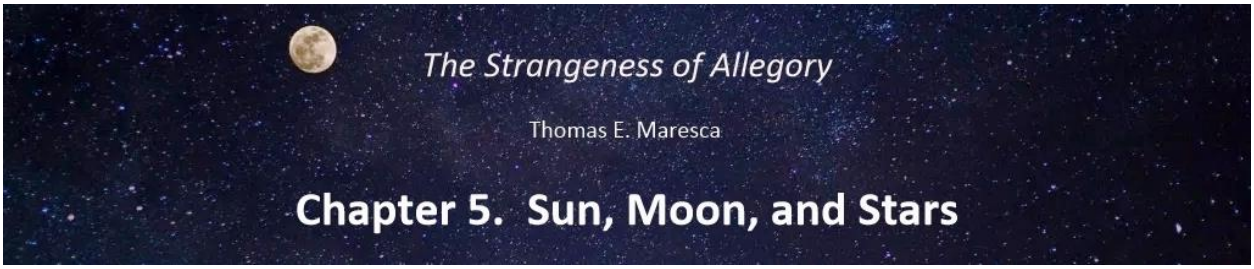

When an allegorical work is near what passes for its closure, it characteristically achieves, or manipulates the reader to perceive, some sort of coalescence, a merging of hitherto separate strands of meaning into a paradoxically unitary apprehension. Equally characteristically, at what passes for its beginning, it creates, or manipulates the reader to realize, some sort of dissolution, a breaking up of what had been or was customarily understood to be unitary or unequivocal or simple or clear.

Allegory starts by shattering the givens of the reader's world and the presuppositions of conventional writing. Allegory opens – literally, literally – by undermining its own medium of expression, by forcing its readers to question the very language they read and the images/ideas that language manifests. Allegory's beginning is always a kind of pre-positioning, a reorientation not just of the reader but of language – and literature – itself toward a set of "objects" (subjects is probably truer) widely different from those of conventional writing and conventionally used language. It does that most subversively by forcing readers to deal with, to "come to terms with," what its words – all words, any words – actually say.

> Therewith she spewed out of her filthy maw
> A floud of poyson horrible and blacke,
> Full of great lumpes of flesh and gobbets raw,
> Which stunck so vildly, that it forst him slacke
> His grasping hold, and from her turne him backe:
> Her vomit full of bookes and papers was,
> With loathly frogs and toades, which eyes did lacke,
> And creeping sought way in the weedy gras:
> Her filthy parbreake all the place defiled has.
> (*The Faerie Queene* I.i.20)

> While I was running down to the depth there appeared before me one who seemed faint through long silence. When I saw him in that vast desert, I cried to him, "Have pity on me whatever you are, shade or living man!"
>
> "No, not a living man, though once I was," he answered me.... "I was a poet, and I sang of that just son of Anchises who came from Troy after proud Ilium was burned...."
>
> "Are you, then, that Virgil, that fount which pours forth so broad a stream of speech?" I answered him, my brow covered with shame. "O glory and light of other poets, may the long study and the great love that have made me search your volume avail me! You are my master and my author. You alone are he from whom I took the fair style that has done me honor."

(*Inferno* 1.61-87)[1]

> I must warn the Reader, to beware of applying to Persons what is here meant, only of Books in the most literal Sense. So, when *Virgil* is mentioned, we are not to understand the Person of a famous Poet, call'd by that Name, but only certain Sheets of Paper, bound up in Leather, containing in Print, the Works of the said Poet, and so of the rest. (*The Battle of the Books*, "The Bookseller to the Reader)[2]

Pre-positions

Allegory is preoccupied to the point of obsession with the formal status of books and authors, a corollary of its unrelenting concern with language itself. It is a truism so obvious as to verge on idiocy that allegories are woven of language, but apparently considerably less plain to many readers is allegory's conscious (one could almost say self-conscious) concern about the nature and workings of language, its iterated and reiterated interest in what words and figures and books actually mean and how they mean it. Allegories are books made out of other books, or perhaps – more broadly and more accurately – texts made out of other texts, pre-Derridean, pre-Fishian self-deconstructing artifacts pasted together "of parasitical presences – echoes, allusions, guests, ghosts of previous texts,"[3] pre-Bakhtinian colloquia where heteroglossia rules, where competing voices are given all the scope they need to show their capabilities and their limitations.

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[1] Mentre ch'i' rovinava in basso loco,
dinanzi a li occhi mi si fu offerto
chi per lungo silenzio parea fioco.
Quando vidi costui nel gran diserto,
"Miserere di me," gridai a lui,
"qua? che tu sii, od ombra od omo certo!"
Rispuosemi: "Non omo, omo gia fui....
Poeta fui, e cantai di quel giusto
figliuol d'Anchise che venne di Troia,
poi che 'l superbo Ilion fu combusto....
"Or se' tu quel Virgilio e quella fonte
che spandi di parlat si largo flume?"
rispuos' io con vergognosa fronte.
"O de li altri poeti onore e lume,
vagliami 'l lungo studio e 'l grande amore
che m'ha fatto cercar lo tuo volume.
Tu se' lo mio maestro e 'l mio autore,
tu se' solo colui da cu' io tolsi
lo bello stilo che m'ha fatto onore...."

[2] The text of Swift quoted here and throughout is that of Herbert Davis, *The Prose Writings of Jonathan Swift*, 14 vols. (Basil Blackwell: Oxford, 1957-68).

[3] The language is neither Jacques Derrida's nor Stanley Fish's but J. Hillis Miller's, from his essay "The Critic as Host," in *Deconstruction and Criticism*, ed. Geoffrey Hartman, New York, 1979, p. 225. Miller of course is speaking of all literature rather than just allegory, and he means that these presences are often unknown to the author and their effect on the text is often contrary to or at least divergent from the author's intention. In allegory, I would argue, they are very much a part of the whole text's "intention."

Allegories in all times and places remain fascinated by the remarkably unstable medium by which meanings make their way from the mind of an author to the physical pages of a physical book to the mind of a reader, and perhaps then in a further replication from the mind of a reader to the pages of another book to the mind of yet another reader, and so on potentially *ad infinitum*. Allegories (to be prosopopoeic about it) are right to be so preoccupied: what they are bearing witness to and participating in is an improbable transformation of totally incompatible states. A noumenon – a thought, an idea, a meaning – emerges out of some unknowable condition of indeterminacy or undifferentiation. It gains articulation and acquires a unique specificity within a mind – as a pure noumenon, that is – and then yet more mysteriously enters a condition or state of phenomenality: it is made thing, metamorphosed, incarnated first in language, then in writing, then in a book. Finally, it returns to the state of noumenon as the integrated or re-integrated mental property of some other being entirely, of a reader and understander who disengages the meaning from the book, the writing, the language, and possesses it in (if not its original, at least) a noumenal condition.

The Renaissance would have recognized that procession as a Platonic emanating triad,[4] a process whereby a mental datum becomes a physical thing becomes a mental datum. Speaking purely logically, it can't happen. It's impossible. Ideas and things aren't convertible states like gaseous and solid: they are different orders of being, species so differentiated they can't hybridize – but they do, and they don't breed mules. The fertility of their offspring is what constitutes the danger of Error's spawn, the wonder of Virgil's book, the futility of the Bookseller's warning. What better person to urge the pure phenomenality of books than the man who makes and sells their physical manifestations? Who more likely to warn us against thinking of the person, the mind, that lives in them than the man whose main interest is the making and selling of their material bodies? And how perfect that his warning should preface a tale that so comically reminds us of just how very lively those "Sheets of Paper, bound up in Leather" really are.

Most allegories begin with an encounter with books or a bookish encounter, the difference between the two turning largely on who it is who makes the first contact, the protagonist of the allegory or its reader. Devotees of science fiction will hear in the phrase "first contact" not-too-distant echoes of sci-fi's almost cliché way of referring to the human race's first meeting with alien beings: I intend them to apply with full force to the confrontation, in allegory, of protagonist and reader with other books, each and all of which constitute alien beings enfolded within the text, versions of The Other that protagonist and reader alike – alike – must, most literally, "come to terms with."

In the *Commedia*, the protagonist Dante's first encounter is with the book from which he has learned his style, Virgil. His second is a reading lesson in substance, the rock-graven words over Hellgate. His third encounter is a properly bookish one in substance and in style, the colloquy with Charon on the bank of Acheron, which shadows the similar meeting of Aeneas and the Sybil with the ferryman of the underworld in *Aeneid* VI. The protagonist's fourth encounter recapitulates the poet's literary education: he meets all the books he admires – Homer, Horace,

[4] For a specific discussion of the role of Platonic emanating triads in literature, see my *Three English Epics*, *passim*.

Ovid, and Lucan; Aristotle, Socrates, and Plato. In his fifth encounter, his first in Hell proper, the pilgrim confronts a pair of lovers who touch him so nearly that he swoons and falls "as a dead body falls" (5.*ult*.), a condition all too appropriate for where the pilgrim is and who and what he is meeting: the adulterous lovers Paolo and Francesca, who are damned by the agency of a book, a love story – "A Gallehault was the book and he who wrote it; that day we read no farther in it" (5.137-38).[5] Readers should need little reminder that the love Dante's writings have celebrated up to this point was likewise adulterous, and that Dante prided himself on the seductiveness of "the fair style" in which he wrote it.

The reader's bookish encounters in *Commedia* begin even earlier, starting in the poem's first line with the metaphor of life as a journey, an image trite already in the thirteenth century, and further vitiated by being tacked to its own explanation (*cammin di nostra vita*). The dark wood and the straight way lost are similarly obvious and conventional, not to say hackneyed, "literary" locutions. If those "figures" (they are barely such) wear their meaning obviously and prepare the reader for more such easy identification of tenor and vehicle, the next set of figures the reader encounters are anything but obvious and totally upset all such expectations: the leopard, the lion, and the she-wolf remain of uncertain meaning to this day, even though they appear to be emblems or icons, classes of figures which normally bear simple and rigidly fixed, in fact codified, significations.

That defeating of conventional readerly expectations readies us for the verbal and logical strangenesses that immediately follow: a place "where the sun is silent" (meaning it doesn't shine? perhaps, but bizarre); "one who seemed faint through long silence" (the figure might appear faint, but how could the pilgrim guess the cause? and why would silence make anyone faint?); the pilgrim's immediate guess that this might not be a living human being (hardly the first thing that springs to mind on seeing a stranger); the pilgrim's subsequent identification of the shade as 1) Virgil the producer of artistic language ("that fount that pours forth so broad a stream of speech"), 2) the author of the volume that has been the pilgrim's study (in both these two instances the language and the book are something separate from the man, something made by him), and 3) "he from whom I took the fair style that has done me honor."

In this latter instance, the language and the man, the book and the author, are beginning to merge together in the way they must to prepare for Virgil's role as guide to an underworld ultimately derived from the one he described in *Aeneid* VI. The figural function of Virgil in the *Commedia* is precisely (though not exclusively) to embody the encounter of thought and thing, body and spirit, physical book and mental meaning. For Dante, Virgil embodies and enacts allegorical mediation, a mediation whose complexity can be almost adequately expressed in the ambiguities of simple statements like "I'm reading Virgil" or "Virgil is Dante's guide to the underworld." Before those ambiguities become fully operative, however – that is, before readers can starting making such quasi-allegorical formulations for themselves – their

[5] "Galeotto fu '1 libro e chi lo scrisse:/ quel giorno piu non vi leggemmo avante." As is typical of Dante's procedure throughout the *Commedia*, the density of meaning packed into this episode (in the context of *Inferno* we initially read its primary significance in its literal statements) is vastly augmented by the recurrence of the word *galeotto* in *Purgatorio* 2.27, where it denotes the angel who guides the ship of souls to the shore of the Purgatorial mountain. I am grateful to Professor Magda Gilewicz for pointing this connection out to me.

conventional assumptions and expectations about both language and allegory must be deflected and realigned to conform with what *Commedia* will in fact make of both; that is the reason for all these word-oriented, *figura*-centered, bookish encounters that preface or "pre-position" the main actions of the narrative.

The Faerie Queene begins with a similar tattoo of books and book-begotten figures. Even if we disregard the proem, which opens with an overt allusion to, almost quotation from, the opening of Virgil's *Aeneid* (which functions in this context as a reminder of Spenser's poetic career to date) and goes on to mention "antique rolles" and Tanaquill and Arthur, Jove, Venus, Cupid, and Mars, before concluding with a plea for inspiration and a reminder of the rhetorical artifice and effort that shape the poem – even if we disregard all that (and that is asking a lot), our first readerly encounters in the poem are with figures who appear to be emblems or icons but who very quickly begin behaving in non-iconic and anti-emblematic ways. The descriptions of Red Crosse Knight and Una may invoke for us ideas of the Christian soldier and the Pauline armor of God and images of Christian humility and innocence, but surely every reader is amused, puzzled, and made uneasy by the anomaly, the inappropriateness, of

> Behind her farre away a Dwarfe did lag,
> That lassie seemd in being euer last,
> Or wearied with bearing of her bag
> Of needments at his backe. (I.i.6)

The Dwarfe belongs to a whole different iconic and literary kingdom than do Una and Red Cross Knight, and his presence here is an early signal of the unsteady commingling of Biblical and romance narrative that *The Faerie Queene* is undertaking.

Spenser very quickly makes the instability that mention of the Dwarfe initiates[6] quite present to the reader by employing the second half of the Dwarfe stanza to activate a third literary realm, one dominated by pagan mythological references with a decidedly erotic tinge:

> Thus as they past,
> The day with cloudes was suddeine ouercast,
> And angry Ioue an hideous storme of raine
> Did poure into his Lemans lap so fast,
> That euery wight to shrowd it did constraine,
> And this faire couple eke to shroud themselues were fain.

Even the sharp break in subject matter in this stanza is itself one more indication of the instability and unsteadiness of focus in the poem: the abrupt redirection of readers' attention from iconically presented individuals to classicized, eroticized (nearly personified) landscape supplements and reinforces both the movement of the narrative (i.e., from ambiguous "plaine" to confusing forest, with all that we said in the last chapter that "forest" can imply) and the

[6] "lnitiates" is not fully accurate: instability of significations is present in the poem from the poet's first use of the word "seems," from his indication of the disparity between the battle-worn armor and the untried knight within it, perhaps even from the word "pricking."

movement of signification, from clear-cut (but subliminally troubled) figuration to clearly presented disproportion between tenor and vehicle.

Indeed, looked at closely, Spenser's figuration shows that it is in fact enacting this subliminal disratio between figure and meaning: the untried knight with the evidently iconic armor demonstrates that as at least one among its several possible meanings. And, even more paradoxically, the figural disproportion is itself figurally present in the Dwarfe, in his straggling, in his romance or fairytale provenance and nature intruded into a to-this-point religious tableau. The Dwarfe destroys the tableau, just as "his" stanza breaks apart into radically disjunct halves. Spenser's figures, considered formally as such, are enacting the inadequacy, the unsteadiness, the instability of all figuration as it enters the precincts of allegory, here shadowed by the forest itself, the outside which surrounds the "outside" of the armor, the dark wood of this life in which Dante wandered, the matter – *silva* (forest, woods, matter) – of real human existence outside of the "plaine," the matter – *silva* – of rhetoric in which all language is inescapably immersed.[7]

Even beyond all that, an extraordinary number of book-generated expectations are being met, set in motion, and frustrated in these few lines. Red Crosse Knight and Una, who had been traveling "on the plaine," now leave that apparently straight road for who knows (at this point) what troubles. Those two, who had been presented to us quite singly, as entities complete in themselves (we didn't even know Una was there "on the plaine" with Red Crosse Knight until the fourth stanza), have suddenly become a "faire couple," with all the emotional freighting that phrase is capable of in a context where Jove's anger takes the form of a sexual pouring into "his Lemans lap" – an image that is further complicated by its unavoidably summoning memories of Danae and Jove's shower of gold. That curious mixture of wrath and eroticism is itself further adumbrated by the repetition of the ominous verb "shroud," which suggests both a death-shroud and that the "faire couple" are somehow emulating or mimicking, in micro, what has happened in macro, as the clouds "suddeine ouercast" the day. All of these ambiguities, moreover, are contained and held within a larger, explicitly literary frame, one that itself generates yet more ambiguities and destablilizes Spenser's text yet further: the beginning of *Aeneid* IV, the story of the love of Dido and Aeneas, that other "faire couple" who were also driven by some Roman gods to take shelter from a storm, with, of course, ultimately disastrous results.[8] For the reader approaching this poem with at least a nodding familiarity with the conventions of romance and the contents of Virgil and the Bible, these first six stanzas are

[7] Such meanings are, of course, already present in Dante's complex though opposite use of the *selva oscura*: there it is the linguistic and rhetorical jungle of conventional expression that bewilders and dismays the pilgrim and from which he must escape first into a world of extreme univocation before language – his language, at any rate – can re-establish any sort of figural function.

[8] Spenser goes right on multiplying literary contexts at about this same rate. Immediately after this, Una and Red Crosse Knight enter a dark wood "that heauens light did hide" where they wander labyrinthine ways that lead them finally to Error's cave, which echoes of Plato's cave more than it does the one Dido and Aeneas took shelter in (it also echoes somewhat more distantly of the cave in which Menelaus wrestled the shape-shifting Proteus to force him to speak the truth: perhaps the episode is filtered, for Spenser, through Virgil's adaptation of it in the Fourth *Georgic*). Enroute to that destination, the poem has paused long enough to embrace some hardy topoi, the pleasance and the medieval catalogue poem among them. For a fuller discussion of all this along lines similar to those I am suggesting here, see the Spenser chapter of my *Three English Epics.*

utterly disorienting: one set of expectations after another is raised only to be set aside, generated only to be frustrated and superseded – all just as it is at the beginning of *Commedia*.

Jonathan Swift has the marvelous gift of not only making this whole process explicit but of making it funny too. Swift takes what allegorists do with more or less straight faces and gives it to madmen and clowns, obsessives and narcissists, who enact unwittingly and unconsciously what the allegorist – or anti-allegorist in this case – does with full awareness. The laminated opening of *A Tale of a Tub* illustrates this quite clearly: "An Apology" precedes a "Postscript" precedes a "Letter of Dedication from the Bookseller To the Right Honourable, John Lord Sommers" precedes "The Bookseller to the Reader" precedes "The Epistle Dedicatory, to His Royal Highness Prince Posterity" precedes, finally, "The Preface," which, in turn, precedes "Section I: The Introduction." Besides all the overt and obvious play with the physical apparatus and appearance of contemporary books, each of those successive usherings into the book is primarily concerned with and talks obsessively about the book, this book, *A Tale of a Tub*, what has gone into its making, what sort of reception it has had, what it means, the books it derives from, and the books it has in turn spawned. The closer – physically and durationally – the reader approaches to the actual tale itself, the more *A Tale of a Tub* obsesses about the tools of writing, the mysteries of language, the artifices of rhetoric, the depths of wisdom that can be concealed beneath the cover of words and the outsides of figures.

Not for a second are readers allowed to forget the "bookness" of the book they're reading. They are immersed in the process of making the book, including that most mysterious and often not successful process by which "wit" passes from one mind to another via the printed page:

> ...I have remarked, that nothing is so very tender as a *Modern* piece of Wit, and which is apt to suffer so much in the Carriage. Some things are extreamly witty *to day*, or *fasting*, or *in this place*, or *at eight a clock*, or *over a bottle*, or *spoke by Mr. What d'y'call'm*, or *in a Summer's Morning*: Any of which, by the smallest Transposal or Misapplication, is utterly annihilated. Thus, *Wit* has its Walks and Purlieus, out of which it may not stray the breadth of an Hair, upon peril of being lost." (26)

The consequence of this circumscription of the motility of wit is that readers are urged not to put themselves in the same mental state as the writer but in the same physical state, "to sharpen [their] Invention with Hunger,...a long course of Physick, and a great want of Money" (27). The process that begins here will culminate in the peculiar "bookness" of *The Battle of the Books*, the total reification of the idea of book and the ideas in books into "certain sheets of Paper, bound up in Leather."

All of this, of course, is ancillary to the account of Peter, Martin, and Jack's doings in the matter of their father's will. This seemingly apparent and transparent fable overtly analogizes the stances of the three major divisions of Christianity vis-a-vis the Bible, the central book of Christian culture: thereby *A Tale of a Tub* offers itself to the reader as, *in excelsis* and most literally, an encounter with books and bookishness. But more is involved than that, since the action of the executive portions of the *Tale* turns on the three brothers' confrontation with and reaction to the intentionality of the Will and their wrestlings with and wrestings of its and their

own meanings (a wonderfully prophetic parody, by the way, of Bakhtin's notion of dialogics), while the thrust of the meditative portions[9] of Swift's text turns obsessively on how meaning is to be found and promulgated: how and what texts mean, in short – the central problem of every allegory for every reader. If it is true, as Hillis Miller remarks, that "Deconstruction is not a dismantling of the structure of a text but a demonstration that it has already dismantled itself,"[10] then *A Tale of a Tub* is not merely a deconstructive work but a full-scale presentation of deconstruction in action, dismantling in the guise of "mantling" (both verbally and sartorially, it should go without saying, given *A Tale of a Tub's* chosen *figurae*), allegory simultaneously lifting and lowering its veil.

This climaxes, early in the *Tale of a Tub*, in the narrator's explanation of how and why the *Tale* came to be written. Fear that the "Wits of the present Age" might "pick Holes in the weak sides of Religion and Government" prompts plans "for taking off the Force, and Edge of those formidable Enquirers."

> To this End, at a Grand Committee, some Days ago, this important Discovery was made by a certain curious and refined Observer; That Sea-men have a Custom when they meet a *Whale*, to fling him out an empty *Tub*, by way of Amusement, to divert him from laying violent Hands upon the Ship. This parable was immediately mythologiz'd: The *Whale* was interpreted to be *Hobbes's Leviathan*, which tosses and plays with all other Schemes of Religion and Government, whereof a great many are hollow, and dry, and empty, and noisy, and wooden, and given to Rotation. This is the *Leviathan* from whence the terrible Wits of our Age are said to borrow their Weapons. The *Ship* in danger, is easily understood to be its old Antitype the *Commonwealth*. But, how to analyze the *Tub*, was a Matter of difficulty; when after long Enquiry and Debate, the literal Meaning was preserved: And it was decreed, that in order to prevent these *Leviathans* from tossing and sporting with the *Commonwealth*, (which of itself is too apt to *fluctuate*) they should be diverted from that Game by a *Tale of a Tub*. And my Genius being conceived to lye not unhappily that way, I had the Honor done me to be engaged in the Performance. ("The Preface," 24-25)

This curious passage marks the formal beginning of that "Performance," and it has in one linguistic event conflated the importance – and something of the meaning – of Dante's and the reader's sequential encounters with trite metaphor, worn-out imagery, failed personifications, and the univocal words spelled in the rock of Hellgate. Like all those actions, these half dozen sentences play with the ways language denotes and connotes. They confound the formal status of statements of fact and statements of meaning. They raise and defeat readerly expectations, systematically – or anti-systematically – cutting out the supposedly solid ground of simple

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[9] I am borrowing – and to some extent deliberately misapplying – the notions of "executive" and "deliberative" episodes from Thomas M. Greene's *The Descent from Heaven: A Study in Epic Continuity* (New Haven and London, 1963). Greene uses these terms to characterize a kind of typical rhythm in epic, an alternation of episodes that advance the action of the poem with sections that reflect upon the significance of that action (or at least provide readers with means and opportunity to so reflect). In the broadest possible terms, of course, Swift's alternation of narrative and essay in *A Tale of a Tub* both uses and parodies that rhythm. For a fuller discussion of these epic aspects of Swift's satire see the Swift chapter of my *Epic to Novel.*

[10] "Steven's Rock and Criticism as Cure II," *Georgia Review* 30 (1976)..

signification from under the reader's and the prose's feet. Item: the comically inappropriate imagery of the whale "laying violent Hands upon the Ship," which is not only funny in itself but has the secondary – or perhaps it is primary? – effect of causing readers to at least momentarily disconnect the actual form of words from what is being said: i.e., despite the obvious fact that whales do not have hands, we all "know" what the narrator means by the statement, so we, as good readers, reading for the gist, the meat of the passage, almost automatically discount or disregard the literal statement the narrator makes. That is trap #1 in this short passage.

Item: "this important Discovery," the "Custom" of diverting the whale with a barrel, becomes, in the very next sentence, a "parable" to be "mythologiz'd": i.e, what was offered to us as a statement of fact (however implausible) is immediately construed by the Grand Committee and the narrator as a symbol, as a *figura* in need of explanation. Item: the explanation of the now-deemed mysterious "parable" proceeds from almost synonomy – the linking of the whale with leviathan with Hobbes's *Leviathan* – to cliché – the ship as the ship of state – to total breakdown – the failure to find a meaning for the tub and the decision to retain its literal denotation in the midst of figurative connotation. That is, the interpretive act performed by the Grand Committee and the narrator is both obvious to the point of banality and self-contradictory: they come up with an impossibly mixed *figura* wherein interpretive and literal elements are forced to coexist in a totally unsteady state – unsteady because readers more readily accept the "factual" implausibility of the tub-as-diversion as a symbol than either the ship or the whale, because the tub as an entity made into a symbol has in itself less innate or intrinsic or conventional meaning than either the whale or the ship, and therefore demands all the more that the text attach significance to it, because the tub as literally and figuratively a hollow container demands to be filled.

This is trap #2: the whole relationship of statements, of verbal formulas, to their usual realms of denotation and connotation is here being upset. The reader from this point on cannot rely on the "factuality" – fictitious to be sure – of anything the narrator says, nor can the reader take refuge in easy symbolism to escape the unreliable *littera*, because the narrator insists on what is most unsatisfactory, the literal meaning of the tub, of which, his "Genius being conceived to lye not unhappily that way," it is now his task to write the tale it is our task to read. Our readerly temptation here is quite similar to what we were drawn to in the case of the whale's "violent Hands," but now on a much larger scale. As either good readers or inattentive ones, we are almost automatically beginning to disregard the literal statements of the text – they, after all, are difficult, uncomfortable, not easy to reconcile with each other – and substitute for the text's actual statements the kinds of relationships and meanings our conventional readerly expectations prompt us to. So then, we start to understand and classify this passage as a satire of the fuzzy-mindedness of the Moderns, of whom this narrator is an example; and having said that we are then free to pay no further attention to what text and narrator actually say and do – that is, by categorizing the genre of the text, we "free" ourselves to begin to treat language with the same cavalier disregard for its actual statements that the narrator demonstrates. To justify our disregard of the literal statements, we call our text a satire: the narrator accomplishes the same thing by calling his text a parable.

Trap #3 is the most insidious of all. Without most readers noticing it, the narrator has provided the very meaning for the tub which he said could not be found: "The *Whale* was interpreted to

be *Hobbes's Leviathan*, which tosses and plays with all other Schemes of Religion and Government, whereof a great many are hollow, and dry, and empty, and noisy, and wooden, and given to Rotation." So the tub represents "Schemes of Religion and Government," and the text has done what it said it couldn't. Or has it? Just how separable from the idea of "the *Commonwealth*" are ideas of religion and government – especially in Swift's day? Indeed, even figuratively, how far is the Commonwealth from such "schemes" if one can be depicted as a ship and the other a barrel, both of which are "hollow, and dry, and empty, and noisy, and wooden, and given to Rotation" (if the last quality troubles you as applied to the ship of state, let me remind you of the narrator's remark about "the *Commonwealth*, which of itself is too apt to *fluctuate*"[11]). After all, it is the danger of the whale's "toss[ing] and play[ing] with" the ship that prompts diverting it with such a micro-ship as a tub. So linguistically and logically, literally and evidentially, complete meaning is available within the passage, even in terms of the rather arbitrary assigning of signification that the Grand Committee and the narrator indulge in – yet the narrator denies or overlooks those available meanings and opts for, instead, a literal meaning which readers respond to as not literal at all but as an open-ended *figura*, a signifier whose meaning remains unknown.

Readers fairly consistently overlook that readily available meaning for the tub and for the title too – because, I think, it is once again an uncomfortable datum, one that defies their expectations of Swift and this text. After all, the very first page of "An Apology" assures us that *A Tale of a Tub* was written against "numerous and gross Corruptions in Religion and Learning," (1) by which words most twentieth-century readers have been content to believe that Swift – Swift, not the narrator – established his Anglican orthodoxy. Not for the first or the last time in this book, I say piffle. What follows that assertion, a few short sentences after, is the famous analysis of the *Tale* as bifurcated, "Abuses in Religion... set forth in the Allegory of the Coats.... Those in Learning by way of Digressions," a separation of subject matter and modes that is inaccurate on several counts and at least disingenuous on several more.[12] What precedes the assertion, a few short sentences before, is a largely ignored, wonderfully comic and complacent piece of egoism that ought to serve to identify the writer here not as Swift but as yet one more of his mad personae, if not the very one responsible for the point of view of the *Tale*: "Therefore, since the Book seems calculated to live at least as long as our Language and our Tast admit no great Alterations, I am content to convey some Apology along with it." The availability of Church and State as formulas and concepts interchangeable with (at the farthest remove, as synecdoches for) "Schemes of Religion and Government," the textual and linguistic logic that links wooden ship and wooden tub, the figural design that parallels tub and ship as objects of the whale's sport – all those considerations demand an enlargement of our notion of *A Tale of a Tub*'s satiric targets beyond the unnecessarily narrow confines of Swift's (or his narrator's) putative respect for Anglican niceties.

"Abuses in Religion and Learning" are unquestionably among the satiric targets of the work, but they are so in subversive ways and degrees, enmeshed in what amounts to a total

[11] "Fluctuate" in fact introduces yet another level of signification into the passage, since fluctuation is properly speaking the activity of waves: this thereby intrudes into the narrator's already frenetic significatory process what constitutes the ground (forgive the bad joke) of the whole figuration, the sea itself.

[12] For a fuller discussion of the *Tale of a Tub* volume, see the Swift chapter of my *Epic to Novel.*

logical/rhetorical (or, if you prefer, philosophical/linguistic) critique of the ways we read and the ways we write. That critique from the outset aims specifically and devastatingly at the traditional Augustinian husk-and-kernel interpretative paradigm and all its attendant figural implications: that much at least is one of the clearest significations of the multiple layers of introductory and apologetic pieces prefixed to the *Tale*, of the imagery of the tub itself, and of the motif of insides and outsides that both set in motion.

As with Dante's figural and linguistic encounters at the opening of *Inferno* and the reader's parallel encounters at the start of *The Faerie Queene*, the figural gyrations that Swift puts us through at the start of *A Tale of a Tub* amount to the set of reading lessons that we need in order to respond intelligently to the texts that follow them. Each of these "introductions" constitutes each allegory's attempt to shatter our *a priori* assumptions about the validity or invalidity of particular codes and ways of meaning. Each is its own way of making us confront language's simultaneous revelations and concealments without the crutches of our pat explanations and refuges, whether those evasions take the form of simple readerly inattention or sophisticated notions of genres and their workings. Each of these openings encodes an interpretive paradigm for its text, and each challenges some paradigms we might bring to it.

Allegories insist on being read on their own terms, which are generous ones – generous enough to allow the possibility of multiple "right" readings, but still strict enough to prohibit some demonstrably wrong ones. Anyone who reads *Commedia* as a dream vision or *The Faerie Queene* as only personification or *A Tale of a Tub* as only ironic is wrong, plain and simple. Conversely, the more readers can learn from each of those work's openings about their unique alignments of language and meaning, about the peculiar relation of figure and signification that each is erecting and demolishing for itself, the more right each of their understandings of the texts will be. Each and every allegory exists in a singular linguistic universe, and each must be approached on its own linguistic and figurative terms – each time. This why I have refrained as much as possible from specific interpretive readings of specific allegories: any interpretation I offered would be less than provisional – ephemeral at best, good for one ride only. For the rest of this study I will point out as much as I can about how allegories work as a class and how some specific allegories go about some specific activities, but I will not be volunteering "exhaustive" explications of any of them: I doubt that is even possible.

Deposition

How to read is what at least part of every allegory is about. How to construe a text, how to interpret evidence, how to draw an inference, how to understand a "fact": the problem of how to "read" anything at all, everything at all, anytime at all, catalyzes allegories, and allegories in turn "analyze," in the most literal sense, the "genres," literary or cultural or allegedly ontological, that define the limits of the askable and knowable. *A Tale of a Tub* does this explicitly and overtly. *The Battle of the Books* repeats its inquiries and dissolutions in reverse: Where *A Tale* begins by construing "facts" (ship, whale, tub) as "parable," *The Battle* starts by *a priori* "factualizing" a metaphor (the battle of the books).

Indeed, *The Battle* rests on an even more fundamental reification, the literalization of one of our most common figures of speech, a figure so trite that for most readers/users it has lost all

its figural dimensions: our habit of metonymizing author and works. We say, as a statement of fact, without intending metaphor or imagery, "I'm reading Virgil" or "I'm reading Swift," meaning that we're reading a work of Virgil's or of Swift's; meaning even more accurately that we are at this moment actually, physically reading, as the Bookseller points out for us, "certain Sheets of Paper, bound up in Leather, containing in Print, the Works of the said Poet," a single, specific text in one particular edition, arrangement, and format; meaning, underneath all that, that in some way, mysterious and indefinable as it may be, that we *are* "reading" – coming to know and understand – Virgil the poet and Swift the satirist and the two human beings – their intellects at least – that animate and exceed, overflow, hyperinform, and "overdetermine" those two generic categorizations; meaning thereby that the trite figure of speech we use so casually is ultimately no figure at all but a statement of fact. Dante capsulizes, concentrates, all that in his "figure" of Virgil: Swift expands it, expatiates upon it, in all the prefatory materials of *A Tale of a Tub* and the parallel, more succinct laminates that recall and re-activate key concerns of *A Tale* and thereby induct us into *The Battle of the Books*.[13] The two works stand in relation to each other as specific to general, minor premise to major premise, proof to argument, practice to theory, part to whole, definite article to indefinite: *the* battle to *a* tale.

From the outset, the Bookseller's apparently innocent remarks undermine the assumed relation of rhetorical discourse, or parable or metaphor or fable, to "history" – itself a mode of rhetorical discourse – and to "factual" reality – the latter increasingly seen as/made into a mode of discourse itself. The Bookseller proceeds from certainty and general context ("The ... Discourse ... is unquestionably of the same Author,[14] ... written about ... the Year 1697, when the famous Dispute was on Foot, about *Antient and Modern Learning*"[139]) to specific context (the *Phalaris* controversy and Wotton's, Bentley's, Temple's, and Boyle's roles in it). This sentence immediately follows the one just quoted and precedes the Bookseller's pregnant warning against mistaking books for persons:

> At length, there appearing no End of the Quarrel, our Author tells us, that the Books in St. *James*'s Library, looking upon themselves as Parties principally concerned, took up the Controversie, and came to a decisive Battel; But, the Manuscript, by the Injury of Fortune, or Weather, being in several Places imperfect, we cannot learn to which side the Victory fell.

This sentence awards the books the very standing as persons that the Bookseller's warning seeks to deny them. There exists no distinction – at least not in rhetorical status – between the uncertain outcome of the (fictional) battle and Wotton's and Bentley's previously mentioned (factual) attempt "to destroy the Credit of *Aesop* and *Phalaris*": both are the doings of authors in and about books, and in both cases, "we cannot learn to which side the Victory fell."

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[13] *A Discourse Concerning the Mechanical Operation of the Spirit in a Letter To a Friend. A Fragment* will perform the same prefatory revival of the key terms and concerns of its two preceding works in an even more concise, *diminuendo* form.

[14] The Bookseller's certainty about the authorship of *The Battle* is doubly curious in the face of his doubts about the authorship of *The Mechanical Operation of the Spirit*, which resembles *A Tale of a Tub* much more closely in subject, style, and point of view than does *The Battle.*

This destabilization of our kind and degree of knowledge is immediately compounded by the actual narrator of the "Discourse," who in his very first remarks undermines the genre that every reader has been content to rely on for what few certainties and firm perspectives the work affords:

> Satyr is a sort of *Glass*, wherein Beholders do generally discover every body's Face but their Own; which is the chief Reason for that kind of Reception it meets in the World, and that so very few are offended with it. (140)

The mirror of art fails to reflect what is right in front of it, and causes no reflection in its beholder: not only is its didactic function utterly discredited, but even its referentiality is denied, its relation to the reality upon which it is putatively based undermined. Its only purpose becomes, implicitly but clearly, to provoke anger and fury,[15] and yet when it succeeds at that, when its targets have been "whipt into Froth," what remains beneath that froth "will be fit for nothing, but to be thrown to the Hogs." For readers who have been comforting themselves that they understand all this farrago, that it is a satire on the Moderns and not, heaven forefend, upon themselves, this is utterly discommoding: they find themselves by that very fact numbered among the imperceptive who fail to see themselves in the glass – and if they get annoyed at that, they can then count themselves among the pitiful "Brain[s], that will endure but one *Scumming*," – Swift has a genius for the most offensive possible word – ready to "bubble up into Impertinence" and become food for hogs. Those pathetic wretches at least have enough wit and knowledge for one skimming: how much worse off are those modern readers who, by virtue of superior theory or greater historical knowledge or simple critical acumen, get to the end of this whole passage without ever realizing that they are involved? There is more than one reason for the narrator's complaint, in *A Tale of a Tub*, about "a superficial Vein among many Readers of the present Age, who will by no means be persuaded to inspect beyond the Surface and the Rind of Things" (40).

The surface and rind of *The Battle of the Books* offers, in its smaller scope, almost as many layers as *A Tale of a Tub*, though here the laminates are of a different order or, more accurately, here the initiatory layers of the narrative subvert different orders. The "Full and True Account of the Battel" begins with a barrage of portentous apothegms, historical generalizations, and debasing analogy. The first two of these are couched in resolutely prosopopoetic language: "*War is the Child of Pride*, and *Pride the Daughter of Riches*;" invasions travel "from *North* to *South*, that is to say, from Poverty upon Plenty," lust and avarice are "Brethren or collateral Branches of *Pride*." The third adopts "the Phrase of Writers upon the Politicks" to present a simultaneously over-inflated and debased Aesopian fable about "the Republick of *Dogs*" and the causes of dissension therein ("one great *Bone*," "a Turgescency in any of their Females"), all of which returns the reader, with perfect rhetorical circularity and

[15] If "Beholders" recognized their own faces in satire, they would be "offended with it" rather than chastened or corrected by it. The narrator makes it even clearer that giving such offense is precisely his intent: "But if it should happen otherwise, the Danger is not great; and, I have learned from long Experience, never to apprehend Mischief from those Understandings, *I have been able to provoke*" (italics mine). Such language and opinions deny the validity not just of general satire but even of particular satire, and they most certainly strip satire of any (in Eighteenth-century theory legitimizing) therapeutic or socially ameliorative function.

logical self-closure, to the abstractions of Poverty, Want, and Pride.[16] The writing to this point is self-consciously pleonastic. Swift employs fairly obvious devices of amplification to say the same thing in several different ways, though the omnipresent Swiftian irony and the omnipresent Tub-ian subversion work here to return us to the language and rhetorical mode of the opening sentences with their essential point contradicted: war is the result of pride issuing from poverty and want rather than from riches.

All of this, however, serves only as prolegomenon to the account of battle, to which the narrator now segues by means of an extraordinary rhetorical sleight of hand:

> Now, whoever will please to take this Scheme [which one?], and either reduce or adapt it to an Intellectual State, or Commonwealth of Learning, will soon discover the first Ground of Disagreement between the two great Parties at this Time in Arms; and may form just Conclusions upon the Merits of either Cause. But the Issue or Events of this War are not so easie to conjecture at. (142)

To be periphrastic: all this inflated language and analogical hokum serves only to demonstrate that the quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns arises from the Moderns' envy of the Ancients' greatness, but that's not the point of this report. So Swift's narrator resolves the major issue, the cause of the war, in and by a rhetorically circular argument which is then dismissed as an aside, an irrelevancy, to an account of the events which are results of, symptoms of, that cause – a procedure which seems to subvert quite openly the priorities of logic and importance, and to nullify yet more (if that is possible) the status of the narrative's opening rhetoric by stripping it of applicability to the subject at hand. Moreover, the narrator then goes on to offer one more account – this time putatively "factual" and "historical" – of the origin of this war, the tale of the quarrel about possession of the higher peak of Parnassus. Every reader accepts this account as metaphor or analogy or fable based on imagery or symbols derived from Classical literature, but the narrator offers it as reality, the factual ground of the "figures" that have preceded it.

Even more important, in a rhetorical and logical movement reminiscent of the crucial identification of terms that opens *A Tale of a Tub*, the narrator offers this "history" of the war for the top of Parnassus as the factual ground for the ambiguous "figures" that follow it, the books themselves.

> In this Quarrel, whole Rivulets of *Ink* have been exhausted, and the Virulence of both Parties enormously augmented. Now, it must here be understood, that *Ink* is the great missive Weapon, in all Battels of the *Learned*, which, convey'd thro' a sort of Engine, call'd a *Quill*, infinite Numbers of these are darted at the Enemy, by the Valiant on each side, with equal Skill and Violence, as if it were an Engagement of *Porcupines*. (143)

Let's put aside the interesting confusion here about a simple issue (which is the "missive Weapon," the ink or the pen?). After all, this already amounts to a very long preface to what

[16] All, in Swift's text, italicized as well as capitalized: the practices of Eighteenth-century typography make it easy for Swift to keep us always on the verge of personification.

most readers were from the outset quite willing to accept as a transparent analog for the "real-life" intellectual issues lumped together under the heading of the Ancients-Moderns controversy, so it is little wonder that few readers have bothered to notice that, alas! we have not yet gotten to the books. No, gentle reader, this missive ink (or pen) isn't a figure for the books – at least it is not so for Swift's narrator – no matter how much it logically and esthetically looks as if it ought to be. It is rather another postponement of the books, another repositioning of them figuratively and ontologically. Counter to all our expectations, counter even to the rhetorical logic of ink-as-weapon, books have no part in this war – so all this figural paraphernalia too is a digression, all this "background" of Parnassus and its twin peaks is another irrelevancy, serving to remove what will be the central events of Swift's narrative from any sort of centrality to the main issues.

Every movement toward the center of Swift's narrative amounts to a simultaneous shunting toward a sideline of the supposedly important intellectual contents of that narrative and a further devolution in the status of figuration and even language itself. Consider the implications for the idea of language of Swift's simultaneous offering of the hackneyed figure of ink (or pen) as weapon and his separation of that figure from the ideas of books or writing. His subtraction from the metaphor of its tenor, his reduction of it to literalized vehicle alone, does violence to more than the idea of metaphor: it does equal violence to our conditioned responses to figurative language and upsets quite thoroughly our notions of the relation of ideational content to rhetorically or figuratively shaped speech. It subverts or inverts or just plain shatters our comfortable ideas of what makes a good reader and what constitutes a good reading.

So when and how do we get to the battle of the books, and what is its status when we get there? We reach the battle that is to form the subject of Swift's narrative by way of his making a trope of "trophies," objects that are by nature already tropes: i.e., words or entities whose meaning has been altered, figurative representations of something other than what they literally are:

> ...so the *Learned*, after a sharp and bloody Dispute, do on both sides hang out their Trophies.... These Trophies have largely inscribed on them the Merits of the Cause; a full impartial Account of such a Battel ["A Full and True Account of the Battel..."], and how the Victory fell clearly to the Party that set them up. They are known to the World under several Names; as, *Disputes, Arguments, Rejoynders, Brief Considerations, Answers, Replies, Remarks, Reflexions, Objections, Confutations.* For a very few Days they are fixed up in all Publick Places, either by themselves or their Representatives [i.e., the trophies of trophies], for Passengers to gaze at: From whence the chiefest and largest are removed to certain Magazines, they call, *Libraries*, there to remain in a Quarter purposely assign'd them, and from thenceforth, begin to be called, *Books of Controversie*. (143-44)

These trophies, bearing their full, impartial accounts of the merits of the cause, reverse the relation – richly ambiguous term in this context – of "representative" to event, of figure to meaning. They don't synopsize events and meanings in a concise symbolic representation but rather the reverse: they re-present events as the erectors of the trophies would have them understood, circumstantially and fully. They relate what happened and an interpretation of what happened. They are texts: not signs of something else but trophies, tropes, turned inside

out, not signs but the thing itself. And *A Full and True Account of the Battel Fought Last Friday, Between the Antient and the Modern Books in St. James's Library* identifies itself as just such an inside-out trope, exactly that sort of non-sign. The manipulated figural logic of Swift's mad, manipulated narrator leads inexorably to the literalization of the book – the book understood not as the container of something intellectual or the representation of something else or the embodiment of something intangible, but the book as real(ity).

At this point – and not until this point – Swift reinstates our commonplace way of speaking of books as persons ("I'm reading Virgil") by introducing the wonderfully wry notion of the *Brutum hominis* to explain the fact that "In these Books, is wonderfully instilled and preserved, the Spirit of each Warrier" (144). The latter statement (substituting only writer for "Warrier") is of course exactly the conventional attitude we all bring to books and the way we normally regard them (at least the best of them). Painstakingly, circuitously, we have been guided back to ordinary language and to literal statements, enriched. Swift's language systematically destroys metaphor and the possibilities of metaphor, systematically subverts our notions of language and logic, to bring us to the point of seeing a book as a book, in its fullest literal reality. And all of this too serves, finally, only as a prelude, only as one more sidetrack, one more irrelevancy, in a work that centers itself on and in irrelevancies. Swift creates a personification narrative that is not really personification, but literalization of our most normal, most habitual modes of speaking, only to bring us to the point that readers have always recognized as the true center of *The Battle of the Books*, the digression or interruption that is the encounter and debate of the spider and the bee.

If the basic narrative of *The Battle* constitutes one form of mock-prosopopoeia, the fable of the spider and the bee offers another, the anthropomorphized animal fable (though here both are couched in the rhetoric and style of the heroic, and constitute mock-heroic as well as mock-prosopopoeic and mock-allegorical). The events it recounts – a bee wandering into and escaping from a spider's web – are the most believable and "realistic" actions in the narrative they interrupt, but their hypothetical status as "real" is undermined not only by the style of their presentation but by the mode of their perception. Aesop, or the book that bears his name, treats them exactly as every reader of Aesop would expect "him" to: he textualizes their encounter, analogizes it, and reads it. He draws a moral from it, finding point for point correspondences between the doings and sayings of the spider and the bee and the bookish antagonists of the larger conflict: he performs the same actions, in fact, that most readers of Swift's "satire" do, and equally to their own advantage.

Neither Aesop nor most other readers seem to notice or care that, despite their rhetorical certitude and clarity, the battle continues to its muddled and unclear inconclusion around them. The textualization of reality avails here as little as the reification of texts, save to thoroughly fudge the already uncertain border between the two. Both inside and outside the narrative, readers and characters, critics and the books they interpret, all perform the same actions and come to share the same level of reality and the same mode of existence: the Virgil we read is as real as the "we" who read "him" – and vice versa. If we perform the very same acts, for the very same reasons, as the narrators of *A Tale of a Tub* and *The Battle of the Books*, how – readerly speaking – are we different from them? We both exist as readers of texts in which we are implicated, texts of which we are part receptor and part generator, part audience

and part creator. The important question is not about the objectivity or subjectivity of this text, but how many, or how few, other texts belong in this class and to this text.

Composition

Swift's manipulation of narrator and reader into positions of parallel acuity and obtuseness amounts to a satirist's version of allegory's more conventional (if that word is ever applicable to allegory) reversal of mimesis. "Normal" allegory turns the idea of art as the imitation of action upside down and inside out, wrenching the touchstone of truth out of the extraliterary world and setting it up firmly, if multivalently, within the text itself – thereby, by the way, rendering completely irrelevant any of the criteria or even the concept of realism. That the allegorical text is then itself bombarded by qualifications and sapped by contradictions, riddled with pointless rhetoric and tattooed with circular tropes, reduced to words of only the most literal, limited meaning, adds to rather than subtracts from its status as touchstone, base point, ground zero: that's where allegory starts, but you have to work through a lot of allegory before you can know it.

In allegories less convolute than the *Tale of a Tub* trio, the reader is led more openly to imitate the protagonist. In most of Pynchon's novels, for instance, readers become as hooked on the word games and signs as Oedipa Maas, as determined to follow the clues and solve the mystery as Stencil, as obsessed with finding pattern as half the characters of *Gravity's Rainbow*. Paranoia is Pynchon's word for all this: Madness was Swift's, and both agree in crediting it with "*The Establishment of New Empires by Conquest; The Advance and Progress of New Schemes in Philosophy; and the contriving, as well as the propagating of New Religions,*" just as both agree in the reader's thorough complicity in it. Such entrapment is both point and meaning in itself and, at the same time, just a single component of allegory's multiple strategies for implicating the reader in its workings, for making the reader co-creator of the text as well as co-partner of the text, perhaps even coextensive with the text.

Another way for allegories to accomplish that is by exposing to readers just how complicitous they already are: that is, allegories force readers to confront the ways they are already and habitually shaping texts and completing their meanings by the simple, conventional expectations they bring to them – which most "ordinary" texts, of course, labor mightily to meet and satisfy. Nowhere in allegorical literature is this done more baldly or boldly than in the first two scenes of *The Tempest*, where Shakespeare, no stranger to puncturing theatrical illusion,[17] thoroughly defeats our spectatorial expectations only to make us aware that we are in the hands of a master illusionist. Good attentive audience that we are, we witness in the first scene of *The Tempest* a violent storm at sea. No matter what else is going on verbally or dramatically – conflicts of authority, differences of response to danger or fear, dialogues about death and fate, sin and forgiveness, value, loyalty, order, subordination, power – everything else in the scene is secondary to the main action of the scene, which is the tempest of the title

[17] *Antony and Cleopatra* pushes the stage to its illusionist limits, and Shakespeare there boldly has his boy-actor-playing-Cleopatra declaim against boy actors "squeaking" her greatness. Earlier explicit invocations of theatricality in *Hamlet* and *King Lear* ("And pat, like the catastrophe in the old comedy, he comes") and *As You Like It* also verge on shattering the dramatic illusion, but without ever entirely crossing over the border.

and to which we as audience give, according to our degree of sophistication and empathy, our qualified or unqualified provisional belief.

We "know" it isn't a real storm. We "know" the ship isn't really a ship and that it won't sink. We "know" the bosun and the king – the actors playing the bosun and the king – won't die. Nevertheless, on some level, in some way, each and every member of the audience accepts the "reality" of all of those things, in exactly the same way that we have in other plays accepted the "reality" of Oedipus and Othello. Whatever else goes on in Act I, scene i of *The Tempest*, its primary function is to induct us into the "reality" of this play just as surely as Bernardo and Francisco must lead us into the "reality" of *Hamlet* or Orlando and Adam must guide us into *As You Like It*. And we respond to this. We have come to the theatre for this. We desire this special half-way house of belief and disbelief, where we may safely accept the provisional reality of horrors and wonders, so we accept the – always provisional – truth and reality of the events we "see," a ship sunk with grievous loss of life.

How do we feel then, what do we think, when only a few moments later Prospero assures Miranda and us that what we saw was false? that it didn't happen? that nobody was hurt?

> The direful spectacle of the wreck, which touch'd
> The very virtue of compassion in thee,
> I have with such provision in mine art
> So safely ordered that there is no soul –-
> No, not so much perdition as an hair
> Betid to any creature in the vessel
> Which thou heard'st cry, which thou saw'st sink.
> (I.ii.26-32)

We heard and saw also, and we believed: now what are we to think? Analogies of Prospero and Shakespeare, readings of *The Tempest* as Shakespeare's farewell to the stage, all ignore how radically the interplay of these first two scenes undermines the foundations of drama. More than undermines: Prospero's dismissal of the storm, the wreck, and the drownings, the second scene's identification of all that we and Miranda witnessed as mere illusion – that destroys the possibility of drama, because it is literally true. Everything we saw in the first scene *was* illusion, a "spectacle" arranged by the "provision of ... art." By pointing out precisely the fact of theatrical illusion, Shakepeare's Prospero de-theatricizes this most self-consciously stagey of Shakespeare's plays. He brings us backstage and shows us how it's done, how the playwright director invents the lines, the prop master Ariel sets the stage, and the gofer Caliban lugs the lumber and brings the coffee. We are meant, from the second scene on, to see the flies and hear the creaking of the pullies, to catch glimpses of the actors changing costume: we have been taken behind or before the illusion and its fictions and we are dealing with the "fact" of drama – at least that is the fiction of this play.

And that's the rub: fiction undoes fiction, illusion exposes illusion. By violating the unspoken pact between playwright and audience, Shakespeare moves us not out of theatre but deeper into it, into a world where the only reality is theatrical reality, a word-made world where all you

have to do you must do in "The time 'twixt six and now" on the "bare island" of a stage.[18] All the strands of meaning that accrete around the play grow out of its acceptance of its own contingency and the strangely limited terms and conditions of its existence. *The Tempest* embraces theatricality and artifice and creates its reality out of them, and it does so in and by the act of repudiating them. This constitutes its radical Otherness from the life of its spectators and also its bond to them: its alienation is its relation; its uniqueness is also its universality. There is no island in the world like Prospero's: a true statement in all of its senses. There is no world that isn't an island like Prospero's: also a true statement.

So we as audience are divorced from the play, separated from it, repudiated by it in its transgression of our agreement – and yet we as audience are pinned to our seats, ever-so-willing co-conspirators as the play continues to show us how gullible we are, what cheap tricks – old clothes on a line, forsooth! – will take us in, how helpless we are in the hands of an old stager. We laugh, and we nod, and we love it, not the least bit uncomfortable dealing with an illusion about making illusions that alter "reality" – until at the end of the play our "reality" is altered and, via the epilogue, we enter the play world: indeed, we become the magicians, releasing Prospero from his exile by our applause – Clap if you believe in Tinkerbell. Our "good hands" free Prospero from his island, our "gentle breath" sends him offstage, just as Ariel's winds fill the sails of the ship. Until we join in the play, until we actively demonstrate our complicity, the master of illusion is trapped within the illusion of his role and the limits of his island kingdom, confined within the stage that Shakespeare has created on, or of, the stage. And this is logical, this is right, because we have, willy nilly, knowingly or unknowingly, all along empowered Prospero and Shakespeare. We have colluded at our own deception and are now asked to ratify the deceit, and we do. As Prospero frees Ariel, we free Prospero. Ariel is "to the elements/...free." Prospero is "set...free," "sent to Naples." What, I wonder, are we freed to?

De-composition

That state of happy confusion – the uncertainty of where, in any intellectual sense, one actually is, coupled with a mild euphoria and the unreasonable certainty that one is in the hands of a master – is not in the least untypical of allegory's effects upon the perceptive reader. Pleasing as it may be, so subjective a state obviously offers but little help in further sorting out allegory's intricacies – but it does offer a little. Subjective as it may be, that state of befuddlement – the uncertainty about what is actually going on or what it all means – that confusion is objectively caused. Allegories work hard to bring their protagonists and their readers to precisely that condition, that ground zero where assurance and preconception have been annihilated. Allegories educate their heroes and their readers to know that they know nothing, and at the point at which they realize that they know nothing, their real learning can begin. Shakespeare at the end of *The Tempest* returns us to ourselves to finish the job, but Shakespeare seems always to have had a higher opinion of our capacities than we deserve: most other allegorists take pains to make sure we recognize ground zero when we're at it, and some of them, like

[18] To my way of thinking the ideal staging of *The Tempest* would spare no expense to achieve a thoroughly realistic storm and shipwreck; after that, the rest of the action should take place on an absolutely bare stage, relying only on the language and the actors and such costumes (gorgeous, I should think) and props (witty and portable) as they can comfortably carry on and carry off to establish all the necessary theatrical illusion.

Spenser, seem to take a positive delight in rubbing our noses in our own ignorance before carrying on with the balance of our instruction.

Certainly *The Faerie Queene* creates befuddlement in the attentive reader more frequently and more intensely than most other allegories, and not all the confusion can be explained away by the poem's unfinished condition – which, in the case of allegory, need not mean incompleteness anyway. The complexities of Books III and IV can just as readily be construed as the allegorist's deliberately created obstacles to reflex reading as confusions generated by unrevised or too much revised material. And Book VI and "The Mutabilitie Cantoes" close *The Faerie Queene* as admirably as Spenser could have hoped or planned: only readers of the "Yeah, but does Arthur ever get Gloriana?" persuasion can repine at them.

Be that as it may, Book VI comes very late in the poem as we have it and midway in the poem as Spenser, in *The Letter to Raleigh*, seems to have planned it – in either case, pretty far along, it would seem, to be creating confusions and reducing the patient reader once more to a condition of confusion and unknowing. Yet that is exactly what Spenser does, very thoroughly and quite overtly. More openly than any other book of *The Faerie Queene*, Book VI is literary in its essence, book-obsessed, even to the extent of offering characters whose names are books and genres and printing houses – Aldus and Aladine, Pastorella, Calepine. Its proem posits the priority of its own fiction over laborious reality: Faeryland supplies strength to the flagging poet, ravishes his spirit, beguiles his "tedious trauell" (Proem VI.i). Only the Muses can reveal to the poet "the sacred noursery/ Of vertue" (iii) and its prize blossom, courtesy, which is travestied rather than embodied by what passes for courtesy in the "real" world. Spenser expresses this through the hoary cliché of the mirror, invoking incidentally to amplify his meaning the language of Sidney's *Defense of Poesy*:

> But in the triall of true curtesie,
> Its now so farre from that, which then it was,
> That it indeed is nought but forgerie,
> Fashion'd to please the eies of them, that pas,
> Which see not perfect things but in a glas:
> Yet is that glasse so gay, that it can blynd
> The wisest sight, to thinke gold that is bras.
> (Proem VI.v)

Only in the mirrors of art and of Elizabeth's pure mind (Proem VI.vi) can "real" courtesy be found, and from that latter source it

> ... well[s]
> Into the rest, which round about you ring,
> Faire Lords and Ladies, which about you dwell,
> And doe adorne your Court, where courtesies excell.
> (Proem VI.vii)

So the pattern of true courtesy, the virtue that "spreds it selfe through all ciuilitie" (Proem VI.iv), can be found in Elizabeth and her courtiers, who are also the primary audience of the poem:

> Then pardon me, most dreaded Soueraine,
> That from your selfe I doe this vertue bring,
> And to your selfe doe it returne againe...
> (Proem VI.vii)

If the "generall end" of *The Faerie Queene* is, as *The Letter to Raleigh* phrases it, "to fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline," then the courtier knight Calidore – "none more courteous Knight,/ Than *Calidore*, beloued ouer all" (VI.i.2) – manifests the poem's ideal audience, internalized and absorbed into the lessons he teaches and learns, just as Miranda, in her very first reactions to the storm and wreck, manifests and internalizes Shakespeare's audience into Shakespeare's – or perhaps Prospero's – play. Calidore begins his book as the poem's ideal reader, a creature formed by books, made of books, set loose within a courtesy book and chivalric romance that mutates into a pastoral romance and heroic quest with overtones of mythology and overlays of Biblical narrative, both of the last culminating, along with his quest, in the capture of a monster made of language ("The which did seeme a thousand tongues to haue"; VI.1.9) by means of a Herculean and Christic harrowing of hell – all in a day's work for your average, run-of-the-mill courtier and reader of Spenser.

What we witness in that sort of generic hyper-enrichment of the text is not the breakdown of Spenser's control so much as it is the flooding of the text by one particular referential pool, literature itself – by no means the only referential area at work in Book VI, but to my mind the one with greatest attractive power, the dominant strange attractor of the book. Where Book I initiates us into allegory by relentlessly literalizing (e.g., "God helpe the man so wrapt in *Errours* endlesse traine"; I.i.18), Book VI proceeds by an equally unremitting literarizing, by turning everything into (what in fact it is and must be, in a poem) books or the matter of books. And of all those books that feed into *Faerie Queene* VI, none – not romance, not the Bible, not the myth of Hercules, not the whole phenomenon of pastoral – is more important than *The Faerie Queene* itself. Book VI amounts to a structural doppelganger of Book I: as such, it enacts *The Faerie Queene*'s encounter with its own shadow self.[19] Spenser's poem has become its own referential area, its own strange attractor, closing its own system while at the same time opening itself to endless further bifurcations and duplications. This process does not begin in Book VI – *The Faerie Queene* has been reproducing and modifying its own elements and episodes almost from the beginning – but Book VI is where the process culminates, where even the poet enters his own book and becomes a denizen of it.

The conventions and associations of pastoral play a crucial part in effecting this naturalization of the poet within the poem. Calidore's pastoral digression in Cantos ix, x, and xi and the prominence of "natural" characters (e.g., Tristram, the Salvage Man, the "saluage nation" that almost cannibalizes Serena) throughout the book involve *The Faerie Queene* with genres and

[19] For a fuller discussion of the structural relations of Books I and VI, see my *Three English Epics* and James Nohrnberg's *The Analogy of The Faerie Queene* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1976).

traditions that have no connection with epic and only peripheral attachment to romance.[20] Pastoral is the genre of artifice, the last articulated of the great classical forms, and the one most enormously enriched by later Christian culture. Pastoral comes into existence as a paradox, a form of nostalgia for a world that never was, a sophisticated courtier's expression of longing for a nonexistent simplicity. Courtiers Theocritus and Virgil might be, but they and their audience knew what sheep really smell like, and they knew very well that real shepherds didn't have the leisure for love lyrics or the wealth for gifts of honeycombs or (in all likelihood their master's) newly weaned lambs, or the inclination toward either. Pastoral is an illusionist form, perhaps *the* illusionist form, using the artifice of an invented golden-age simplicity to counterpoint the artificiality of the over-sophisticated world that produces it. Several versions – all more or less ironic – of the opposition of art and nature are basic to it, most turning at some key point on the fact that – to adapt Spenser – not just "vertues seat" but reality's too "is deepe within the mynd,/ And not in outward shows, but inward thoughts defynd" (Proem VI.v). That central fact is pastoral's strength and its limitation, and Shakespeare, for instance, faces squarely up to that in his brilliant exploitation of orthodox pastoral in *As You Like It*: Orlando glimpses the outer limits of pastoral when he says "I can live no longer by thinking" (V.ii.55).

That is to say, pastoral makes itself a genre of fantasy, of an alternative reality, of a "nature" that isn't and wasn't, a genre of the literary imagination freed from many of the constraints of the canon and the demands of mimesis. Pastoral's time is a "golden" age not just in the classical sense but also in Sidney's sense of that word, its space the scope of Sidney's "erected wit" rather than the world of our "infected will." As such, the pastoral world, the pastoral poem, is a place of transformation like the forest of Arden, where the quotidian can reveal itself as extraordinary, where any mangy shepherd might disguise Pan, where people can – as Calidore does in *The Faerie Queene* and Oliver does in Arden – perform that most extraordinary, most quotidian act of literally "changing their minds." For Spenser's culture, the most profound form of that "change of mind" was true religious belief and salvation through the ministration of the Good Shepherd Christ, a concatenation of ideas, Biblical texts, and an image that also furnished precisely the most significant and complex dimensions of the post-classical expansions of the literary idea of pastoral.

Finally, not the least of the paradoxes of pastoral is that this self-allegedly simple, illusionistically natural, apparently heathen form became crucial to the career of the Christian epic poet: by the example of Virgil, the progression from pastoral to georgic to epic became the *cursus honorum* for a serious poet. (Even as late as the Eighteenth century, Pope would conscientiously work through the first two steps without ever quite reaching the third.) That precise aspect of pastoral has been latent within *The Faerie Queene* from its very first words, which overtly echo Virgil's autobiographical opening of *The Aeneid* and draw the explicit parallel between the progress of the two poetic careers:

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[20] One could make a relatively feeble counterargument on the basis of the so-called primitivism of *Aeneid* VIII (the simple life of Evander and his people on the site that will be Rome) and some of Homer's similes and inset artifacts (e.g., the shield of Achilles), but antithetical elements contained within epic for purposes of clarification, contrast, or irony are different in kind from utterly non-epic elements that usurp the action of epic and transform it. Consider the implications of one small point as an example of this: when Calidore finally accomplishes his quest and captures the Blatant Beast, how is he dressed? as knight? or as shepherd?

Lo I the man, whose Muse whilome did maske,
As time her taught, in lowly Shepheards weeds,
Am now enforst a far vnfitter taske,
For trumpets sterne to chaunge mine Oaten reeds,
And sing of Knights and Ladies gentle deeds...
(Proem I.i)[21]

The overt pastoralism of Book VI re-invokes and revives, within the poem, this "extra-textual" pastoralism of Spenser's personal biography and literary career: the result is the almost inevitable appearance, within *The Faerie Queene*, of the poet's earlier pastoral alter ego, Colin Clout. That is to say, the introduction of pastoral as a controlling narrative format in Book VI allows or necessitates Spenser's textualizing a version of himself as a sort of *genius loci*, a presiding power within the sub-set or sub-genre or localized pocket of order that constitutes the pastoral portion of his poem.[22] This is all the more appropriate and necessary because the poet himself – the poet in, so to speak, *propria persona* – has already textualized himself rather thoroughly at the outset of Book VI. At the beginning of Proem VI, the poet does not merely posit the priority of Faeryland to "reality," as I argued earlier. More exactly, he involves himself in Faeryland, implicates himself in it, initiates or inducts himself into it in exactly the same way that Red Crosse Knight and Una were led out of "the plaine" and into the Wandering Wood and so into Faeryland proper:

The waies, through which my weary steps I guyde,
In this delightfull land of Faery,
Are so exceeding spacious and wyde,
And sprinckled with such sweet variety,
Of all that pleasant is to eare or eye,
That I nigh rauisht with rare thoughts delight,
My tedious trauell doe forget thereby...
(Proem VI.i; cp I.i.8-10)

[21] Renaissance readers usually took as genuinely Virgilian four lines that precede *Arma virumque cano*:

Ille ego, qui quondam gracili modulatus avena
carmen, et egressus silvis vicina coegi
ut quamvis avido parerent area colono,
gratum opus agricolis; at nunc horrentia Martis
arma virumque cano...

I am he who once tuned my song on a slender reed, then, leaving the woodland, constrained the neighboring fields to serve the husbandmen, however grasping – a work welcome to farmers: but now of Mars' bristling arms and the man I sing... (Latin text and translation from H. Rushton Fairclough, *Virgil*, Loeb Library, London and Cambridge, MA, 1960).

[22] As the speaking voice of the narrative, "Spenser" has of course been omnipresent throughout the poem – but other versions of the poet have also manifested themselves as, more or less, *genii locorum* in areas of *The Faerie Oueene* that have been drawn into the orbit of alternative forms or ideas. Consider, in this light, figures as different as Acrasia and the priest of Isis who explains Britomart's dream, or Busirane and Merlin.

This passage accomplishes at least two important things: it activates an analogy between the action past of Book I and the action to be of Book VI, and it sets the poet in motion within his own poem in a manner and a condition strictly analogous to that of his own protagonists.[23]

If Calidore is in any sense manifesting or enacting within *The Faerie Queene* a hypothetical or ideal reader of *The Faerie Queene*, and Colin Clout in any sense plays the poet in the poem, then the major encounter of the two should be an episode of more than slight interest to readers who have remained, in any sense, outside the poem. Certainly the reader who loves *The Faerie Queene* behaves in a manner strictly analogous to the way the poet describes his own reactions to it, relishing the "sweet variety,/ Of all that pleasant is to eare or eye." And certainly too, as details pile up and incidents multiply, they lead the reader inevitably to a fair degree of confusion, of loss of direction, just as the heroes of the poem falter in their quests and lose their momentum and direction. Book VI may not be quite the jungle of episodes and the zoo of characters that Books III and IV are, but it offers more than enough plots and protagonists to keep less-than-totally-attentive readers thumbing back every few pages to make sure they know who is doing what to whose what. But beyond that loose analogy, we can legitimately wonder if we as readers have any real stake in the meeting of Colin Clout and Calidore. We can question, in fact, whether Calidore is a stalking horse for us in any but the most formal and most shallow senses.

Those questions are answered – not clearly but at least directly – at Mount Acidale. Colin Clout's piping and the dance of the Graces explicitly bring into the poem proper the material of the proems, the Muses and "Faire *Venus* sonne" (I.iii), the "sacred imps, that on *Parnasso* dwell" (VI.ii), all of the classical paraphernalia of poetic inspiration that has been essentially absent from the body of *The Faerie Queene*.[24] That introduction of the apparatus and even the act of poetic inspiration and creation into the narrative, in the same sorts of terms as they exist in the proems, effectually erases the line between the "inside" and the "outside" of the poem, between the poet/speaker of the poem as a being in "our" world (which we conventionally take the proems to be: the poet standing outside his own poem and praying for the ability to articulate it) and the poet as a creature of and within the poem (which we take all the actors in the narrative to be).

Colin Clout's apology to "Great *Gloriana*, greatest Maiesty" for intruding praise of another "mongst so many layes,/ As he hath sung of thee in all his dayes" (VI.x.28) overtly merges Colin Clout as a creature of *The Faerie Queene*, Colin Clout as a character or persona of Spenser's earlier poems, the "Spenser" of the proems of *The Faerie Queene* who and which praise Gloriana, and the Spenser who wrote other poems in praise of the Elizabeth who underlies

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[23] This also has a certain predictive value too: when Calidore vacations from his quest, diverted by the charms of Pastorella and the quiet life, he is digressing/wandering/erring in exactly the same way and for exactly the same reasons as the poet and Red Crosse Knight. This ought to make us re-examine the moral judgments we have – usually quite readily – passed on each of these actions. The poem isn't over until it's over: every step of it forces its readers to perform a mental re-reading and revision of some part of its preceding steps.

[24] Some of these classical figures have, of course, appeared in the poem under other guises or aspects, most notably Venus. It is their specifically literary roles that the Mount Acidale episodes activate within the narrative.

Gloriana.[25] The "outside" of the narrative enters and becomes its inside, becoming a closed, self-contained, and yet seamless, limitless system, a sort of literary Mobius strip. Colin Clout's piping evokes the dance of the Graces, a dance that precisely enacts that open-ended closure:

> And eeke them selues so in their daunce they bore,
> That two of them still froward seem'd to bee,
> But one still towards shew'd her selfe afore;
> That good should from vs goe, then come in greater store.
> (VI.x.24)

I am not trying to say that the dance of the Graces is an analog or metaphor for what *The Faerie Queene* is at this precise narrative point making of itself. Mount Acidale marks the intersection of several meaning systems within the poem, and the dance of the Graces, among the abundance of meanings it bears and values it embodies, also *enacts* the poem's intersection of itself, its simultaneous opening and closing of its own thrust. The pattern the Graces make, the motion they execute, replicates – among many other things – the action of bifurcation, the creation of duplicates and doppelgangers. What moves singly in one direction returns upon itself doubled, split, "diuided into double parts" (I.ii.9) to quote the poet of Archimago's initial – and archetypal – success.

Note most carefully that the dance of the Graces *is not* the poem: if there is anything in the episode that could legitimately be considered an analog of the poem, it is Colin's piping. That piping, in turn, calls into being, or enables, or serves as the stimulus for, the dance of the Graces, and the Graces remain totally free agents, independent of the piper/poet, as Colin explains to Calidore in response to his question about why the maidens disappeared:

> Not I so happy, answerd then that swaine,
> As thou vnhappy, which them thence didst chace,
> Whom by no meanes thou canst recall againe,
> For being gone, none can them bring in place,
> But whom they of them selues list so to grace.
> (VI.x.20)

Unhappy Calidore indeed: for him, as for us poor readers, there can be no escape from the woods to direct vision, no way out of the forest of language and rhetoric to unmediated vision. Calidore immersed himself "in the couert of the wood" and "pleased much his sight" (VI.x.11) exactly as Una and Red Crosse Knight did to initiate the action of the poem, exactly as "Spenser" did in the proem to initiate the action of this book, exactly as the reader has done in every book to this point. Calidore enters the matter of rhetoric to spy on a topos, a pleasaunce, a *locus amoenus*, peopled by characters of rhetoric, characters who both exist in and putatively

[25] Spenser even carries this to the extent of having the lyric (presumably) poet Colin Clout echo lines of the narrative poet Spenser: compare "She often made me pipe and now to pipe apace" (VI.x.27) to "Pype iolly shepheard, pype thou now apace" (VI.x.16), "And graced her so much to be another Grace" (VI.x.26) to "Thy loue is there aduaunst to be another Grace" (VI.x.16).

create rhetoric. His attempt to free himself of the "couert" of language and rhetoric immediately dispels the vision, undoes the dance:

> 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 neuer knew.
> (VI.x.17-18)

This is a richly charged scene, with mighty currents working through it. It mirrors Red Crosse Knight's vision of the Heavenly Jerusalem with the Hermit Contemplation, down to the detail of each hero, Red Crosse Knight and Calidore, wishing but being unable to stay always with his instructor and host. It mirrors in a different way Red Crosse Knight's dream of Venus and the dancing Graces leading an all-too-compliant Una to his bed, "Now a loose Leman to vile seruice bound" (I.i.48). It echoes too of the Garden of Adonis and more remotely of the Bower of Bliss as well as the Wandering Wood. In these narrative terms, the Acidale episode is a collector, a magnet, for other narrative places in the poem, and for the meanings and classes of meaning those different places activate.

But before all else, the Acidale episode enacts its primary meaning, as all allegorical narrative must, in its bare *littera*, and that bare literal statement of narrative amounts to nothing more or less than Calidore's catching a glimpse of something very beautiful, very puzzling, and very fleeting, and his consequent, unsuccessful attempt to get out of the woods and see plainly. On the literal level, then, as one of the protagonists of *The Faerie Queene*, Calidore is trying to undo Red Crosse Knight's initial error and return us, poem and reader, to the state of clear vision, of plain simplicity and univocation from which the poem began – and that is impossible.

On that same literal level, as a type or incarnation or embodiment of the reader of *The Faerie Queene*, Calidore shares briefly with the poet/piper in the vision of complex motion and meaningful *entrelacement* that the artwork – the piping, the poem – lures into manifesting itself – and that cannot be sustained: Calidore's attempt to approach it, question it, know it more fully and more permanently causes it to disappear, vanish, evanesce, so completely that even Colin Clout, for the moment at least, cannot bring it back, cannot put it together again in the same way, because it was never completely under his control to begin with, never entirely his creation at all.

The encounter of Calidore with Colin and the dance of the Graces in the sacred precincts of Mount Acidale enacts in the narrative of the poem the encounter of the reader and the allegory. The Mount Acidale episode embodies and enacts, for us, with us, the abilities and limitations of the poem and the poet and the reader, the triumphs and frustrations of each. The allegory lives in the dance: the motion, the weaving, the pattern makes and unmakes the meaning, and it cannot be frozen, nor can it be interrogated. We readers can no more permanently break free of mediation than Calidore can. We may try to get out of the woods, but we always return to them:

> [Calidore] had no will away to fare,

But wisht, that with that shepheard he mote dwelling share.
But that enuenimd sting, the which of yore,
His poysnous point deepe fixed in his hart
Had left, now gan afresh to rancle sore,
And to renue the rigour of his smart:
Which to recure, no skill of Leaches art
Mote him auaile, but to returne againe
To his wounds worker, that with louely dart
Dinting his brest, had bred his restlesse paine,
Like as the wounded Whale to shore flies from the maine.
So taking leaue of that same gentle swaine,
He backe returned to his rusticke wonne,
Where his faire *Pastorella* did remaine...
(VI.x.30-32)

The dart of love, the bite of the Blatant Beast, and the hook of rhetoric all cause similar symptoms, similar rankling, because all are linked in an erotics of language. Calidore falls back from unmediated vison as we readers lapse back into figural language, modulating almost gratefully from Spenser's transfiguration of the *locus amoenus* into the more familiar and comfortable space of the erotic pastoral, of the *pastourelle*. All our attempts to move our "infected wills" to the heights of our "erected wits" are fuddled by the verbal and figural ambiguity of that erection. Just as we are drawn to vision by the desire to know and possess, so we fall back into language from a concupiscence of convention, a yearning for the familiar, the comfortable, for simple Pastorella rather than the deified "iolly Shepheards lasse" (VI.x.16) at the heart of the knot of the Graces. Roland Barthes says "Writing is: the science of the various blisses of language, its Kama Sutra (this science has but one treatise: writing itself)."[26] For an allegorist like Spenser, the forest of rhetoric and the jungle of desire are coextensive, hearts of darkness within us and without. In *The Faerie Queene*, Red Crosse Knight led us into all those dark forests, and we poor readers aren't out of the woods yet.

[26] *The Pleasure of the Text*, translated by Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975).