Sidney, Spenser and the Royal Reader

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By

Shormishtha Panja

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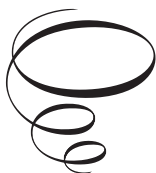

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To my husband Amarendra Chatterjee
and my son Rutajeet Chatterjee

More is thy due than more than all can pay.

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INTRODUCTION

OF QUILLS AND QUEENS

Each gan vndight
Their garments wet, and weary armour free,
To dry them selues by Vulcanes flaming light,
And eke their lately bruzed parts to bring in plight.

And eke that straunger knight emongst the rest
Was for like need enforst to disaray:
Tho whenas vailed was her loftie crest,
Her golden locks, that were in tramels gay
Vpbounden, did them selues adowne display,…

Which whenas they beheld, they smitten were
With great amazement of so wondrous sight.
And each on other, and they all on her
Stood gazing, as if suddein great affright
Had them surprised. At last auizing right,
Her goodly personage and glorious hew,
Which they so much mistooke, they tooke delight
In their first errour, and yet still anew
With wonder of her beauty fed their hungry vew.

Yet note their hungry vew be satisfide,
But seeing still the more desir'd to see,
And euer firmely fixed did abide
In contemplation of diuinitie:
But most they meruaild at her cheualree,
And noble prowesse, which they had approued,
That much they faynd to know, who she mote bee;
Yet none of all them her thereof amoued,
Yet euery one her likte, and euery one her loued.

The Faerie Queene III ix 19, 23, 24[1]

The scene is in front of Malbecco's castle in Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* III. Paridell and Satyrane seek shelter from the storm. A stranger knight joins them. Malbecco refuses to let them in. He has a lovely wife,

Hellenore, much younger than himself. He is terrified that he will lose her. However, the knights succeed in gaining entry. They disrobe and dry themselves by the fire. This is when they find to their astonishment that the stranger knight is a woman. She is Britomart, the knight representing chastity in *The Faerie Queene* III, the only female protagonist in the epic. In the complicated feelings aroused in the male knights, there is surprise ("With great amazement of so wondrous sight"), there is curiosity ("That much they fayned to know who she may be,") there is confusion ("Her goodly personage and glorious hew,/Which they so much mistooke,") there is fear ("sudden great affright") and there is anxiety. In the advance ("Yet note their hungry view be satisfied/ Yet seeing still the more desired to see") and retreat ("And euer firmely fix'd did abide/In contemplation of diuinitie") of the male gaze, in the deconstruction of the stereotypically erotic scene of a knight who turns out to be a beautiful young woman, who carelessly undresses in front of a fire with men present, a woman who arouses in them not lust but *liking* and a sense of camaraderie ("Yet euery one her likte and euery one her loued")--a very surprising thing indeed to find in a romance epic between young men and women--we find in microcosm the complicated reactions of Elizabeth I's male courtiers to a woman in a position of authority. Elizabeth I was a woman who occupied a traditionally male bastion of power, a woman who nevertheless wanted to be regarded as desirable, a woman who hunted like Diana and walked like Venus, in Raleigh's words, a female monarch who was able to exploit the supposed divinity that encircled her position, a woman who consequently aroused complex, indecipherable, almost untranslatable emotions in her male courtiers. This scene perfectly encapsulates the confusion aroused by an anomalous figure like Elizabeth I in the male courtiers' imaginations and bodies. And to complicate the picture further, Britomart is not a figure that Edmund Spenser presents as a possible portrait of Elizabeth. He chooses instead, as images of Elizabeth's public and private selves, Belphoebe and Gloriana: "In that Faerie Queene…in my particular I conceiue the most excellent and glorious person of our soueraine the Queene….For considering she beareth two persons, the one of a most vertuous and beautiful ladie, this latter part in some places I doe expresse in Belphoebe" (Letter to Raleigh).[2] Belphoebe is a problematic figure who devotes herself to a life of unremitting sexual abstinence mistaking it for chastity; Gloriana or the Faerie Queene is conspicuous by her absence in the epic. An apparent accretion of identity, in the identification of Queen Elizabeth with Belphoebe and Gloriana, thus becomes, in Spenser's refusal to identify her with the androgynous

Britomart, another woman in a man's world, adopting a profession seen as exclusively male, an emptying out of identity.

This book deals with two of Elizabeth's courtiers: Philip Sidney and Edmund Spenser. It looks at their lives and their work and at their interaction with Elizabeth I and her councilors, particularly as events crystallized around the opposition to the marriage match with Duke of Alençon and Anjou (c1579 to 1586).[3] This match brought to a head the Protestant faction's discomfort with a female ruler who apparently would not listen to counsel. The book does not deal exclusively with the events surrounding the marriage proposal but it does endeavour to illustrate how this match brought into sharp focus the workings of the Protestant league, with the Earl of Leicester, Sidney's maternal uncle and Spenser's sometime employer, at its head. Both Sidney and Spenser played a vital role in the writings reacting to the match and to the queen's desire to wed a Roman Catholic French prince much younger than herself. While Sidney was a courtier and politician, he was a disgruntled one, and his relations with the monarch, as reflected in his correspondence and works like *The Lady of May* and *The Four Foster Children of Desire* (which he may have co-written and in which he performed) were complex. Edmund Spenser, a man not of noble blood but who gained access through his education and poetic talent to the inner circles at court, was initially enthusiastic at being a part of the Leicester faction as his correspondence with Gabriel Harvey attests. However, his zealous response in support of this faction as expressed in *Mother Hubberds Tale* ended in an exile of sorts from court and the dashing of his political ambitions.

It may be appropriate at this point briefly to discuss the events surrounding the match with the Duke of Alençon and Anjou.[4] Finding a match for Elizabeth I was not a new thing. She received marriage proposals from Philip II of Spain, King Eric XIV of Sweden, King Charles IX of France, and an archduke from Austria.[5] Most of the above were found to be unsuitable in some way: Philip II was held responsible for the persecution of the Protestants in the reign of Mary I; Charles IX was too young; King Eric XIV was the son of a usurper and his kingship was "elective."[6] While proposals and petitions from Parliament or Privy Council in the 1560s pleaded with the queen to marry so that she might produce "a little Henry" to "play in the palace"[7] later petitions in the 1570s emphasised not childbirth but the importance of alliances with powerful European countries such as France.[8] Elizabeth did not pledge to remain single and marriage proposals were not entertained to silence her critics or for "diplomatic gain."[9] Leaving England open to a war of succession in the

absence of an heir to the throne was not a possibility she accepted with equanimity. There are two occasions when Elizabeth seriously considered marriage: the first in the early 1560s to Robert Dudley, the future Earl of Leicester and Sidney's maternal uncle, after he lost his wife, Amy Robsart, (many said that she had been murdered and the fall down the stairs was no accident,) and then, in 1579, to the much younger Duke of Alençon and Anjou. Apart from the scandal of Amy Robsart's death, William Cecil felt that Dudley would "study nothing but to enhanss his owne particular frends to welthe, to offices, to lands, and to offend others."[10] The famous anonymous tract *Leicester's Commonwealth* (1584,) an imaginary conversation between a gentleman, a lawyer, and a scholar, all with marked Roman Catholic sympathies, made no bones about the negative influence Dudley or the Earl of Leicester had on England:

> This man, therefore, so contemptible by his ancestors, so odible of himself, so plunged, overwhelmed, and defamed in all vice, so envied in the Court, so detested in the country, and not trusted of his own and dearest friends; nay (which I am privy to), so misliked and hated of his own servants about him for his beastly life, niggardy, and atheism (being never seen yet to say one private prayer within his chamber in his life) as they desire nothing in this world so much as his ruin and that they may be the first to lay hands upon him for revenge. This man (I say) so broken both within and without, is it possible that her Majesty and her wise Council should fear? I can never believe it; or if it be so, it is God's permission without all cause for punishment of our sins, for that this man, if he once perceive indeed that they fear him, will handle them accordingly and play the Bear indeed…"
>
> *Leicester's Commonwealth* 194

Cecil's efforts to scuttle Dudley's hopes were matched by Dudley's machinations to foil the proposed matches with Habsburg and French royalty. According to Doran, Dudley did not want to jeopardize his position as Elizabeth's favourite just as Cecil did not want the opposing Dudley faction to become more powerful.[11]

The marriage match with the Duke of Alençon and Anjou was more complex than any proposed alliance with Dudley, and it is with this match that my interest lies. In 1570, the proposal first came for the older brother, Henry, then Duke of Anjou, later King Henry III of France who insulted Elizabeth, called her whore (*putain publique*) and turned down the proposal in no uncertain terms. His mother, the indefatigably ambitious Catherine de' Medici, had already married her daughter Margaret to Henry III of Navarre (he would be Henry IV, the future King of France,) and then

in part engineered the St. Bartholomew's Day's Massacre a mere four days later. Catherine was no stranger to Protestant matches for her Roman Catholic children—in fact, this was seen as a means of allaying the strife in France between the Roman Catholics and the Huguenots. She then proposed as a match for Elizabeth her youngest son, Francis, Duke of Alençon who became Duke of Anjou in 1576, two years after his brother Henry ascended to the throne. Then proceeded what Wallace T. MacCaffrey rightly calls a comedy in many acts. Initially Elizabeth, still burning from Henry's insults, refused to consider a match with the supposedly pockmarked, deformed and considerably younger Francis (he was twenty-two years her junior): "we cannot…bring our mind to like of this offer, specially finding no other great commodity offered to us with him."[12]

However, gradually she relented and no doubt snobbery had a role to play in this change of stance as MacCaffrey suggests: Francis, whom Elizabeth had never seen, belonged to one of the most illustrious families in Europe. Francis' illustrious lineage was not the only reason for Elizabeth modifying her stance by the end of April 1572: there were political considerations. She was anxious that the French might seize the Netherlands, taking advantage of the rebellion there. William of Orange approached Elizabeth and then the Duke of Alençon and Anjou to take up the sovereignty of the provinces of Holland and Zeeland in the Netherlands, because he was convinced that without foreign help their cause was lost. Both declined. Later the Duke of Alençon and Anjou expressed an interest in the Netherlands and offered aid. As Doran suggests, Elizabeth became worried that this was a sign of incipient French control over the Netherlands. One could add that the queen made the crucial error of supporting the politically and martially inept Duke of Alençon and Anjou rather than the able William of Orange.

For two years there was little communication between Elizabeth and Alençon, now Duke of Anjou. There was no further talk of marriage. Francis supported his brother in the civil war in the spring of 1577. He forgot his Protestant friends and stormed Huguenot towns.

In May 1578, however, marriage negotiations were once more reopened because Elizabeth was alarmed at the Duke of Alençon and Anjou's growing ambitions. Thus it was not just the ticking of her biological clock, as MacCaffrey seems to suggest, but also shrewd political considerations that governed Elizabeth's actions. Elizabeth's policy of hunting with the hounds and running with the hare remained unabated—she wanted to aid the Huguenot rebels but also stay on good terms with the French. The

Massacre of St. Bartholomew's Day occurs in Paris on 24 August, 1572 but it does not bring an abrupt halt to the marriage negotiations as Elizabeth's councilors and subjects thought it would.[13] An important and novel factor was that the match would make France an ally—what with the machinations of the Duke of Guise and Mary, Queen of Scots, France was not perceived as an ally of England. Such an alliance would help combat the growing power and political ambitions of the European superpower, Roman Catholic Spain.

What was unique about this marriage negotiation, and this was a factor that contributed directly to Sidney and Spenser's writings on the match, was that Elizabeth was taking an independent stand in this matter.[14] Rather than following her council's decree, she was putting to them a proposition that would have far-reaching consequences. In fact, the all-important Burghley was kept in the dark about her plans and initially Sussex was in her confidence.[15] Burghley emerged as a leading champion of the match only in 1579. Burghley's 1579 letter to the Queen appears to make a paternal plea to the Queen to end her solitariness, adding with unflattering candour (but with a directness that Elizabeth valued among her closest advisors) that her years of self-indulgence and irresponsibility are now over: the "morning of her time" has passed when she tasted "the sweet dew of pleasure and delight" (the queen was forty-six years old) (Marcus, Mueller and Rose 240).[16] She should now consider marriage seriously. Even God created angels and humans "to be witnesses and partakers of His felicity"--can Elizabeth then resist the lure of a "companion, friend or servant beloved" that she may "love and esteem above the rest" (Marcus, Mueller and Rose 241)? This was the first time that Burghley was kept in the dark on matters of such crucial importance. Another interesting fact was that the leader of the Protestant faction, Leicester, was not immediately up in arms. He was even telling people that he had ordered a new suit of clothes for the wedding. Letters from the French and Spanish ambassadors did not at first suggest that he was opposed to the match.[17] This is a crucial factor, for Spenser would later write *Mother Hubberds Tale*, published in 1591 but written and no doubt circulated in manuscript c1579-80, in vociferous support of Leicester's opposition to the match, but Leicester obviously did not want this opposition to be so blatantly voiced. Leicester and Sidney were part of the group of nobles attending on the Duke of Alençon and Anjou. Sidney performed in and probably helped to compose, no doubt unwillingly, *The Four Foster Children of Desire*, an entertainment staged for the French Duke. They were also ordered to be part of the group that attended the Duke's departure. Stow's entry for February 1581 reads thus:

> "The fifth of February the queenes Maiesty with her whole Court accompanied Monsieur Duke of Anjowe from Westminister to Canterbury, where when shee had feasted all the French nobility, either tooke leave of other, and her Maiesty returned. The first day of the same moneth the Duke lodged at Sandwich, & on the next morning tooke the sea, being accompanied of the Earle of Leicester…Master Sidney…so as the whole traine that attended upon the said Earle was one hundred gentlemen & mo then three hundred Servingmen…"
>
> Stow 373-374[18]

Holinshed writes for An. Dom. 1581:

> "The first of Nouember, monsieur Francis duke of Aniou, the French kings brother, and other nobles of France (hauing latelie arriued in Kent) came to London, and were honourablie receiued, and reteined at the court with banketting, and diuerse pleasant shewes and pastimes, of whom more hereafter in place conuenient"
>
> *Holinshed's Chronicles* 4, 447[19]

As for the other monarchs, Henry III and Catherine de' Medici were not very confident about the match. Mary, Queen of Scots was skeptical as was Philip II of Spain. However, Philip offered his own daughter with a big dowry to the Duke of Alençon and Anjou just in case. The queen swung to and fro—in early October 1578 she was sending the Duke of Alençon and Anjou her portrait, a month later she was blowing cold. Simier's visit proved to be a turning point; it was followed by the Duke of Alençon and Anjou's visit. It is then that the queen began seriously considering marriage, much to the consternation of Council, the nobles and her people. Simier's announcement of Leicester's secret marriage to the queen's second cousin and lady in waiting, Lettice Knollys, certainly did not help the Protestant league's cause. Leicester was in disgrace and preparations for the match went on in full swing. That her councillors would be opposed to the match is something Elizabeth had no doubt foreseen; what she and advisors like Sussex had badly underestimated was the public furore that was to erupt as a result of this proposal. It was no wonder the people were upset and nervous: even as late as 1577, when the marriage drama was on, the Duke of Alençon and Anjou was storming Huguenot towns and aiding his brother in the French civil war by fighting against Huguenots. As Doran points out, apart from English xenophobia, marriage to a Catholic, the possible involvement of England in foreign wars, the taking over of England by France or some other European power: all these nightmare scenarios were used by nobles at court as well as by English citizens in pamphlets and discourses, such as the one by John Stubbs, to dissuade the queen from this alliance.[20] Even details like conversion, the wedding service and the

celebration of Mass were discussed threadbare in the event of a marriage with a Catholic.[21] The match was seen as a serious threat to what one could term notions of Protestant Englishness.

Let us look briefly at John Stubbs in *The Discourse of a Gaping Gulf* (1579,) one of the most famous tracts written opposing the marriage. Stubbs voiced strong arguments against the match based on based on religion: the match would be "treason to the reformed religion" and it would endanger the reformed faith. The English were God's chosen people; this marriage would then be like a marriage between Hebrew and Canaanite: "S. Paul speaking of contrary couplings together, compareth them to the vneuen yoking of the cleane Oxe to the vncleane Asse, a thing forbidden in the lawe" (Stubbs 6). "[O]r shall it not be much more ougly before God and hys angels, vvhen an Hebrew shal mary a Cananite?" (Stubbs 7). It would be abhorrent on grounds of nationalism: "It is naturall to all men to abhor forreigne rule as a burden of Egypt, and to vs of England if to any other nation vnder the son First, it agreeth not vvith thys state or frame of gouernment, to deliuer any truth of vnder gouernment to an alien, but is a poison to it when vve receiue any such for a gouernour" (Stubbs 30). Stubbs stressed the perfidy of the French and emphasized the extreme inappropriateness of such a foreign alliance: "Out of thys inbred hatred it came, that Frenchmen aboue other aliens beare thys addition in some of our auncient chronicles, Charters, and, statuts to be the auncient ennemies of England" (Stubbs 33). The evils of foreign rule and some other terrifying possible outcomes of the match were not left unspoken: "how exceedingly dangerous they find it, by theyr learning for her maiestie at these yeeres to haue hyr first child, yea hovv fearfull thexpectation of death is to mother and child" (Stubbs 46). If Elizabeth's husband becomes the King of France, she would have to travel to France to be mere "borovved Maiestie as the moone to the sonn, shining by night as other kings vvyues" (Stubbs 44) or stay back in England "vvithout comfort of her hus band, seing her selfe despised or not vvifelike esteemed and as an eclipsed son diminished in souereinty" (Stubbs 44). According to Stubbs, the old enemy France was thoroughly untrustworthy and there could be no advantage in marrying "this odd fellow, by birth a french man, by profession a papist, an Atheist by conuersation, an instrument in Fraunce of vncleannes, a fly worker in England for Rome and Fraunce in this present affayre, a sorcerer by common voyce & fame…" (Stubbs 83). Sidney and Spenser, as I discuss in later chapters, would also weigh on this problematic proposed match. As the anonymous author of *Leicester's Commonwealth* put it, "Such running there was, such sending and posting about the realm, such amplification of the powers and forces of Casimir

and other princes present themselves unto his aid for defense of the realm and religion against strangers…such debasing of them that favored the marriage…tending all to manifest and open war…" (*Leicester's Commonwealth* 76-77).

The important factors to be kept in mind with regard to this match was that Elizabeth was taking the initiative and acting independently, something that her councilors regarded with anxiety; the Earl of Leicester, at least at the beginning of the marriage drama, did not want to sound as if he opposed the match too vociferously, a stance that Spenser badly miscalculated; the match was not merely a question of Elizabeth's snobbery or the ticking of her biological clock as MacCaffrey seems to suggest, but a political move aimed at curbing France and Spain's ambitions in Europe. It was not just Elizabeth's age and her hormones—her mind seemed at one point to think that this match was a good idea.

After this brief examination of the events surrounding the match with the Duke of Alençon and Anjou, I now turn to Philip Sidney and Edmund Spenser. The focus of this discussion is not the poetry of Sidney and Spenser in isolation but on the close link between literary output and courtierliness, on how their political aspirations are expressed in and often thwarted by their poetry and prose. I use the word "courtierly" rather than "courtly" because it pinpoints the special skills required of courtiers, rather than any member of the court. These specific skills contemporary courtesy books elaborated on and examined at length. The ways in which Sidney and Spenser inflected and modified this discourse forms part of my study. This study demonstrates how both these figures, viewed today as poets rather than politicians, had political ambitions that were frustrated and how they expressed their discomfort with and critique of authority figures, be they the monarch or her advisors, in their major and minor works: *The Lady of May*, *The Old Arcadia*, and *The New Arcadia, Mother Hubberds Tale*, *Virgils Gnat*, *The Ruines of Time*, *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe*, *Astrophel* and *The Faerie Queene* and also how they refashioned and re-determined their own role vis **à** vis locations of power. Andrew Hadfield in *Edmund Spenser: A Life*,[22] Richard Rambuss in *Spenser's Secret Career*[23] and Katherine Duncan-Jones in her biography of Sidney, *Sir Philip Sidney: Courtier Poet* [24] have dealt to a certain extent with the political ambitions of these two figures but Hadfield does not discuss Spenser's role in the Duke of Alençon and Anjou's marriage proposal or Spenser's relationship with Sidney in any great detail. Rambuss' focus is on Spenser's secretaryship to Lord Grey in Ireland and Duncan-Jones, while composing a fine biography of Sidney, does not always talk about

the influence of historical events, particularly the queen's proposed marriage with the Duke of Alençon and Anjou, on Sidney's literary works. The courtier and the poet mentioned in her subtitle do not always mesh together. Too, there has not been enough attention paid to the interaction between Sidney and Spenser and on their plans for English poetry in the vernacular. Sidney and Spenser are usually discussed as having identical aims for English poetry. However, while Sidney favoured classical models, Spenser clearly harked back to the "well of English undefiled." His heroes were Chaucer and Skelton. If he borrows from Virgil or Ovid he invariably adds an English twist. These differences in poetics between the two remain crucial and under-discussed. The relationship of these two poets, their political location and their differing aims for English poetry as well as English society, a society that enabled rapid upward mobility, (Sidney's stance being the more conservative and Spenser's relatively radical,) are discussed in detail here. The manner in which the two poets played a crucial role in what is commonly termed the Cult of Elizabeth is also examined as are the elements of that cult: royal progresses, literary works written in honour of the queen, the queen's speeches and the visual syntax of her portraits. The queen favoured what I term the register of oxymoron: i.e. she presented herself as simultaneously desirable and chaste, vulnerable and strong, beloved and mother, indeed female and male.

The study is of course inspired by the fine work of the new historicists, particularly that of Louis Adrian Montrose, in the reading of history and literature as parallel narratives, interwoven and inextricable, but it also presents a somewhat different way of intermingling history with literature, inspired by the work of revisionist historians such as Wallace T. MacCaffrey, Penry Williams, Simon Adams and Susan Doran. The emphasis of the new historicists is on history as a constructed, fabulous narrative, meriting the status of a fictional work. Therefore, the focus of the new historicists is often on historical details that are cryptic, even "bizarre" (Walter Cohen's adjective).[25] While this makes for enormously entertaining reading, the text under discussion is frequently eclipsed by the somewhat totalitarian urge of the critic's imagination. Power relations are subtly altered but not demolished (note Greenblatt's famous statement "There is subversion, no end of subversion, but not for us" which displays an absence of acknowledgment of the heterogeneity of the interpretive community of early modern texts; note his unwillingness to annotate Caliban's use of the word "scamel" in *The Tempest* insisting that it remain a marker of the opaqueness of Caliban's utterances). History, I argue, is too precious a commodity to be trusted to the new historicists alone.[26] Too,

while new historicists such as Stephen Greenblatt valorize the biographical details and the critical standpoint, even biases, of the critic, although not as stringently or candidly as I would like them to, I endeavour to intermingle the biography of the two poet politicians I discuss and their works.[27]

In the discussion of my book that follows, I intersperse my own argument with references to the work of those critics whose work I find most relevant to my study, pointing out crucial differences between their stance and mine. I also interweave the chapters dealing with Sidney's work and those dealing with Spenser in order to demonstrate not just how closely linked their lives, their political aspirations and their literary output was but also to accentuate the major differences between them. The first chapter, " 'This courteous cruell': Queen Elizabeth I and the Register of Oxymoron," offers a somewhat different view of Elizabethan history than that of the new historicists with their penchant for snapshots of history, the more startling and unrelated to the text at hand the better. I explicate the events surrounding the match with the Duke of Alençon and Anjou and how the queen's negotiations disclosed a new and worrisome angle of her diplomatic dealings—she was taking the initiative and had plans of her own, often plans to which her councilors were not privy, and this was seen as a matter of great anxiety to her (male) councilors and her subjects.[28] Following the cue of revisionist historians like Penry Williams, Wallace T. MacCaffrey, Simon Adams and Susan Doran, I explicate what I call Queen Elizabeth I's rhetoric of oxymoron in the light of her progresses, particularly *The Four Foster Children of Desire* in which Sidney performed a part and which he might have co-written, the visual syntax of her portraits and the rhetoric of her speeches. I explicate the enmeshing of the courtierly within the political and how the poets of the Elizabethan age played a very distinct role in the circle of patronage.

Many literary critics and historians have written on Queen Elizabeth and on the Cult of Elizabeth.[29] I refer to these books at various places in my discussion of Queen Elizabeth I. Here, in the Introduction, I make particular mention of some of them. Philippa Berry's book, *Of Chastity and Power: Elizabethan Literature and the Unmarried Queen*[30] dwells at length on the influence of Petrarch and Florentine Neoplatonism on the Cult of Elizabeth. Unlike my work, Berry spends almost no time on the Duke of Alençon and Anjou's marriage proposal: a few lines in chapter three is all the mention it gets. Berry's focus is on the mythic and historical dimension of Spenser's portrayal of the queen. Berry makes the insightful observation that the queen's mythic self-sufficiency sits oddly with historical contingency; however, it is surprising that she does not

choose to analyse further the complexities in Spenser's delineation of the queen particularly with reference to the proems as I have done. Too, the continual intervention of the Platonic paradigm in Berry's discussion does not really fit with the historical and material dimension of Elizabeth I. In the discussion of Belphoebe, Berry sees the figure as bestowed with both sexual and spiritual power, a combination of Venus with Diana. However, my argument is that the model of Diana is one that Belphoebe has adopted for herself; the extreme sexual allure of the description of her hunting emphasises the fact that the male viewer does not accept Belphoebe's image of herself as a chaste virgin. Just as Elizabeth tried to combine the irreconcilable polarities of the Venus paradigm with the Diana paradigm in her own cult, Spenser's depiction of Belphoebe underlines the anomalies and paradoxes of just such an adoption.

Louis Montrose in his book *The Subject of Elizabeth: Authority, Gender and Representation*[31] focuses on how the iconographic element of the Cult of Elizabeth supplanted the previously established but currently outlawed marian cult. The appropriation of marian iconography in the "richly figurative and ideologically unstable discourse" (Montrose *Subject* 89) that is the Cult of Elizabeth, Montrose finds to be more "nuanced and oblique" than hitherto noticed (Montrose *Subject* 76). He notes the combining of elements of the Roman cult of Vesta with elements of marian iconography. Such "syncretism," the combination of classical and pagan elements with Christian ones, he opines, diluted the possibly "blasphemous" marian notes (Montrose *Subject* 76). Montrose notes the "multiform image of Elizabeth as a providential Virgin Queen, a nurturing mother to her people and their reformed church, a chaste and self-possessed goddess of love and beauty" (Montrose *Subject* 89). While noting the "hybrid and improvisatory" nature of the cult (Montrose *Subject* 104,) he does not dwell on the contradictions inherent in such a representation as do I. [32]

The second chapter of my book, "A 'soul bent to honesty': Sir Philip Sidney and Queen Elizabeth," deals in detail with Sir Philip Sidney's relations with Queen Elizabeth. He did not have too many reasons to be grateful to her and he was not one of her favourites. Through an analysis of the details of his life, his extended correspondence with members of his family and, in particular, his Protestant mentor Hubert Languet, as well as his work, *The Lady of May*, the pastoral entertainment written in honour of the queen, the whole unhappy saga of Sidney's relations with a monarch who encouraged chivalry and its oblique modes of address and was upset by his plainspeaking, characteristically both Protestant and English, is set forth. In other words, the myth of Sidney, the ultimate courtier, on the

lines of Castiglione's Italianate courtier, suave and a master of ambiguous discourse and indirect advice, a myth created by his contemporaries and his friend Fulke Greville after his early death, is questioned.

One of the most important studies of Sidney is, of course, Katherine Duncan-Jones' *Sir Philip Sidney: Courtier Poet*, a detailed look at Sidney's brief life. Duncan-Jones' meticulous research examines Sidney's extended family and his many links to nobility and prestige. However, Duncan Jones does not exhaustively discuss Sidney's correspondence and relationship with Languet. Languet, I argue, is no Dutch uncle and his devotion to his young protégé is quite selfless. The influence of specific historical events, like the proposed marriage of the queen and the French duke, on Sidney's works is not examined in detail. Duncan-Jones also argues that Sidney wanted a life of leisure and freedom and a life spent in service to the queen would afford him neither. However, from Duncan-Jones' own account of Sidney's enormously packed European tours (see, for example, the map of his tour on pages 67-8 of Duncan-Jones' book) and his impatience at being cut off from court and not allowed to speak bely Sidney's wish for leisure. In Duncan-Jones' discussion of *The Lady of May*, she does not analyse the fact that the queen chose a character, Epsilus the shepherd, as the winner in the debate that Sidney would not have chosen. Sidney would have chosen Therion the forester, the *vita activa* over the *vita contemplativa*. Even in such small matters the two could not agree; more, Sidney could not predict his monarch's preferences. Duncan-Jones also calls Sidney's politics conservative, but in his meeting with the Roman Catholic Edmund Campion, dwelt on at length by Duncan-Jones, in his outspoken letter to the queen and in his open championship of the Protestant League, Sidney appears more radical than conservative in his politics, as far as a member of the English aristocracy could be radical, that is. Duncan-Jones also claims Sidney to be manic depressive, craving solitude. Nothing in Sidney's letters which complain vociferously about his enforced silence suggest that. When Sidney claims that his *Arcadia* is a child he wishes to abandon as did the early Greeks, he speaks only half in jest. My argument is that he wanted a life of active political engagement rather than a life of retirement giving him enough free time to compose poetry. While Duncan-Jones speaks of the "ingeniously covert and ambiguous strategies" that Sidney used to criticise the queen, my argument is that Sidney is a great deal more forthright and outspoken when it comes to matters relating to the queen than many of his contemporaries. I bring this out in a detailed comparison of George Gascoigne's *Princely Pleasures* and Sidney's *The Lady of May*.

The book then continues to analyse in the chapter " 'The weakness of their first spring": Sidney, Spenser and the Leicester Faction," the relationship between the two leading poets of the English Renaissance, Sir Philip Sidney and Edmund Spenser, who despite being clubbed together by posterity as the twin guiding spirits of English Renaissance poetry, had a problematic and complex relationship. It is true that they had many interests in common: both aspired to a life in active politics as members of the Protestant League led by Sidney's maternal uncle the Earl of Leicester; both were disappointed and had their ambitions thwarted. I disagree with Duncan Jones' rosy picture of the cordial relationship shared by Sidney and Spenser: "the general notion that Sidney's appreciation of Spenser's worth as a poet was slow in coming but, once attained, was warm and generous" (Duncan-Jones, *Sir Philip Sidney* 120). In my analysis of the portrait of Sidney in *The Ruines of Time* and as Astrophel in the belatedly-composed pastoral elegy of the same name, the depiction of Calidore in *The Faerie Queene* VI, carrying verbal parallels to the portrait of Sidney in *Astrophel*, the discussion of courtly factional politics under the guise of a beast fable in *Mother Hubberds Tale* as well as the telling dedications to poems that are written to Sidney's uncle and to his sister, I propose that the relations between these two poets, despite the similarities in their aspirations, their links to Ireland and to the Protestant faction, were not as cordial as has been supposed. As I argue in this chapter, Spenser's dissatisfaction was aimed not just at the Earl of Leicester but also at Sidney.

While both Sidney and Spenser contributed enormously to the growth of English poetry, their programme for English poetry was quite different. Sidney looked to the classical literature of Greece and Rome for inspiration while Spenser favoured a home-grown, English poetry harking back to Chaucer and Skelton. I make a close analysis of Sidney's *Apology for Poetry*, Spenser's Letter to Raleigh, Spenser's letters to Gabriel Harvey and the dedicatory epistles of a number of Spenser's poems in order to establish this thesis which to my knowledge has not been adequately analysed by any other literary critic, particularly with reference to the texts mentioned above. Usually Sidney's *Apology for Poetry* and Spenser's Letter to Raleigh are not discussed together.[33] The parallels in both issues, examples and terminology, between the two are so marked that there could be no doubt that Spenser would have seen Sidney's tract in manuscript form. In both, the poets consciously position themselves in an ongoing tradition of rhetoric and poetics. They both refer to the arguments posited by Plato in *The Republic* Book X and by Aristotle in the *Poetics*—for example, the theory of mimesis, the battle between the historian, the

philosopher and the poet, the aims of poetry etc.-- but at the same time Sidney and Spenser make their individual positions as well as the freshness of English vernacular poetry explicit. Sidney places a great deal of emphasis on the ability of poetry to move and persuade its readers to lead a better life as opposed to the lectures of the philosopher and the often morally confusing factual narrative of the historian (the "delightful teaching" of the poet more effectively than the words of the philosopher or the historian "lead[s] and draw[s] us to as high a perfection as our degenerate souls, made worse by their clayey lodgings, can be capable of" (*Apology for Poetry* 21, 22,) while Spenser chooses as the hero of his English epic the English King Arthur and not a figure borrowed from Homer or Vergil, a figure not only known for his heroism but also, Spenser states, "farthest from the daunger of enuy, and suspition of present time" (Letter to Raleigh).[34] More, while Xenophon's Cyrus in the *Cyropaedia* is Sidney's model protagonist ("not only to make a Cyrus…but to bestow a Cyrus upon the world to make many Cyruses…" [*Apology for Poetry* 16],) Spenser slyly hints in the Letter to Raleigh that it is sign of the debasing of contemporary culture that Xenophon should be placed in a higher position than Plato: "all things accounted by their shows, and nothing esteemed of, that is not delightful and pleasing to commune sence. For this cause is Xenophon preferred before Plato…" (Letter to Raleigh).[35] The reference to "delightful and pleasing" in the same sentence cannot but be a reference to Sidney's emphasis on the poet's "delightful teaching" (*Apology for Poetry* 21). What is significant, and a clear departure on the part of both from the theories of Plato and Aristotle, is the importance both Sidney and Spenser place on the reception of their work. Sidney asks why "England (the mother of excellent minds) should be grown so hard a step-mother to poets" (*Apology for Poetry* 68) while Spenser wants to compose the letter to Raleigh in an effort to avoid "gealous opinions and misconstructions" of his work (Letter to Raleigh).[36] My argument about the close relation between poetic output and societal and political environment is thus validated. Earlier formulators of poetics or theorists about poetry be they Plato, Aristotle, Horace or even an early modern humanist like Alberti talking about the nature of artistic representation in *On Painting*, do not strike this personal note when theorizing about the discipline. In fact, Spenser's Letter to Raleigh is written as a personal letter to a person of his acquaintance, a possible mentor who will explicate his "darke conceit."[37] And as far as the illumination of the "darke conceit" of *The Faerie Queene* is concerned, the letter while purporting to do that, actually throws more light on Spenser's anxiety about the reception of the poem and about his position in the gradually unfolding rhetorical/poetics

tradition. It does not really explicate *The Faerie Queene*. In fact, Spenser's discussion of the epic in the letter is strewn with red herrings that confuse rather than illuminate the reader.

The fourth chapter of my book, " 'To fashion a gentleman': Spenser and the Courtesy Book Tradition," looks at the courtesy book tradition, the work of Guazzo, Primaduye, Elyot, della Casa, Humphrey and, of course, Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtier*, and examines how Spenser's work fits into it. I argue that the anomalous virtue of courtesy in *The Faerie Queene* VI is the tool Spenser uses to express his ambivalence towards the court and to the queen's patronage. Courtesy books were the self-help books of the early modern world, written to enable rapid upward social mobility in an age where nobility dative rather than nobility native was seen as increasingly possible. Beginning modestly and innocuously with codes of behaviour, dress and conversation, the books often spiral into a discussion of the larger and more crucial accomplishment of being an advisor to a person in a position of power. Spenser's own career was an illustration of a rise from humble beginnings, as a result of education and poetic talent, to the inner court circle of the Leicester faction. However, as already stated in the synopsis of chapter three above, Spenser's relations with the Earl of Leicester and his nephew were problematic. The portrayal of Calidore, the knight supposedly representative of courtesy, in *The Faerie Queene* VI, a portrait often seen to bear a resemblance to Sidney, bears this out.

An important recent book on he courtesy book tradition is Jennifer Richards' *Rhetoric and Courtliness in Early Modern Literature*.[38] Richards sees the political aspect of courtesy books and how they would facilitate a democratization of courtly benefits. She stresses the importance of the dialogue form and of the concept of civil conversation, a supple, flexible concept, not quite solidified, in the process of being explicated in full in the early modern period, which could facilitate negotiation between opposing parties of unequal power, as between self-interest and civil duty.[39] Richards makes the important observation that it is through the give and take of civil conversation as exemplified by the Spenser-Harvey letters that a supple and democratic vernacular can be evolved for the use of English poets who do not want to be dominated by classical literature. She explores the setting up of an English, Protestant reading community as opposed to an Italianate one, the members being John Cheke, Thomas Smith, Roger Ascham--and Harvey and Spenser. They had in common humble birth and a rapid rise—Smith, the son of an Essex farmer becomes Elizabeth I's Ambassador to France, and the son of the journeyman tailor

and the Saffron Walden ropemaker did not do too badly either: one became a premier English poet and a landowner in Ireland and the other became Lecturer in Greek and University Praelector in Rhetoric (Richards 3). Richards analyses Spenser's comment to Harvey, about how Sidney and Dyer "have by authoritie of their whole Senate, prescribed certaine Lawes and rules of Quantities of English sillables for English verse...and drawen mee to their faction" (sig. G3v quoted by Richards 125). The point here is not that Spenser is boasting about his closeness to Sidney but that he is subtly commenting, as Richards argues, on the lack of democratic functioning when two people's views can represent an entire "Senate." My arguments about the differing plans Spenser and Sidney had for English poetry as discussed in Chapter 3 is supported by Richards' analysis of the Spenser-Harvey letters.

The next chapter of my book, " 'The malignant woods': Sidney's Critique of Court Affairs in the Two *Arcadias,*" looks at the authority figures in *The Old Arcadia* and *The New Arcadia* (Basilius, Euarchus, Pyrocles, Musidorus, Helen of Corinth, Amphialus, Cecropia and others) in an effort to analyse Sidney's growing discomfort with the queen's way of managing the country, his opposition to her marriage alliance with the Duke of Alençon and Anjou (what he perceived as a potentially disastrous marriage to a "Romish" French prince,) the queen's ability to influence public opinion through the manipulation of images and to set up a Cult of Elizabeth that bore resemblance to the Roman Catholic marian cults, and, above all, his disquiet over the queen's apparent refusal to listen to counsel—the last a danger most potent in rulers that early modern intellectuals like Erasmus, More and Castiglione had so frequently warned against. Pyrocles in *The Old Arcadia* is similar to the poet-councilor who tries to argue for empathy and the ability to look at a problem from multiple perspectives. However, Euarchus prefers a stringent and literal legalism. Some of the Eclogues in *The Old Arcadia* often present political parables and are analysed in that light.

The final chapter of my book, " 'In mirrours more than one': Colin and Eliza," examines in detail Spenser's various portraits of Queen Elizabeth I in *The Faerie Queene:* Gloriana, Belphoebe, Mercilla and Britomart. The chapter also analyses Spenser's works, his epic *The Faerie Queene, The Shepheardes Calender* as well as poems like *Mother Hubberds Tale, Daphnaida, Virgil's Gnat, Colin Clouts Come Home Again* etc., in order to demonstrate how they relate to the tradition of giving advice to princes, how they express his growing disenchantment with the Leicester faction and his criticism of the Burghley faction. The proems to the six complete

books of *The Faerie Queene* also reveal Spenser's complex attitude towards the queen herself. The chapter ends with a look at the Acidale incident in *The Faerie Queene* VI and how it reflects the April Eclogue in a distorted mirror in order to demonstrate the long distance Spenser has travelled in his career from eulogy of the queen to absence and substitution.

In his book *Spenser's Secret Career,* Richard Rambuss speaks of Spenser's "high profile" career in Ireland as Lord Grey's secretary and how this career "coincides with and...informs his poetic career" (Rambuss 2). Much of Rambuss' book deals with the incipient early modern writings about secretaryship, such as Angel Day's *The English Secretary* (1586). Something that this work and Spenser's poetry have in common is the concern about secrets. What Spenser's poetry "insists on displaying at every turn—is not so much secrets," Rambuss argues, saying something very similar to Frank Kermode in his book *The Genesis of Secrecy,* "but *secrecy* itself"(Rambuss 3, emphasis original). Rambuss speaks of how secrecy becomes for Spenser both a strategy to measure how far he is from royal power as well as a means of "self-promotion" (Rambuss 4).

In his discussion of the 1590 *Faerie Queene* and Spenser's *Complaints,* Rambuss says that while the impulse in Spenser's early poetry is to keep secrets hidden, in the 1591 *Complaints* the urge is to expose them (Rambuss 64). Gloriana is one of the figures that *The Faerie Queene* never reveals. The Fairy Queen and Belphoebe are mere shadows of Elizabeth. Elizabeth is always hidden "some place els" (Rambuss 73). Similarly, the chronicle of British history that Arthur encounters in the House of Alma stops short of revealing Elizabeth (Rambuss 68). In his argument about the "deferral" of Elizabeth's presence in the poem, Rambuss seems to be influenced by Jonathan Goldberg's argument, inflected by poststructuralist narratology, in '*Endlesse Worke': Spenser and the Structures of Discourse*[40] (Rambuss 69). Carrying forward the metaphor of secretaryship, Rambuss argues that the proem to Book II "asks the queen to gaze at the representation she has dictated of herself looking at herself" (Rambuss 71). However, my argument would counter the passivity in Spenser that this reading implies. Instead of taking dictation from Elizabeth, I argue that Spenser sees himself as a creative and imaginative force in the proems, a force that creates various images of Elizabeth, some of which she may not have imagined for herself. And this force is disdainful of readers who cannot read between the lines, "That no'te without an hound fine footing trace" (*The Faerie Queene* II Pr. 4). Far from expressing the dictation he has taken from the monarch, the proems, I

argue, are sites where Spenser's self-expression becomes increasingly more forceful and his critique of courtly mores more explicit.[41]

To return to the passage from *The Faerie Queene* with which this Introduction began, according to Tom MacFaul in his book, *Poetry and Paternity in Renaissance England: Sidney, Spenser, Shakespeare, Donne and Jonson*,[42] the generation of daughters is "less problematic" than that of male protagonists because "one does not have to *become* a woman as one does a man" (MacFaul 110, emphasis original). One can see legions of female readers and critics (Catherine Bates, Philippa Berry, Julia M. Walker,) myself included, taking umbrage at this. If one looks at Book III and all the women portrayed there, Britomart, Florimell, Belphoebe, Amoret, I think it is quite clear that there is no standard prototype of womanhood that Spenser seems to promulgate. All the characters have to find their own way through the minefields of desire; they have to reach their various destinations with very little help from others. Florimell thinks that the solution to everything is to flee. Amoret suspects friend and foe alike: for her, sexuality is problematic and phobia-ridden. Belphoebe thinks that everyone will readily respect her own self-imposed code of rigorous chastity (I agree with MacFaul when he remarks that the account of the Garden of Adonis "pushes the virgin aside in favour of the sexually generative sister" i.e. Amoret [MacFaul 112]). It is only Britomart, who begins with the fewest preconceptions, who frequently stumbles (note the initial "feruent fits" upon seeing Artegall's image in the mirror, the exaggerated, self-indulgent lament on the seashore) but who keeps doggedly on—only she can be said to approach her goal. It is through the portrayal of Britomart, particularly in the epiphanic scene with which this Introduction began where she undresses in front of the fire in Malbecco's castle much to the wonderment of the gazing knights who did not know her identity but immediately greet her with an almost sexless wonder and camaraderie, "Yet euery one her likte, and euery one her loued" (*The Faerie Queene* III ix 24,) that Spenser completely reworks the topoi of erotic female undressing in firelight and in the presence of half-undressed men to express liking rather than lust. This sort of model for femininity and desire is unusual to say the least. And it is a model that is constructed and is fashioned. Contrary to MacFaul's idea, it is not a given. And chastity is not something one "maintains" as MacFaul puts it, but something one "acquires," (MacFaul 110)--but only after one has understood what a malleable, flexible, relative, person-specific thing it is. In short, I would argue that MacFaul's somewhat rigid and discrete categories of masculinity and femininity do not really hold good in the light of either Sidney's romances which use cross-dressing to foreground

the fluidity of gender roles or Spenser's epic.[43] And the lack of identification of Elizabeth I with Britomart, who would seem such a perfect fit for the female monarch, is an indication, I argue, of Spenser's sense of discomfort with Elizabeth I's handling of her court.

As should be evident from the discussion above, while there are a number of historians who have written about Elizabeth I, her cult and her relationship with her courtiers, as there have been legion critics who have studied the works of Philip Sidney and Edmund Spenser, a detailed look at the interaction of these two figures with each other, with the Protestant League and with the monarch, merits further enquiry. The ways in which these two poet-courtiers pursued their political ambitions and the methods they used to voice, loudly but ineffectually, the rampant male anxiety in the Elizabethan court about a female monarch who seemed, in the Duke of Alençon and Anjou match, not to heed counsel, deserves interrogation. The manner in which these two figures, in the process, refashioned their own role as models of Protestant English plain-speaking as opposed to ambiguous Italianate courtiers, masters of indirection and innuendo, has been under-discussed. Finally, the processes by which Sidney and Spenser reacted to each other's poetic and political aspirations and how each of them carved out a distinct and discrete trajectory for vernacular English poetry has not as yet received the attention it deserves. Reading Spenser and Sidney together not only creates a more accurate picture of the Cult of Elizabeth, Elizabethan politics and the role of poet-politicians, it also makes possible a fuller picture of political life. The fact that people are not trying to persuade the monarch of something in a vacuum--they exist and make their arguments in relation to one another--becomes clear in such a reading. Looking at the poet-courtiers' interaction with each other and with the monarch, their varying responses to the stress and anxiety of a courtier's life, make the milieu of Elizabeth's court more comprehensible. Such a reading clarifies the writing of the English nation--how its "high culture," its claims to authority and seriousness as a nation, arose through the conversation and debate among writers. This study examines the different ways the enmeshed dynamics of gender, desire, politics and courtiership could affect male, subordinated writers in the age of a female monarch.