphrasis* of a work of architecture.

Fearful that the sexuality of architecture will undermine the qualities of temperance the House of Alma is supposed to monumentalize, Spenser unsexes it in two ways—by excluding the sexual organs from its goodly frame and by undermining it as a work of visual art, imaginable architecture. But, conversely, the attitudes to architecture which so limit the House of Alma enable the creation of other buildings and locations not dedicated to virtue. The contrast between the House of Alma's chaste interior and the heavy ornamentation and profuse images in the Bower of Bliss and the Castle of Busyrane is a case in point, for in many contemporary handbooks rhetoric is defined as ornament, and both are linked to femininity and to seduction. At the House of Pride, the Bower of Bliss, the

castles of Malecasta and of Busyrane, lascivious paintings jostle for wall-space with tapestry representations of myths and gods, the tone being set by the ceremonial entrance to the Bower, with its brilliant, eye-deceiving, lifelike ivory relief of Jason and Medea: 'Ye might have seene the frothy billowes fry / Under the ship'. But at the House of Alma, the entrances have no decoration to distract from the dignity of the materials and forms. Spenser's emphasis here on the unadorned beauties of geometry suggests a kinship between the architectural style he adopts for the presentation of a classical virtue and that advocated by Alberti:

We find that among the Ancients the Men of the greatest Prudence and Modesty were always best pleased with Temperance and Parsimony in all Things, both publicke and private, and particularly in the Affair of Building (186)

Not unexpectedly, either in this quotation from the *Ten Books of Architecture* or in *The Faerie Queene*, there is a congruence between building style and the virtue of the occupant. Alberti too stresses the importance of precisely that geometric perfection that Spenser creates for Alma, and with the same subterranean analogy to the body; we need only consider the title of the chapter in which he defines beauty as residing in 'the Number, Figure, and Collocation of the several Members'. Ornament, though accepted by Alberti, is always subservient to the beauty of plain form. Spenser may well have been thinking of Alberti when writing this part of *The Faerie Queene*; and he would have been attracted not least by the congruity between the theme of his second book and the governing principals of Alberti's architecture (and much else), temperance and moderation.

Again, Spenser is probably not alone in deploying architectural style as a means to convey, reinforce and deepen our appreciation of moral condition. His deployment of visual plainness and the complexity should be compared with the architectural styles of Sidney's *New Arcadia*; there, the simple form of Kalender's house contrasts with the extravagant design of the lodges within which Basileus is hiding; and Sidney appears to be using his selection of architectural styles to express moral and political judgements, on the basis of well understood discriminations between contemporary architectural styles and their equally well-understood ideological implications.

Spenser also seems to be thinking in terms similar to those published by Alberti in the way in which the House of Alma is decorated inside, a subject which has stimulated little or no discussion because, as said before, decoration is largely absent. When there are images, they are characterized again by an absolute plainness and lack of obscurity—there is a tapestry,

In which was nothing pourtrahed, nor wrought,
Not wrought, nor pourtrahed, but easie to be thought.

(II.ix.33.5–9)

Leaving aside learned discussions of the allegorical nature of these easily understood things, we should read the visual style first and foremost as a visual style. This art, like the House of Alma itself, is good because it is simple and ‘legible’; and we have only to look at an example such as that of the recusant Sir Thomas Tresham’s triangular lodge at Rushton, to a contemporary eye obviously papist in its exuberant display of religious symbolism, to see what Spenser was reacting against. The very qualities that so endear the lodge to modern iconographical scholars would render it deeply suspect in Spenser’s eyes.

Conforming even more to the Albertian doctrine are the images found within the three rooms of the mind at the summit of the House. In the first lodging, that of Phantastes or the imagination, the walls are covered with,

Devices, dreames, opinions unsound,
Shewes, visions, sooth-sayes, and prophesies;
And all that fained is, as leasings, tales, and lies.

(II.ix.50–1)

This contrasts immediately with the rooms of the reason, which are decorated,

with picturals
Of Magistrates, of courts, of tribunals,
Of common wealthes, of states, of pollicy,
Of lawes, of judgements, and of decretals;
All artes, all science, all Philosophy,
And all that in the world was aye thought wittily.

(II.ix.53)

Here are representations of the historical events of a society; and in giving these to reason Spenser closely follows Alberti, who praises the ancient Romans for decorating their public buildings principally with such scenes, with memorials of their rulers’ deeds.

That Spenser restricts the decoration of this room to such subjects on Albertian grounds is not surprising; but the fact that the next room Guyon and Arthur enter, the lodging of memory, should have no visual art at all makes us look back at this sequence of descriptions with new eyes. Instead of finding his walls decorated as the others had been, we are told that ‘His chamber all was hangd about with rolls’. In other words, there are only manuscripts and books, which Arthur and Guyon sit down eagerly to read. Spenser’s exclusion of the visual so rigidly from the territory of memory indicates a radical distrust. This may again be linked with Arthur’s

imageless shield: as Page duBois has pointed out, the *ekphrasis* of the hero's shield is not an account of a simple image but of a visual statement of human and divine history; and in both these cases, the shield and the decoration of the walls of memory, Spenser's anxieties concerning the power and independence of images results in their banishment.¹⁸

The progression in the House of Alma from wild visual imaginings, through chaster representations, to the ultimate exclusion of visual art is validated by second authority, though it is perhaps surprising (though perhaps not so surprising after all) to find him in such harmony with Alberti. Calvin in the *Institutes* at one stage hastily reassures his readers that he does not advocate the destruction and exclusion of all visual art, including secular art: 'And yet I am not gripped by the superstition of thinking absolutely no images permissible. But because sculpture and painting are gifts of God, I seek a pure and legitimate use of each'.¹⁹ Calvin goes on to define good art, and the art that should be repudiated because it is not actively beneficial:

Therefore it remains that only those things are to be sculptured and painted which the eyes are capable of seeing [in other words, none of the fantastic visions of the imagination that Spenser describes so warily in Phantastes' room in the House of Alma] . . . Within this class some are histories and events, some are images and forms of bodies without any depicting of past events. The former have some use in teaching or admonition; as for the latter, I do not see what they can afford other than pleasure.

And with his gradgindian logic, Calvin sees that the images that provide nothing better than pleasure are to be excluded utterly. Calvin's grudging acceptance of history painting—it may have some use in teaching or admonition—leaves well open the possibility that the visual ought to be excluded altogether, a conclusion he reaches at the end of the very section in which he appeared to sanction the use of some visual art for didactic purposes: 'I only say that even if the use of images contained nothing evil, it still has no value for teaching'. At least one Elizabethan writer besides Spenser came to that conclusion: Anthony Munday says in his *Blast of Retrait from Plaies and Theaters* of 1590,

There commeth much evil in at the eares, but more at the eies, by these two open windowes death breaketh into the soule. Nothing entereth in more effectualie into the memorie, than that which commeth by seeing.²⁰

¹⁸ P. duBois, *History, Rhetorical Description and the Epic* (Brewer, Cambridge, 1982), p. 80.

¹⁹ *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (I.11.12) [Library of Christian Classics, vols 20 and 21] trans. F. L. Battles, ed. J. T. McNeill, 2 vols (Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1960), vol. 1, p. 112.

²⁰ A. Munday, *A Second and Third Blast of Retrait from Plaies and Theaters* (London, 1586), pp. 95–6.

Munday's point about vision and the memory explains fully why images are excluded so rigorously from the third room at the head of Alma's house.

This raises the whole question of which *ekphrases*, if any, describe works of art regarded positively in *The Faerie Queene*; and once that question is asked it is clear that there are very few. Almost all the famous descriptions are of locales defined in the poem as evil; and when we do come across a 'good' painting or work of visual art it is, like the House of Alma, characterized either by paucity of description or by a verbal style that paradoxically denies the visual; or there is, somewhere, a profound ambivalence attached to it. Characteristically, the virtuous work of art in *The Faerie Queene* becomes a version of Arthur's shield, an image-less *ekphrasis* like Gloriana herself—the risk of the image's potential sexuality or disruptiveness outweighs its potential virtue, and so the image is controlled either by exclusion or, as in an emblem, by being so schematized and verbalized that its meaning is constrained to a single predetermined course. Calvin seems almost to deny the presence of the human in history painting, seeing 'images and forms of bodies' only in those wholly devoted to visual pleasure; and Munday, having praised Calvin, exclaims against the force of what 'Tullie termeth the eloquence of the bodie' (p. 95). Spenser too achieves the banishment of the body, however virtuous, even from its own chief symbolic representation.

The same tendencies can be seen in the visual arts of Spenser's own time. In a work such as *Queen Elizabeth Confounding the Goddesses* (Fig. 8) the queen is represented in a dramatically different style from that of the pagan deities—incidentally, such pictures demonstrate the inadequacy of claims that Elizabethan artists used such iconic, flat, perspectiveless styles in portraits through ignorance: clearly here the artist elects to use different styles for different subjects. And this is equally clear from Peacham's title-page to his *Compleat Gentleman* (Fig. 9): some styles are associated with dignity and virtue—here, the iconic figure contrasting with all that mannerist exuberance is labelled 'Nobilitas', as against the others 'Scientia'. And the nubile, attractive, mannerist figure on the right is associated with the implements of visual art, once more confirming the sexuality of visual art in the contemporary mind.

The application of this point to the art found in *The Faerie Queene* is substantiated by a consideration of the other principal *ekphrases* within the poem. These works of art contravene all of Calvin's and Alberti's rules, riotously embracing the possibilities of the illusion of real space, of entertaining the mind with shadows, as Spenser says of the false Florimell (III.viii.10.8). She demonstrates art's potential to usurp the position of the real:

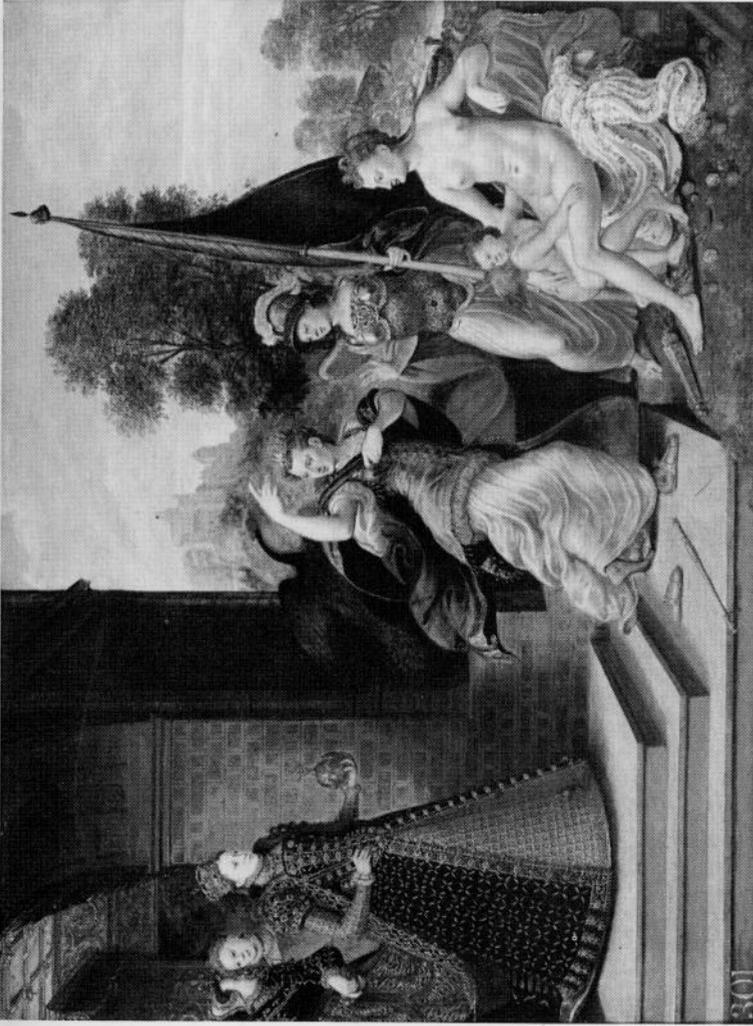


Fig. 8. Monogrammatist HE [Hans Eworth?], 'Queen Elizabeth Confronting the Goddesses'. Reproduced by gracious permission of *H M the Queen*.



Fig. 9. Henry Peacham, titlepage to *The Compleat Gentleman* (1634). *The British Library*.

So hard, this Idole was to be ared,
 That *Florimell* her selfe in all mens vew
 She seem'd to passe: so forged things do fairest shew.

(IV.v.15.7-9)

The iconic representations of Queen Elizabeth reveal a conscious attempt to deny the viewer the possibility of considering the picture to be lifelike, for just this reason: were Elizabeth, in the portrait mentioned, to be painted in the same style as the goddesses, she would have become as much as they the painting's subject, her pre-eminence disputable since she occupies the same space as they do, no longer majestically separate but just another part of the fiction. Nicholas Hilliard's record of his discussions with the queen while she was sitting for her portrait, confirms her awareness of the hidden meanings of aesthetic choices. Discussing Italian painters, all her comments lead one to believe that she prefers their style; and Hilliard reinforces her views by explaining to her the use of 'shadow' within the painting to convey the illusion of depth. But having concluded their admiring discussion, the queen then surprisingly chooses to be painted in such a position that no shadow should suggest itself to the painter; and Hilliard concludes by complimenting her on her perception of the underlying ideological choice in which she was engaged. What the queen understood and was suspicious of was visual art's potential autonomy and its capacity to subject the real to the image. Language was slippery enough, but visual art could seem disconcertingly beyond control, dangerously capable of independent life and of substituting its own apparent reality for the artist's and the subject's own.²¹

IV

And repeatedly Spenser does represent art's ability to escape control. But if the English seem to have preferred immobility and the iconic even in painting, to have preferred not to permit a two dimensional art form to give the illusion of three dimensions, then how much more worrying is the whole matter of sculpture, potentially so lifelike. It is no surprise that in iconoclasm's principal texts sculpture dominates the anecdotes justifying the destruction of images. One of the most frequent complaints is of statues that move, that deceive the eye not just because they are skilful likenesses but because they simulate human movement. In the Cistercian Abbey at Boxley in Kent a statue of Christ on the Cross 'was able, most

²¹ See M. Leslie, 'The Dialogue between Bodies and Souls: Picture and Poesy in the English Renaissance', *Word & Image*, 1, (1985), 16-30.

cunningly, to nod with his head, to scowl with his eyes, to wag his beard, to curve his body, to reject and to receive the prayers of pilgrims'; of course, 'certain engines and old wires' were discovered proving this to be a fraud, but the vehemence of the iconoclasts reveals depths of suspicion inappropriate to a handful of tricks.²² (The heir to this ancient hostility was surely the Lord Chancellor after the Second World War, who would prosecute the nudes at the Windmill Theatre for obscenity if they so much as shivered: immobility in the 1940s still denoted virtue.) Sir Thomas Overbury confirms the equation between different arts and styles and the different degrees of vice in his character of a prostitute: 'the sins of other women shew in landskip [landscape painting], far off & full of shadow; hers in statue, neere hand, and bigger in the life'.²³

In *The Faerie Queene* the statues show an alarming capacity to move between the worlds of art and reality—the nodding figure of Venus who sanctions Scudamour's seizure of Amoret (a version of the dedalian Venus mentioned by Chapman in connection with Achilles' lifelike shield), the statue of Isis that comes alive in Britomart's dream, the arrogant figure of Cupid who replaces his image in order to direct the torture of Amoret in the House of Busyrane. Even when, as with Isis, the figure seems benign, the poem still registers anxiety: 'With that she waked, full of fearefull fright, / And doubtfully dismayd through that so uncouth sight' (V.vii.16.8–9).

Once more, all these incidents of statues coming to life are connected with sexuality and particularly with the potential for and dangers of violation, transgression and adultery. The statues threateningly move from their proper realm as mute and subject to the eye, and assume power over the beholder; they are emancipated from the temporal realm of the verbal and dominate the spatial imagination. It is again illuminating to look ahead to the summation of this antagonism to the visual in Lessing's *Laocoön*, especially as Lessing is interpreted by W. J. T. Mitchell. Mitchell draws attention to Lessing's digression to deal with classical texts retelling myths concerning dreams of adultery with monsters and serpents experienced by the mothers of heroes, precisely the sources of *The Faerie Queene's* Temple of Isis; and he comments:

And this dream in turn helps us to see that 'one effect' the visual arts have that [as Lessing has already said] 'demands the careful attention of the law.' That effect is precisely the irrational, unconscious power of images, their ability to provoke 'adulterous fancy,' the imagining of improper, scandalous

²² Quoted in J. Phillips, *The Reformation of Images: Destruction of Art in England, 1535–1660* (Cal. UP, Berkeley, 1973), pp. 73–4.

²³ *The Overburian Characters*, ed. W. J. Paylor (Oxford, 1936), p. 28.

conjunctions—the union of human and divine figured as the copulation of woman and beast.²⁴

In Lessing's mind and those of his ancestors among the Protestant iconoclasts of the Reformation, statuary's potential transgression of artistic boundaries implied and was emblematic of the transgression of sexual and all other rules.

The clustering of episodes concerning disconcertingly mobile statues around the stories of Britomart, Amoret and Scudamour is highly appropriate, because one of the most powerful myths of visual art and statuary in particular is that of the gods permitting Pygmalion's image to warm to his erotic fervour, especially in Ovid's version; and this is one of the controlling myths of Books Three to Five of *The Faerie Queene*, especially within the story of Amoret, and also of the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*. Like Scudamour and Polifilus, Pygmalion visits a Temple of Venus and while there prays to the goddess in terms which both Renaissance authors imitate for the principal prayer heard in their temples. Reading back from this allusion to the cancelled ending to Book Three, the story of Amoret and Scudamour is seen to be structured by references to this myth: Scudamour's Pygmalion-like wooing of Amoret is intended to remove her from, as he sees it, the statuesque world of virginity; but, with a grim humour commenting on the simplicity of masculine faith in the rightness of solutions that satisfy its own desires, his sexual aggression results in her transformation into a frozen image within the House of Busyrane, indeed through the architectural symbolism into the stone of the house itself; and their final embrace, the intensity of which leads Spenser to liken them to a statue of a hermaphrodite, indeed ends with her 'melting' with passion, recalling the references to modelling wax in Ovid's account of Pygmalion and at the end of the *Metamorphoses*, and recalling also Michelangelo's description of men as 'living statues' and statuary as the crystalization of love. But in addition we should remember that following Ovid's Pygmalion episode is that of his granddaughter Myrrha, she who committed incest with her father, coming alive in her maker's arms. Ovid's description of her emotional terror and distress as she struggles with this guilty passion is taken wholesale into Spenser's account of Britomart's response to her vision of Arthegall within her father's mirror. The Ovidian meditation on sexuality's quickening art pervades Spenser's books of love and chastity.

In making his statues thus mobile, in endowing them with divine powers, and in describing them constantly as 'idols', Spenser seems deliberately to be provoking the reader to view them in a deeply distrustful

²⁴ W. J. T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* (Chicago University Press, Chicago, 1986), p. 109.

light. Not for him the awakening into healthy delight—‘Be stone no more’—of Paulina’s ‘art lawful as eating’ as the statue of Hermoine comes to life in *The Winter’s Tale* (of course, the confidence of Shakespeare’s depiction may derive not least from the fact that his statue is not real). Rather, the more one encounters these ambiguous presences in *The Faerie Queene* the more doubtful, disturbing and lawless they seem.

Statues in *The Faerie Queene* possess just that autonomy—indeed that authority in the idols of Cupid, Venus and Isis—that Spenser and both the pressures on his aesthetic, the Albertian and the Calvinist, seem to be simultaneously fascinated by and fearful of in the visual. Where the Calvinist iconoclast decapitates the statue, the perspectivist seeks to fix the image within his grid, literally putting it in its place. The more evil statues of *The Faerie Queene* successfully escape such tactics. Sir Guyon attentively studies the splendid, sexy fountain in the Bower of Bliss, which,

with curious imageree
Was over-wrought, and shapes of naked boyes,
Of which some seemd with lively jollitee,
To fly about, playing their wanton toyes,
Whilst others did them selves embay in liquid joyes.

(II.xii.60.5–9)

The fountain’s decoration has just that apparent motion, that apparent lifelikeness, that entices and terrifies in the work of visual art. And if the ‘shapes of naked boyes’ remain just on one side of the art/life divide, the ‘two naked Damzells’ bathing in the basin show every sign of leaping it, large as life and twice as nubile.

V

Even when works of art themselves do not move it is still their combination with movement that endows them with such persuasive power. In the poem’s two great moments of iconoclasm, the point of the destruction is not a simple fear of art as a blasphemous idol or fear of the beautiful, but the recognition that each individual work of art functions within a programme of experiences designed to persuade, indeed to control the will. The overall ensemble of art contains a spatial rhetoric, all the more worrying to a Reformation culture in that, as Anthony Munday said, the evil that enters at the eye is infinitely more compelling than that at the ear.

Examples of that spatial rhetoric abounded in sixteenth-century Europe, not only in Italy, but also in Elizabethan England. Time and again visitors to houses and designed landscapes found themselves following

prescribed routes and as a result subjected to relentless pressure to accept the agenda of the estate. The success of that pressure lay not only in the organization of the programme, but in the very necessity of motion on the part of the visitor. In order to encounter the various events and set-pieces, the various mythological figures, one must embark upon a voyage; and that voyage commits the visitor to whatever sequence is designed:

Her most excellent Majesty walking in Wanstead Garden, as she passed down the grove, there came suddenly among the train one appavelled like an honest man's wife of the country; where crying out for justice, and desiring all the lords and gentlemen to speak a good word for her.²⁵

To Queen Elizabeth, a walk through the Earl of Leicester's Wanstead estate in 1578 has suddenly become a fiction laden with meanings of which she begins by knowing nothing, in which she becomes none the less the central actor, and in which all eyes will be on her. Here, in Sir Philip Sidney's *Lady of May* entertainment, the queen has been ambushed, not with a harmless pastoral, but with a highly topical, controversial and far from complimentary allegory of her government, all designed to persuade her to change her ways.

Because that encounter in the garden has occurred as a result of the supposed audience's movement into and on to the territory of the fiction, the relationship between spectator and art is radically different from that in a theatre.²⁶ A mobile audience has, knowingly or not, made a commitment through action and invasion; has unwittingly agreed to abide by the rules and codes of a fiction it does not comprehend and over which it has little or no control—this might be a description of the fundamental position of Spenser's heroes as they embark on their quests from Gloriana's court. The result of movement has been radically destabilizing. In the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* it is precisely that lack of control as the Dreamer is relentlessly moved from artwork to artwork that produces the anxiety essential to the psychological exploration. Neither action nor inaction, neither movement nor stasis can guarantee safety, as Britomart learns; although ostensibly cast as audience, the visitor is inevitably the leading actor: no response can ever be passive, the 'texts' of such entertainments and landscapes always interpreting even speechlessness and absence as active participation, judgement and commentary. Both Elizabeth and the characters within *The Faerie Queene* find themselves no

²⁵ Sir Philip Sidney, *The Lady of May* in *Miscellaneous Prose of Sir Philip Sidney*, ed. K. Duncan-Jones & J. van Dorsten (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1973), p. 21.

²⁶ Not that Spenser is without doubts concerning the theatrical: before Sir Guyon reaches the bathing beauties of the Bower of Bliss he is subjected to a preliminary temptation by mermaids, whose habitation is 'like an halfe Theatre' (II.xii.30.7).

longer the possessors of the 'sovereign eye' as at a masque or in the theatre; instead of being the celebrated audience of art, they become its object, and its subject, wriggle and wrestle however much they try. The effect is similar to that of Alberti's monumental façades, where the architect has manipulated perspective so that the visitor's movement and vision are controlled and channelled, unwaveringly conveying the ruler's omnipotence and the subject's powerlessness. I remarked earlier that perspective, for Alberti and others, was a means of controlling the image, tying it down; but it is also a means of fixing the position of the viewer. Alberti is compromised, of course: he recognizes the potency of the visual and seeks to control the image, but only to deploy its power for his own purposes. Norman Bryson sees the same rhetorical motive in Alberti's use of Ciceronian prose style:

In the Ciceronian sentence, the organization of information into strict hierarchies of priority affords the reader little room for manoeuvre . . . Ciceronian rhetoric imposes a gubernatorial perspective on the information it purveys, and this in turn fixes the subject in a unitary position of submission before [it].²⁷

In the next century Louis XIV not only controlled the palace and landscape at Versailles but wrote and rewrote his *Manière de Montrer les Jardins de Versailles* in order to ensure and supplement verbally his visual absolutism. Spenser deploys similarly pointed verbal patterning in order to convey the persuasiveness of Phaedria's island-garden, which is inhabited by tuneful songbirds; but the harmony of their song is described in a rhetorical progression that continues melodiously through into the seduction of the unwary:

No bird, but did her shrill notes sweetly sing;
No song but did containe a lovely dit:
Trees, braunches, birds, and songs were framed fit,
For to allure fraile mind to carelesse ease.
Carelesse the man soone woxe

(II.vi.13.3–7)

Art's perfection here is part of the process of seduction, as is the collocation, to use Alberti's word, of the whole of Phaedria's setting. As in the Bower of Bliss to which this is only a curtain-raiser, it is less a single artwork than the cumulative, structured experience of the whole ensemble that Spenser reveals as evil. At the end of his long, dangerous journey through Acrasia's garden and villa ensemble, Guyon destroys not just the lascivious artworks, but the Bower in its entirety, for its real power resides

²⁷ N. Bryson, *Vision and Painting: the Logic of the Gaze* (Macmillan, 1983), p. 104.

in the way it has operated as a single rhetorical device to attract and subdue the visitor.

The same is true of the other great instance of art's destruction in *The Faerie Queene*, that of the House of Busyrane:

Returning backe, those goodly roomes, which erst
 She saw so rich and royally arayd,
 Now vanisht utterly, and cleane subverst
 She found, and all their glory quite decayd,
 The sight of such a chaunge her much dismayd.

(III.xii.42.1–5)

Britomart's previous journey through the rooms of the castle clearly had followed a set programme, a route designed for maximum effect upon the visitor, in which the works of art which cloth the walls, and the statue of Cupid ultimately encountered, put steady pressure upon her to succumb, to enter its fiction, to turn the objective observer into art's subject, in all senses. Britomart's journey through the ensemble of architecture, statuary and tapestries is punctuated by the work of art's addresses, commands and warnings to her: 'Be bold, be bold, and everywhere be bold'; 'be not too bold'. By this stage in Book Three, she is largely immune to the attractions; but the idol of Cupid she ultimately encounters compels even her admiration:

That wondrous sight faire *Britomart* amazed,
 Ne seeing could her wonder satisfie,
 But evermore and more upon it gazed,
 The whiles the passing brightnes her fraile senses dazed.

(III.xi.49.6–9)

The brightness, characteristically, comes from no external source, but shines from within the statue itself.

Leaving the fabulous hall of the tapestries and the statue, Britomart comes to another room, briefly described but said to be far more beautiful still. And here the images exceed those of the earlier room not least in that they have become those of the imagination discovered in the House of Alma, 'wilde Antickes' and 'a thousand monstrous formes', fitting for their collusion with the individual's fears of the unmaking of the known self in the processes of desire. Thus prepared, Britomart and the reader witness precisely the kind of show found at the heart of the entertainments given Queen Elizabeth on her peregrinations, a masque, or a nightmarish intensification of true masque, perhaps a dramatic mirroring of the self. Populated by a strangely orderly riot of figures drawn from all ranges of the figurative expression of the erotic and the romantic, the Masque of Cupid prances silently before Britomart, with Amoret at the centre as the

triumphal, self-mutilating victim of Love himself, recalling the images of violence and deceit in the earlier rooms.

Amoret, actor in the masque but also the audience to whom it is directed, stands as the ultimate figure of the spectator of visual art in *The Faerie Queene*—persuaded, directed, her will controlled, her imagination perverted. And indeed it is Amoret's own imagination, her response to the 'thousand monstrous formes' that surround her, which is the dagger transfixing her heart, honed by the forced journey through the spatial rhetoric of Busyrane's castle. Everything in Busyrane's ensemble is an active participant in a sustained monologue of compulsion, the very verbs Spenser uses endowing inanimate objects with a sinuous, insinuating vitality:

the rich metall lurked privily,
As faining to be hid from envious eye;
Yet here, and there, and every where unwares
It shewd it selfe, and shone unwilingly;
Like a discoloured Snake, whose hidden snares
Through the greene gras his long bright burnisht backe declares.
(III.xi.28.4-9)

The presence of the snake in the simile confirms that temptation is art's purpose here. And, as ever in such scenes, the particular stylistic quality of art that Spenser uses to identify the evil is its lifelikeness:

So lively and so like, that living sence it fayld.
(III.xi.46.9)

During the masque Spenser stresses again its harmony and congruence. And as in Phaedria's island-garden, the purpose of this harmony of arts is to entrap:

the rare sweetnesse of the melody
The feeble senses wholly did confound,
And the fraile soule in deepe delight nigh dround:
(III.xii.6.3-5)

VI

Colin Clout's vision of the Graces is properly taken by readers of *The Faerie Queene* to be a supreme moment of affirmation of the poet's powers of vision. But the question of its validity as art, indeed of his art's validity, is never far from the poet's, and thus our, thoughts. For Calidore, as he stands concealed, watching the bewitching dance of the Graces, is not sure what to make of this vision:

Much wondred *Calidore* at this straunge sight,
 Whose like before his eye had never seene,
 And standing long astonished in spright,
 And wrapt with pleasaunce, wist not what to weene;
 Whether it were the traine of beauties Queene,
 Or Nymphes, or Fearies, or enchanted show,
 With which his eyes mote have deluded beene.

(VI.x.17.1-7)

But with true Protestant zeal and activity, *Calidore* will not remain in ignorance:

Therefore resolving, what it was, to know,
 Out of the wood he rose, and toward them did go.

But soone as he appeared to their vew,
 They vanisht all away out of his sight,
 And cleane were gone, which way he never knew;
 All save the shepheard, who for fell despight
 Of that displeasure, broke his bag-pipe quight

(VI.x.17.8-9; 18.1-5)

It is absolutely characteristic of Spenser in *The Faerie Queene* that he should include both the beauty and the destruction of the vision. *Calidore*, like Sir Guyon, breaks down the beautiful bowers of art in the final completed book of the poem, not with Guyon's deliberate iconoclastic intent, but with the rigour pitiless of Calvinism's determination to question the nature of images and their purpose, to find truth, to expel the imagination's visions of things the material eye cannot see. Spenser's own language in his description of *Calidore*'s puzzlement shows the insistent quality of such rigorous thought: the knight stands 'wrapt with pleasaunce', 'his eyes mote have deluded beene'. One feels that always behind the piping Spenser, transported with the sheer delight of poetry, art and the creation of beauty, Calvin's brooding figure stands, speaking the words of the *Institutes*:

From this we may gather that man's nature, so to speak, is a perpetual factory of idols. (I.11.8) (p. 108)

Within the final affirmation of the glories of art in *The Faerie Queene* is the recognition of the doubts that constantly overhang Spenser's aesthetics: is this form of creation good? In Calvin's terms, is it beneficial? Is it no more than a vision for the titillation of its creator and audience? Moreover the author, but not Colin Clout himself, seems troubled by just such a Calvinist, but also Albertian question concerning authority over the vision. When *Calidore* questions the shepherd, he congratulates him on his power

to conjure up such beauties: 'Right happy thou, that mayst them freely see', to which Colin replies,

Not I so happy, . . .
 As thou unhappy, which them thence didst chace,
 Whom by no meanes thou canst recall again
 For being gone, none can them bring in place,
 But whom they of them selves list so to grace.

(VI.x.20.1–5)

The artist is the midwife to the work of art, a species of humility attractive to a twentieth-century audience. But seen from the perspective of a Calvin or an Alberti the autonomy of the vision confirms its dangerousness. Colin expresses no doubt concerning the health of his creation; but the manner of its disruption, and the fact that Calidore's further truancy in conversing with Colin has contributed to the capture of Pastorella, seem calculated to raise questions in the reader.

It is usual to end a discussion of Spenser's art in *The Faerie Queene* with a reference to Colin Clout's vision of the graces at the end of Book Six; but though that vision is dispelled by Calidore's loutish intrusion, it remains too comfortable to act as a conclusion to this lecture. Instead I want to end with the only vision of a poet in Spenser's epic, that extremely disturbing vision in Book Five as Arthur and Sir Arthegall march into the palace of Mercilla:

There as they entred at the Scriene, they saw
 Some one, whose tongue was for his trespass vyle
 Nayld to a post, adjudged so by law:
 For that therewith he falsely did revyle,
 And foule blaspheme that Queene for forged guyle,
 Both with bold speaches, which he blazed had,
 And with lewd poems, which he did compyle:
 For the bold title of a Poet bad
 He on himselfe had ta'en, and rayling rymes had sprad.

(V.ix.25)

The poet is obviously a betrayer of his art, so the punishment may not extend to all authors; but he is none the less an artist. Spenser did not suffer such retribution, but perhaps might have done if he had lived longer—the vision of this lying poet occurs just before we witness the trial and sentencing of Duessa—in the political allegory, the trial, sentencing and execution of Mary Queen of Scots, Spenser's 'foule blaspheme' of whom so annoyed the future James I.

But more disturbingly, one is aware that however grisly the scene here in Book Five, Spenser is, if not approving, then tolerant of the punishment inflicted; that he sees this mutilation as appropriate. The ritual punishment

of the poet occurs—without warning, but one suspects with a lost contemporary appropriateness—in conjunction with the final judgement on Duessa. Throughout the poem, ritual revelation and degradation have been associated with the female and the creators and creatures of art and fiction, with things which are not what they seem—Duessa herself, revealed as half-witch, half-serpent, Errour the patroness of books and papers who is similar, the idol of the False Florimell, the House of Pride: Spenser's radical ambivalence towards his own art is summed up in all of this. If an iconoclast truly believes in the dictum *ut pictura poesis*—as pictures, so poetry—then the exclusion and desecration of visual must involve that of verbal art as well.