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

Laura E. Rupp

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THE USE OF CLASSICAL MYTHOLOGY

IN

EDMUND SPENGER'S FAERIE QUEENE

BOOK I AND II

BY

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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 re-
search work already mentioned in this paper.
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 worke, and also furthest from the danger of envie and suspicion of present time."¹

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,

¹ 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;¹ 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
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...
thus making her immune to evil, so affects the woodland folk that they become a protective force for her. Their pity at her sad plight and amazement at her bright beauty is evident as

"All stand amazed at so uncouth sight
And gin to pittie her unhappy state;
All stand astonied at her beautie bright,
In their rude eyes unworthie of so woful plight." (I. VI. 9.)

Their usual hostility to mankind is laid aside as they desire to comfort and to reassure her. They do homage to her humbly.

"The salvage nation feele her secret smart
And read her sorrow in her count'nce sad;
Their frowning forheads, with rought hornes yclad,
And rustick horror, all asyde doe lay;
And, gently grenning, shew a semblance glad
To comfort her; and, feare to put away,
Their backward bent knees teach her humbly to obey." (I. VI. 11.)

"They, in compassion of her tender youth
And wonder of her beauty soverayne,
Are wonne with pitty and unwonted ruth;
And, all prostrate upon the lowly playne,
Doe kisse her feste and faune on her with count'nance fayne." (I. VI. 12.)

They feel spiritual, not sensual joy at finding her and do reverence to her.

"They, all as glad as birds of joyous Prime,
Thence lead her forth, about her dancing round,
Shouting and singing all a shephard's ryme;
And with greene branches strewing all the ground,
Do worship her, as Queene,with olive girlond ground." (I. VI. 13.)
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 shafts 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 woody 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 viewed have her heavenly grace, they envy her in their malicious mind, and fly away for fear of foule disgrace; but all the Satyres scorne their woody 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 Satyrene. 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
with "Phoebus cheareful face" to bring out her somberness. (I. IV. 20.) Spenser gives her mythological origin in these lines.

"O thou most auncient grandmother of all,
More old than Jove, whom thou at first
didst breede,
Or that great house of gods cælestiall;
Which was begot in Daemogorgons hall."

(I. V. 22.)

Entering Hell, Duessa and Night first encounter the dreadful Furies, horrible with their snake entangled hair. These Furies were created from the blood of Uranus, one of the ancient gods who was slain by his son Cronus, the father of Jupiter. Then the House of Pluto, who is the Lord of the Underworld, is reached "with its trembling ghosts, chattering their yron teeth and staring with stonie eyes." The rivers of Lamentation and the fiery flood of Phlegeton, both rivers of the classical Underworld, are passed. Night, who is a power in Hell, leads Duessa past the watch dog, Cerberus with his three deformed heads.

"Before the threshold dreadfull Cerberus
His three deformed heads did lay along,
Curled with thousand adders venomous,
And lilled forth his bloody flaming tong;
At them he gan to reare his bristles strong
And fellie gnarre, untill dayes enemy
Did him appease; then down his taile he hong
And suffered them to passen quietly;
For she in hell and heaven had power equally." (I. V. 31, 32, 33, 34.)
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 Agamennon 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.¹

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

¹ 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.¹

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,

¹ 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. In *The Faerie Queen* 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" 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-
acters to color his own conception of evil personages. Lucifera, for instance, is the Queen of the House of Pride, to which Duessa lures the Red Crosse Knight, to corrupt him. Spenser traces her genealogy back to the Underworld gods. He makes Lucifera the daughter of Pluto, Ruler of the Underworld and the wife of Pluto. However, Lucifera with her great pride claims Jupiter as her sire. (I. IV. 11.)

As she is evil, Spenser clothes her in great splendor as evil must be hidden in order to be effective. Her beauty is voluptuous, not spiritual as Una's. Spenser compares her "blazing" beauty with that of Phaeton, the son of Apollo.

"Exceeding shone, like Phoebus fairest childe, That did presume his fathers firie wayne And flaming mouths of steedes unwonted wilde, Through highest heaven with weaker hand to rayne; Proud of such glory and advancement vaine, While flashing beames do daze his feeble eyen, He leaves the welkin way most beaten plaine, And rapt with whirling wheeles, inflames the skyen

With fire not made to burne, but fairly for to shyne." (I. IV. 9.)

He compares her with Aurora, the goddess of dawn and therefore brilliant in appearance.

". . . . . . and she, with princely pace, As fair Aurora in her purple pall Out of the east the dawning day doth call; So forth she comes; her brightnesse brode doth blaze;"
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 braspaved way,
Drawne of faire pecocks, that excell in pride
And full of Argus eyes their tailes 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.¹

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

¹ Gayley's Classic Myths p 35
²Faerie 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 re­
sponsibility 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. Phaedrie represents frivolous mirth and wantonness. In his contact with her, Sir Guyon maintains a courteous behavior until her gaieties become questionable. He

... ... "was wise, and warie of her will,
And yet held his hand upon his hart;
Yet would not seem so rude, and thowed ill,
As to despise so courteous seeming part
That gentle ladie did to him impart;
And ever her desired to depart."

The second trial of Sir Guyon's temperance is in the
House of Mammon, where he wins a victory over the sen­
sual 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!"

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

"was warie wise in all his way,
And well perceived his deceitfull sleight,
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."

On the way to the Bower of Bliss, the Pelmer, 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 Boateaman strayt 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 discounselfed, That they it past."
(II. XII. 34.)

On which when gazung him the Palmer saw,
He much rebukt those wandring eyes of his,
And counself'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)
as being on the outer borders of the earth at the entrance to the Underworld. Spenser has enriched this by making it a place of beauty and as he wishes to make it a place of wickedness too, he identifies it as the garden of Proserpina, who is Mistress of Demons and goddess of sorcery. He describes it thus.

"The garden of Proserpina this hight;
And in the midst thereof a silver seat
With a thicke arbor goodly overdight,
Their fruit were golden apples glistrning bright
What goodly was their glory to behold,
On earth like never grew, ne living wight
Like ever saw, but they from hence were sold;
For those, which Hercules with conquest bold
And planted there, did bring forth fruit of gold;
And those, with which the Euboean young man wan
Swift Atalanta, when through craft he her outran.
Here also sprong that goodly golden fruit,
With which Acontius got his lover trew
Whom he had long time sought with fruitless suit;
Here eke that famous golden apple grew
The which amongst the gods false Ate threw
That many noble Greekes and Trojans made to bleed."

(II. VII. 53-55.)

In this Spenser has woven several mythological stories to enrich his main romance. The following is a short sketch of the myths. The eleventh labor of Hercules enjoined upon the hero, was the robbery of the
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 Cydipple to marry him. He threw an apple with an inscription written upon it into the temple where Cydipple 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, 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.

1 Spenser uses Ate instead of Eris.
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 pleasures, whose faire grasse
ground
Mantled with greene, and goodly beautified
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 adorn
When forth from virgin bowre she comes in
th' early morn." (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 upshotting
bye,
The dales for shade, the hilles for breathing
space
And that, which all faire worke 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 respondence 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. 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,

1 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 carrell" 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 dewie haire." (I. V. 2.)

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

In humanizing the noonda.y 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 fiy wheeles 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."

(I. IX. 10.)

Aurora is humanized as in 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 dew
his ever drooping head."
(I. 1. 39.)

and

"Now had faire Cynthia by even tourneys
Full measured three quarters of her yeare,
And thrice three tymes had fill her crooked
horns." (II. I. 53.)

"And silver Cynthia waxed 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 beams 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 pic­
turing 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 es-
pecially in similes. He illustrates the magic power
of Archimago to change his form by comparing him with

Proteus, the sea god who tends the flocks of seals be-
longing to Poseidon, the ruler of the seas, and who,
if seized, can change his form.

"He then devise 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." . .

(II. 10.)

1 Gayley's Classic Myths p 202
The precious stone in Arthur's shield is compared to Hesperus, thus portraying its brilliancy.

"And, in the midst thereof, one pretious stone Of wondrous worth, and eke of wondrous mights, Shapt like a ladies head, exceeding shone, Like Hesperus amongst the lesser lights." (I. VII. 30.)

Hesperus is the brilliant evening star, sometimes identified with Phosphor, sometimes, as the father of the Hesperides, who guarded the golden apples.

To show the strength of Orgoglio, the giant with whom Prince Arthur fought, Spenser compares him with Jove in a wrathful mood.

"As when almightie Jove, in wrathful mood, To wreake the guilt of mortal sin is bent, Hurles forth his thundering dart with deadly food, Enroled in flames, and smouldering dreeriment; Through riven cloudes and molden firmament;"... (I. VIII. 9.)

Spenser shows Cupid, the god of Love, as a proud avenging boy in making Prince Arthur, who scorned love, fall in love with the Faerie Queene.

"Ensample make of him your hapless joy, And of myself now mated, as ye see; Whose prouder vaunt that proud avenging boy Did soone pluck downe, and curbd my libertie." (I. IX. 12.)

In portraying the speed of Sir Terwin's horse,

1 Gayley's Classic Myths p 40
2 Gayley's Classic Myths p 35
Spenser compares him with Mercury who had wings on his ankles.

"Als flew his steed, as he his bonds had brast, And with his winged heels did tread the wind, As he had beene a foole of Pegasus his kind." (I. IX. 21.)

The severity of the Red Crosse Knight's conflict with the dragon is compared with the twelve labors of Hercules.

"Not that great champion of the antique world, Whom famous poets verse so much doth vaunt, And hath for twelve huge labours high extold, So many furies and sharpe fits did haunt, When him the poysond garment did enchaunt, With Centaures blood and bloody verses charm'd As did this knight twelve thousand dolours daunt, Whom fyrie steele now burnt, that erst him arm'd; That erst him goodly arm'd, now most of all him harm'd." (I. XI. 27.)

The Red Crosse Knight's difficulty in releasing his weapon from the grasp of the dragon is compared with plucking a bone from the greedy jaw of Cerberus, the ferocious three-headed dog at the entrance of the Underworld.

"Much was the man encombred with his hold, In fear to lose his weapon in his paw, He wist yet, how his talents to unfold; For harder was from Cerberus greedy jaw, To plucke a bone, then from his cruell claw To reave by strenght the griped gage away." (I. XI. 41.)

1 Gayley's Classic Myths p 34 and p 211
2 Gayley's Classic Myths p 216
3 Gayley's Classic Myths p 47
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 tymbreles 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.

"Ne 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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