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# The Use of Classical Mythology in Edmund Spenser's Faerie Queene Book I and II

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THE USE OF CLASSICAL MYTHOLOGY

IN

EDMUND SPENSER'S FAERIE QUEENE

BOOK I AND II

BY

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A thesis submitted as partial fulfillment for the  
degree of

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Butler University

Indianapolis

1932

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## The Use of Classical Mythology

In

## Spenser's Faerie Queene

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## FOREWORD

For the proper understanding of this thesis, it is necessary to state explicitly what it does not attempt to do. It is absolutely not an examination into the sources of Spenser's classical mythology. That research work has already been done in two published studies; namely, The Sources of Spenser's Classical Mythology by A. E. Sawtelle and a second work with the same title by A. S. Randall. The connection of Virgil and Spenser has been treated by M. G. Hughes in Virgil and Spenser.

Although the source of a poet's material is invaluable in any estimate of his work, it is not the only matter that counts. Furthermore there is such a widespread diffusion of sources, that one cannot always definitely point out the exact origin. Frequently there is no specific source, the matter being the common property of many ancient minds.

However, the use of such mythological material by an English poet is a matter worthy of study in itself. Such a study will accept the mythological data with no attempt to trace them back to their source. Its simple purpose is to explain what use

the poet makes of the data in the specific work in English that he is composing.

Such is the purpose of this thesis. It is based upon a first-hand examination of the actual text of Spenser's poem, and it attempts to show the different values Spenser assigned to his mythological facts.

Mythology is only one of the elements in the larger problems of Spenser's workmanship; but it is important enough to justify a study in itself, humble as it may be. The reader who is interested in Spenser's sources can profitably turn to the more ambitious research work already mentioned in this paper.

THE USE OF CLASSICAL MYTHOLOGY

IN

SPENSER'S FAERIE QUEENE

I

THE GENERAL PLAN OF THE FAERIE QUEENE.

The Faerie Queene is considered a perfect example in English of the purely Romantic Epic. Its plan is vast and its plot, loosely constructed. There are six main stories, each of which contains intricate and involved episodes. The main lines of action are indicated in the following account. Gloriana, queen of Fairyland, holds at her court a solemn festival which lasts twelve days. During this period she sends forth twelve of her most renowned knights on quests to succor people in distress and to right their wrongs. The most perfect of all knights, Prince Arthur, is the outstanding male character. He is enamoured of Gloriana, whom he sees in a vision and whom he seeks but never finds. He appears frequently in the epic at the most critical and opportune time to aid the other

knights when they are hard beset or at the mercy of their enemies.

In a letter to Walter Raleigh, Spenser states the purpose of using the character of Arthur. "The generall end therefore of all the booke is to fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline. Which for that I conceived shoulde be most plausible and pleasing, beeing coloured with an historicall fiction, the which the most part of men delight to read, rather for varietie of matter than for profit of the ensample: I chose the historie of king Arthure, as most fit for the excellencie of his person, beeing made famous by many mens former workes, and also furthest from the danger of envie and suspicion of present time."<sup>1</sup>

Out of the twenty-four books originally planned, the six extant books contain the legends of (I) the Knight of the Red Crosse, or Holiness; (II) Sir Guyon, the Knight of Temperance; (III) Britomart, the female Knight of Chastity; (IV) Sir Campbell and Sir Triamond, the Knights of Friendship; (V) Sir Artegal, the Knight of Justice; and (VI) Sir Caledore,

<sup>1</sup> Faerie Queene Book I G. W. Kitchen Int. XXV

the Knight of Courtesy.

In the first two legends especially, Spenser's purpose is to explain the nature of the spiritual life of man considered as an individual. This he does by telling a story fashioned according to the conventions of chivalry.

Thus he portrays in Book I the Red Crosse Knight engaged in a quest. This quest, on which the Faerie Queene sends him, is to render aid to Una's parents who are besieged by a dragon. In this quest he is pictured in the land of nowhere, where anything may and does happen. There are spectacular combats with evil knights and giants and encounters with horrible monsters and false sorcerers. These evil characters represent the evil powers at work on the soul. At the most critical times in his fights, the Red Crosse Knight is rescued by Prince Arthur, the exponent of Divine Grace.

According to the same allegory, Una stands for Platonic wisdom. It is her wisdom that leads to the Red Crosse Knight's overthrow of the dragon in his first adventure. It is the loss of her wisdom, through his separation from her by the guile of Archimago, the archmagician, that he falls in snares of Duessa, also



an evil character, and finally becomes the prisoner of Orgoglio. Through her wisdom the aid of Prince Arthur is invoked which terminates in the Red Crosse Knight's release. Finally it is Una who leads him to the House of Holiness where he, broken mentally and physically, receives the aid which makes possible the completion of his quest, the release of Una's parents from the dragon. Furthermore, in the House of Holiness moral awakening comes to him and understanding of Una's spiritual beauty through his experiences there in learning the lessons of self-discipline, humility, charity, hope and faith. These adventures of the Red Crosse Knight are used to show how the soul may conquer all temptations in the quest of holiness. Perfection in this virtue is symbolized in the betrothal of the knight and Una. The knight does not see Una's spiritual beauty shining in the full splendor of its glory until the betrothal, as up to this time she travels with a black stole over her face. Thus the knight striving for a divine world from which he receives aid, is enabled to see the true spiritual beauty of Wisdom and Truth.

In the second book of the Faerie Queene, Spenser

works out his theory of temperance in the same manner. In this book, Sir Guyon experiences many adventures in which he overcomes his angry impulses and creature appetites. The climax of his achievements is the destruction of the Bower of Bliss, the home of Acrasia, the enchanter of men's souls. In this allegory Sir Guyon's soul is the ground of a constant struggle between reason and its two opponents, angry impulses and creature appetites. The final victory of Sir Guyon means the attainment of temperance.

These first two books on Holiness and Temperance contain the teachings of Spenser regarding our spiritual life. In these principles other virtues find their source, so the ideals of chastity, friendship, justice, and courtesy which are purely social in character cannot, consequently, be identified as virtues equal in rank to Holiness and Temperance. Hence, in this paper only the first two books will be considered as Spenser practically completed his philosophic purpose before he was aware of it;<sup>1</sup> and the purpose is to show how classical mythology is used by Spenser in

1

John S. Harrison's *The Vital Interpretation of English Literature* p 231

telling the story in the first two books.

## II

### THE USE OF CLASSICAL MYTHOLOGY

#### IN

### BOOK I OF THE FAERIE QUEENE

#### (a) In Handling Situations

In working out his story of the Red Crosse Knight, Spenser uses mythological characters in certain important situations. One such is Una's reception by the creatures of the woodland.

Una, pursued by Sansloy after she was deserted by the Red Crosse Knight, was rescued by mythological folk, the satyrs and fauns in the woodland through which she was fleeing. Spenser also brings Una here in contact with other mythological folk as the nymphs, the god of the woodland, Sylvanus, and Satyrane, a partly mythological character.

The satyrs and fauns were usually very hostile to human beings and very much feared by them. So Spenser uses them to frighten Sansloy away who flees from "this rude misshapen monstrous rablement." (I. VI. 8.) The radiance of Una's beauty, which Spenser spiritualized



8

Una's spiritual beauty is brought out in Sylvanus' reaction to her. Sylvanus, the woodland god, is so charmed, that he begins to doubt the purity of his own Dryope's beauty. He then thinks it is perhaps Venus, the goddess of love herself, but the serene seriousness of Una makes that impossible. Then he decides she is perhaps Diana, but misses the bow and shaftes which Diana, as the goddess of the chase usually wears. Finally she reminds him of

"His ancient love, and dearest Cyparisse,  
How faire he was, and yet not faire to this."  
(I. VI. 14, 15, 16, 17.)

Again her superior beauty is brought out in the action of the nymphs, who conscious of her superior beauty and fearful lest they might suffer from an unfavorable comparison, leave.

"The wooddy nymphs, faire Hamadryades,  
Her to behold do thither runne apace,  
And all the troupe of light-footed Naiades  
Flocks all about to see her lovely face;  
But, when they vewed have her heavenly grace,  
They envy her in their malitious mind,  
And fly away for feare of fowle disgrace;  
But all the Satyres scorne their wooddy kind,  
And henceforth nothing faire but her on earth  
they find." (I. VI. 18.)

The satyrs' and fauns' desire to worship Una is so great that she, to enlighten them as to true worship, teaches them truth and "trew sacred lore." (I. VI. 19.)

To show further the spiritual beauty of Una, Spenser creates Satyrane. His origin is part mythological as his father was a satyr and his mother a gentle maid. Una's spiritual beauty so overwhelms the brute element in his makeup that he, too, learns sacred truth at her feet. (I. VI. 31.) In these various incidents Spenser presents the superior nature of Una's beauty. It has the power of overcoming brute creation and the severity and radiance of her beauty sets it far above the voluptuous beauty of the woodland nymphs and even of the great goddess of love, Venus. The beauty of her whole nature lies in her soul endowed with wisdom and truth. Nor does Spenser fail to state the purpose of Una in the allegory. He portrays her as teaching the satyrs truth and "trew sacred lore." (I. VI. 19.) In this way Spenser arouses the imagination of the reader into an appreciative conception of the great purity of Una.

A second situation in Book I is that of Duessa's trip to Hades in which Spenser gives an interesting but gruesome pen picture of Hell. Night, who accompanies Duessa, is humanized by Spenser. She is clothed in a foule "black pitchy mantle". Her chariot is of "yron" and drawn by "cole black steeds yborne of hellish brood", and furthermore, Spenser contrasts her



In Hell, Night and Duessa pass various victims, all from classical mythology. All are suffering excruciating horrors in expiation of their sins against the gods. In this group are Ixion who was turned on a wheel for daring to aspire to the love of Hera; Tetyus, who attacked Artemis and was punished by vultures eating his liver; Theseus, who attempting to carry off Persephone was condemned to endless sloth; the Danaides, fifty sisters who slew their husbands and who were condemned to endless pouring of water into a leaky vessel; Aesculapius, son of Apollo and the princess Coronis, who was imprisoned in chains for restoring to life Hippolytes, the son of Theseus. (I. V. 35, 36.)

A third situation in Book I is brought about by the use of a device common in classical mythology, the use of a false dream. One such instance is found in the Iliad. Zeus sent a baneful dream to Agamemnon in order to bid him call to arms the Achaians with all speed to take the city of the Trojans. Zeus' purpose was to bring grief upon both the Trojans and Danaans through stubborn fights.<sup>1</sup>

Working after this manner, Spenser has a false dream sent to the Red Crosse Knight. The purpose of

<sup>1</sup> Long, Leaf, Myers, The Iliad p. 21, 22.



the dream is the separation of the Red Crosse Knight and Una in order to lure the Red Crosse Knight into certain dangerous adventures into which he can easily be led as he lacks the wisdom Una supplies him in dangerous situations.

This dream is achieved through the magic of Archimago who by the means of his black art creates two sprites, one, whom he sends as his messenger to the Underworld where he is in league with evil mythological characters. He selects Morpheus, the Greek god of sleep to prepare the bad dream. This dream, portraying Una as the most infamous of women, is to horrify the Red Crosse Knight so that he will desert her. To make the dream real, Archimago uses the second sprite to impersonate Una. The illusion created thus is successful and the separation of the Red Crosse Knight and Una is achieved.

In the portrayal of the Greek god Morpheus, Spenser to show his drowsiness has the sprite threaten him with the "dreaded name of Hecate" goddess of the Underworld, sometimes identified with Proserpina and sometimes with Diana.

"The sprite then gan more boldly him to wake,  
And threatened unto him the dreaded name of  
Hecate, whereat he gan to quake,  
.....

Hither (quoth he) me Archimago sent  
 . . . . .  
 He bids thee to him sent for his intent  
 A fit false dream, that can delude the  
    sleeper's sent." (I. I. 43.)

Still practicing the classical manner, Spenser uses two devices to reveal the perfidy of Duessa. One is fashioned after the mythical story of Daphne and Apollo. Cupid, angry with Apollo shot him with an arrow that excited love and Daphne with an arrow repelling love. Consequently Apollo pursued the unwilling Daphne who prayed to her father that she might remain a virgin like Diana. In spite of Apollo's pleadings, Daphne ran swifter than the wind. However, when Apollo nearly reached her, her father responded to her prayer and turned her into a laurel tree which Apollo worshiped and gave eternal life.<sup>1</sup>

Although Spenser's account does not strictly conform to this, it is similar enough to trace its source to it. This is the manner in which Spenser tells the story. Duessa and the Red Crosse Knight journeying together become tired and seek rest under two trees. The Red Crosse Knight, deeply enamoured of Fidessa (Duessa) decides to weave a garland for her brow. With this intent he breaks a bough which begins to bleed and to his amazement and Duessa's consternation a voice in protest comes from the tree. It is Fradubio, a young knight,

<sup>1</sup> Gayley's *Classic Myths* p 112.89

who tells the story of his and his sweetheart's transformation into trees by the magic power of Duessa, whom the Red Crosse Knight knows as Fidessa.

In this same story as told by Spenser there is use made of a second device from classical mythology-- the magic cloud. In the Iliad such a cloud is used to protect Paris from Menelaus in the combat to decide the issue of the Trojan War. In this case it is Venus who throws a cloud over Paris to aid him to escape.<sup>1</sup> In the Faerie Queene this device appears when Fradubio tells the story of his love. The story as revealed by Fradubio states that he, a young knight, accompanied by his lady love, fights and kills a knight, the companion of Duessa. Duessa, wanting to appropriate Fradubio, makes use of her magic art to create a deluding cloud, which makes her fair indeed, but destroys the beauty of Fradubio's sweetheart, so he deserts her. Then Duessa to rid herself of Fradubio's sweetheart uses her black art to turn her into a tree. Later when Fradubio accidentally discovers Duessa to be "a filthy foul old woman"<sup>2</sup> he suffers the same fate as his sweetheart. Unfortunately, the Red Crosse Knight fails to recognize that Duessa and Fidessa are the same person.

1

Lang, Leaf, Myers The Iliad III p 61

2

Faerie Queene I. II. 40.

A fourth situation in Book I is based upon a mythological foundation. The old mythological tale of Diana and her nymphs is used by Spenser. Diana and her nymphs were running a race one day when she noticed a water nymph lagging behind. This aroused the wrath of Diana who to punish the nymph not only slowed her fountain water but also rendered impotent anyone who drank of it. Spenser has the Red Crosse Knight, weary with long travelling come to this fountain with its dulled water of which he drinks and then becomes as sluggish as the water. Impotent under the influence of the water, the Red Crosse Knight falls a victim to the giant Orgoglio.

In Spenser's use of mythology in these various situations, he provides adventure for his knight of chivalry not from a literature dealing with chivalry but with creations of classical mythology. Spenser did this as his romantic mind grasped the significance of myths--that is, that all myths are based upon love.

#### (b) In the Treatment of Character

In working out his scheme to show how the Red Crosse Knight had to develop his character in combating evil, Spenser draws upon several mythological char-



The heapes of people, thronging in the hall,  
 Do ride each other, upon her to gaze;  
 Her glorious glitter and light doth all mens  
 eyes amaze." (I. IV. 16.)

She is made to resemble Flora, goddess of flowers  
 and Juno, queen of Jupiter.

"So forth she comes, and to her coche does  
 clyme,  
 Adorned all with gold and girlands gay,  
 That seemed as fresh as Flora in her prime  
 And strove to match, in royal rich array,  
 Great Junoes golden chaire, the which they say  
 The gods stand gazing on, when she does ride  
 To Jove's high house through heavens bras-  
 paved way,  
 Drawne of faire pecocks, that excell in pride  
 And full of Argus eyes their tailles dispredden  
 wide." (I. IV. 17.)

In explanation of the last line, mythology relates  
 the story of Argus thus. Jupiter, when discovered by  
 Juno in his love affair with Io, turned Io into a cow.  
 Juno, suspecting who the cow was, set Argus as a guard  
 over the cow. Mercury lulled him to sleep and slew him.  
 Thus Io was free. The eyes of Argus were scattered as  
 ornaments in the tail of Juno's peacock, her sacred  
 bird.<sup>1</sup>

In the case of Sansloy, Sansfoy, and Sansjoy,  
 Spenser traces their genealogy to Night. They are  
 nephews of Night.<sup>2</sup> Night was the child of Chaos and  
 by her marriage with Erebus, also a child of Chaos,

<sup>1</sup> Gayley's Classic Myths p 65

<sup>2</sup> Faerie Queene I. V. 22

she became the progenitor of all gods. Night, that is darkness, is closely associated with evil as evil is most powerful at night. Therefore Sansloy, Sansfoy, and Sansjoy are evil which represents evil in the soul. So Spenser makes them the combatants of the Red Crosse Knight in order to prove his valor as a knight of chivalry.

### III

#### THE USE OF CLASSICAL MYTHOLOGY

#### IN

#### BOOK II OF THE FAERIE QUEENE

To make the second book of the Faerie Queene clear to the reader, the main points of the story will be reviewed. In this book Sir Guyon is not sent out by Gloriana as in the case of the Red Crosse Knight to right wrong but he, as knights often did, assumes the responsibility of righting wrong. He pledges himself to avenge the death of a lady, whom he found dying near the dead body of her husband, who had been lured away by Acrasia, an evil enchantress. This pledge involves the capture of Acrasia and the destruction of her Bower of Bliss. The adventures of Sir Guyon in the course of which he perfects himself in temperance may be considered in two groups, the first to show his conquest of his

angry impulses and the second, the mastery of his desire for sensual delights.

His first adventure is his mastery over his impetuous wrath, excited by Archimago's base assertion that the Red Crosse Knight had mistreated a maiden. He hastens, as a true knight, to avenge the wrong, but upon encountering the Red Crosse Knight he recognizes his mistake. (II. I. 10, 11, 17.) The second experience of Sir Guyon in curbing his wrath is the struggle with Furor and his mother Occasion. (II. IV. 3, 36.) He struggles successfully with the madman urged on by his mother, and binds him in chains. The last adventure is his encounter with Pyrochles, who seeks an occasion for a quarrel. Guyon masters himself in refusing to fight without cause and when forced to fight, fights with reason, not malice, even sparing the life of his assailant. Thus Guyon shows his mastery over the irrational element of wrath.

The second group of adventures tests Sir Guyon's mastery of his sensual desires. Phaedria represents frivolous mirth and wantonness. In his contact with her, Sir Guyon maintains a courteous behavior until her gaities become questionable. He

. . . . . "was wise, and warie of her will,  
And yet held his hand upon his hart;  
Yet would not seeme so rude, and thewed ill,  
As to despise so courteous seeming part



That gentle ladie did to him impart;  
And ever her desired to depart."  
(II. VI. 26.)

The second trial of Sir Guyon's temperance is in the House of Mammon, where he wins a victory over the sensual desire of covetousness. He resists the lure of "mountains of gold", represented as the one necessity to supply all the wants of man. (II. VII. 11.) Guyon shows his wisdom:

"Indeede (quoth he) through fowle intemperaunce,  
Frayle men are oft captiv'd to covetise!"  
(II. VII. 15.)

Urged by Mammon to eat of the golden fruit in the Garden of Proserpina, Guyon

"was warie wise in all his way,  
And well perceived his deceitfull sleight,  
Ne suffred lust his safetie to betray;  
So goodly did beguile the guyler of his  
pray." (II. VII. 64.)

The most important trial of the knight's temperance is in Acrasia's Bower of Bliss. Acrasia, in contrast to Una, has the voluptuous beauty that allures the senses with pleasure, but is destruction to the soul. (II. I. 52.) The only fear that Acrasia has, is

"Wisdomes powre, and temperance might,  
By which the mightiest things efforced bin."  
(II. XII. 43.)

On the way to the Bower of Bliss, the Palmer, the com-

panion of Sir Guyon, keen in reasoning power, advises him not to heed the cry of a woman in distress as it is a lure to deceive him.

"The knight was ruled, and the Boate-man strayed  
Held on his course, with stayed stedfastnesse."  
(II. XII. 28, 29.)

The melody of the mermaid is resisted by the reason of Guyon, who is carefully admonished by the Palmer.

"But him the Palmer from the vanity  
With temperate advice discourse,  
That they it past." (II. XII. 34.)

.....  
On which when gazing him the Palmer saw,  
He much rebuked those wandring eyes of his,  
And counsel'd well, him forward thence did  
draw." (II. XII. 69.)

Thus in resisting all these temptations, he becomes so strong that he can complete his purpose of capturing Acrasia and destroying her Bower of Bliss.  
(II. XII. 83, 84.)

#### (1) IN HANDLING SITUATIONS.

In this book, Spenser uses mythology primarily to develop characters and incidentally situations. One of the important situations is as follows.

To set forth the wiles of Mammon to lure Sir Guyon on to destruction, Spenser makes use of the beauty of the Garden of Proserpina. The origin of this is perhaps the grove of Proserpina, mentioned in the Odyssey (10.509)



golden apples of the Hesperides which he accomplished through a ruse in which he made use of Atlas. The second myth is the story of Atalanta who was won by the Euboean youth as he threw golden apples, which Atalanta stopped to pick up, consequently losing the race. The main points of the story of Acontius are: Acontius used a ruse to force Cydippe to marry him. He threw an apple with an inscription written upon it into the temple where Cydippe was sacrificing. The girl read aloud the inscription on it. "I swear ----- to marry Acontius." Diana registered the vow and the marriage followed. Everyone knows the cause of the Trojan War. At the wedding feast of Peleus and Thetis, Eris,<sup>1</sup> the goddess of Discord, threw an apple with the inscription "To the Fairest." This caused trouble among the goddesses and culminated in the war. To bring out the evil of the Garden of Proserpina Spenser places therein the River of Cocytus, a mythical river of the Underworld which in this case is filled with the victims of the sorceress.

<sup>1</sup> Spenser uses Ate instead of Eris.

(2) IN TREATMENT OF CHARACTER

In the creation of the character of Acrasia, Spenser does not trace her genealogy back to Circe, the enchantress of men's souls but the resemblance is so marked that there is no doubt as to the source. The Circean strain in her makeup lies in her power of deceiving the soul through sense illusions. This is accomplished through the enchanting environment of the "Bower of Bliss."

" . . . . . they behold around  
A large and spacious plaine, on every side  
Strowed with pleasauns, whose faire grasse  
ground  
Mantled with greene, and goodly beautifide  
With all the ornaments of Floraes pride,  
Wherewith her mother Art, as halfe in scorne,  
Of niggard Nature, like a pompous bride  
Did decke her, and too lavishly adorne  
When forth from virgin bowre she comes in  
th' early morne." (II. XII. 50.)

The victim is met by a porter, decked in flowers, who offers him wine to delude his senses. Exquisite flowers are everywhere, to which even the heavens suffer no harm to come either by heat or frost. The air is laden with the heavy perfume and fragrance of flowers to bewilder the senses of victims. Lovely purple grapes hang over the porch, enticing all to taste. Wine in a golden cup is offered to dull the senses of the unwary

and he finds

"There the most daintie paradise on ground  
 Itselfe doth offer to his sober eye,  
 In which all pleasures plenteously abownd,  
 And none doth others happiness envye;  
 The painted flowrs, the trees upshooting  
   hye,  
 The dales for shade, the hilles for breathing  
   space  
 And that, which all faire workes doth most  
   aggrace,  
 The art, which all that wrought, appeared in  
   no place." (II. XII. 58)

In the midst of this place is a fountain containing a silver flood in which merry boys are playing. Over the fountain is a covering of purest gold, upon which is ivy so cleverly carved, it seems to be growing. Music is also used to delude the gullible victim. It seems strangely sweet as if the notes of birds, human voices, instruments, winds, waters were all blended harmoniously together.

"The joyous birdes, shrouded in chearefull shade,  
 Their notes unto the voyce attempred sweet;  
 Th' angelicall soft trembling voyces made  
 To th' instruments divine responce meet;  
 The silver sounding instruments did meet  
 With the base murmure of the waters fall;  
 The waters fall with difference discreet,  
 Now soft, now loud, unto the wind did call;  
 The gentle warbling wind low answered to all."  
   (II. XII. 71.)

To further entangle the victim in the illusion, a voice chants a lovely lay:

"Gather therefore the rose, whiles yet is prime  
 For soon comes age, that will her pride deflowre;

Gather the rose of love, whiles yet is time  
Whilest loving thou mayst loved be with equal  
crime." (II. XII. 75.)

In contrast, to the deceptive loveliness of this enchanting place created to lure man to his destruction is the picture Spenser gives of the ultimate fate of the victims. The picture presents hideous howling, bellowing beasts into which Acrasia had transformed her gullible victims after she grew weary of them. Thus out of the myth of Circe, Spenser created a master picture to develop his theme of temperance, the power of controlling creature appetites.

To create adventure for Sir Guyon to give him an opportunity of mastering his angry passions as this is one of the moral purposes of the book, Spenser creates Cymochles and Pyrochles, two evil knights. As they represent evil, Spenser traces their genealogy to Night and Erebus, as in the case of Sansjoy, Sansloy, and Sansfoy. (II. IV. 41.)

#### IV

#### MYTHOLOGICAL TREATMENT

#### OF NATURE IN

#### THE FAERIE QUEENE

As Spenser treats nature after the manner of the

old mythologists in both books of his Faerie Queene, they will be considered jointly.

The classical mythmaker, who lived very close to nature's heart, believed that all natural objects were closely akin to human life and that they possessed a spirit similar to that of man. This belief is called Animism which is the opposite of the scientific conception called Naturalism, which recognizes nature only as a system of blind, soulless energies. The Greek saw in natural objects a human being real to his sense and imagination; but at the same time it possessed the life of the natural object.<sup>1</sup> Spenser with his Greek appreciation of the loveliness of nature saw the possibility of enhancing his nature descriptions by humanizing the various phenomena of nature by using the gods and goddesses who were the living representatives of the various phenomena of nature. So, instead of a prosaic description of various elements of nature, he puts spontaneity, vigor, and life into it by using the gods and goddesses who actually assume shape and being before us.

One sees the sun as a human being in such lines as:

. . . . . "that Phoebus fiery carre  
In hast was climbing up the eastern hill,

<sup>1</sup> John S. Harrison's The Vital Interpretation of English Literature p 297



Full envious that night so long his roome did  
fill." (I. II. 1.)

One finds here a human characteristic in "envy,"  
and also the fact that he was driving a "fiery carre"  
humanizes him. One senses furthermore the human vigor  
in the last line. In the lines

"At last the golden oriental gate  
Of greatest heaven gan to open faire  
And Phoebus fresh, as bridegrome to his mate,  
Came dauncing forth shaking his deawie haire."  
(I. V. 2.)

Spenser gives us the sun humanized as Phoebus in his  
comparison with a happy bridegroom "dauncing forth,  
shaking his deawie haire." How clearly we sense the  
brightness and sprightliness of a dewy morning!

In humanizing the noonday as the driver of a fiery  
carre Spenser makes us feel the intense heat of noon  
in these words

"For golden Phoebus now ymounted hie,  
From fiery wheelles of his faire chariot  
Hurled his beame so scorching and hot."  
(I. II. 29.)

Sunset in all its colorful glory is humanized as  
Phoebus who is symbolic of sunset takes on a ruddy  
color.

"As gentle shepheard in sweete even-tide,  
When ruddy Phoebus gins to welke in west,  
High on an hill, his flocke to vewen wide,"  
..... (I. I. 23.)

One senses the human weariness of night in

"And now faire Phoebus gan decline in hast  
His weary wagon to the western vale."  
(II. IX. 10.)

Aurora is humanized asin that she has rosy fingers, wears a purple robe, and sleeps on a saffron bed. In this way Spenser is able to give exquisite personality to morning.

"Now when the rosy-fingered morning faire  
Weary of aged Tithones saffron bed  
Had spread her purple robe through dewy air."  
(I. II. 7.)

Aurora is also pictured as a human being "faire with rosy cheeks, for shame blushing red."

"And faire Aurora from the dewy bed of Tithone  
gan herself to rear  
With rosy cheeks, for shame as blushing red."  
(I. XI. 51.)

The last two lines allude to the myth of Aurora and Tithonus. Aurora fell in love with Tithonus, son of Laomedon, king of Troy. She prevailed upon Jupiter to give Tithonus immortality but forgot to have eternal youth joined in the gift, hence as he grew old, she became tired of him.

Spenser frequently uses mythological characters to represent the moon.

Diana is frequently alluded to by Spenser as the moon goddess, whose birth in Mt. Cynthia explains her name--Cynthia.

"Cynthia still doth steepe in silver deaw  
his ever drouping hed."  
(I. I. 39.)

and

"Now had fayre Cynthia by even tournes  
Full measured three quarters of her yeare,  
And thrice three tymes had fild her crooked  
hornes."  
(II. I. 53.)

"And silver Cynthia wexed pale and faint  
As when her face is staynd with magicke  
arts constrained." (I. VII. 34.)

"Now hath faire Phoebe with her silver face  
Thrice seene the shadowes of the neather  
world." (II. II. 44.)

"As when faire Phoebe in dark some night . . .  
Breaks forth her silver beames and her  
bright bed discovers to the world  
disconfited." (II. I. 43.)

In these allusions one sees the silvery light of the moon, in all its cold beauty.

Spenser refers to Jove as god of the sky in picturing the stars as lamps in his house.

"That shyning lampes in Joves high house were  
light." (I. V. 19.)

Another allusion is to day as the lamp of Jove.

"O lightsome day, the lampe of highest Jove  
First made by him mens wandering wayes to guyde."  
(I. VII. 23.)

Spenser portrays storms as the rage of Jupiter (Jove).

"The day with clouds was suddeine overcast,

And angry Jove an hideous storme of raine  
 Did poure into his lemans lap so fast". . .  
 . . . . . (I. I. 6.)

Spenser frequently portrays him as thundering

"The wrath of thundering Jove, that rules both  
 day and night." (I. V. 42.)

"Ne swelling Neptune ne loud thundering Jove."  
 . . . . . (II. VI. 10.)

"That now I weene Joves dreaded thunder light."  
 (II. VI. 50.)

## V

### OTHER USES OF MYTHOLOGY

#### IN

#### THE FAERIE QUEENE

Spenser also uses mythology in comparisons especially in similes. He illustrates the magic power of Archimago to change his form by comparing him with Proteus,<sup>1</sup> the sea god who tends the flocks of seals belonging to Poseidon, the ruler of the seas, and who, if seized, can change his form.

"He then devisde himselfe how to disguise;  
 For by his mighty science he could take  
 As many formes and shapes in seeming wise,  
 As ever Proteus to himselfe could make;  
 Sometime a fowle, sometime a fish in lake,  
 Now like a foxe, now like a dragon fell," . . .  
 (I. II. 10.)

<sup>1</sup> Gayley's Classic Myths p 202





Spenser compared the liveliness and sprightliness of the young girls who rush forth to greet Una upon her return home with Diana and her nymphs.

"And, them before, the fry of children young  
Their wanton sportes and childish mirth did  
play,  
And to the maydens sounding tymbrels song,  
In well attuned notes, a joyous lay,  
And made delightfull musick all the way,  
Until they came, where that faire virgin  
stood;  
As faire Diana in fresh sommers day  
Behold her nymphs enraung'd in shady wood,  
Some wrestle, some do run, some bathe in  
christall flood:"  
..... (I. XII. 7.) .....

VI  
THE COMPLEX CHARACTER  
OF  
THE MATTER IN THE FAERIE QUEENE

A characteristic of a Romantic Epic is that it may include a variety of matter. Spenser has taken advantage of this in creating The Faerie Queene as he has blended together Chivalry, Platonism, Christianity and Mythology.

Chivalry with its gay courts, exciting tournaments, enchanted castles, horrible dragons, brave knights and fair ladies provides the necessary adventures for his

knights on their journeys.

Spenser also uses certain Platonic teachings in the development of his ideal of a gentleman. These teachings have to do with the appreciation of spiritual beauty as exemplified in the quest of the Red Crosse Knight for Holiness, a state of the soul in which the holy one sees the beauty of wisdom or truth, typified by Una. A second Platonic teaching concerns temperance, a necessary condition for the existence of any virtue in the soul as portrayed in the quest of Sir Guyon.

As a Christian, Spenser is intent upon proving the knight's victory comes only with divine aid.

"We let the man ascribe it to his skill,  
That through grace hath gained victory.  
If any strenght we have, it is to ill,  
But all the good is God's, both power and  
eke will." (I. X. 1.)

"Ay me, how many perils doe enfold  
The righteous man to make him daily fall,  
Were not that heavenly grace doth him uphold  
And stedfast truth acquite him out of all."  
(I. VIII. 1.)

Perhaps Spenser's use of mythology is not so vital as the other elements of his Romantic Epic, but it lends a distinct pagan coloring to the whole; so that were that element omitted, the epic would lose a charm that has fascinated poets and poetry lovers for generations. In



his use of mythology, Spenser has been instrumental in preserving the delightful fragrance of an old poetic tradition. It is through his understanding of mythology and that of such poets as Shakespeare, Keats, Shelley, and Milton that the gods and goddesses have not ceased to exist, but still live in the hearts of poetry loving people.

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