

‘O pierlesse Poesye, where is then thy place?’: Locating Patronage in Spenser

Richard McCabe, Merton College Oxford

If ‘location, location, location’ is the single most important consideration in real estate, the same may be said of patronage as Spenser conceived it from the *October* eclogue of *The Shepheardes Calender*’s to the *Legend of Courtesie*.¹ For this he had good Classical precedent. By celebrating the Sabine farm he received from Maecenas, Horace ensured the centrality of place to the patronal ‘imaginary’, and Spenser’s discussions of the ‘place’ of poetry commonly involve, at the very least, four of the main connotations identified in the OED:

A dwelling, a house; a person's home. II.9a

A proper, appropriate, or natural position or spot (for a person or thing). III.12a

A position or station occupied by custom, entitlement, or right. III.13a

Position or standing in an order of estimation or merit. IV.15a²

In *October* Piers accordingly identifies the ‘Princes palace’ as the place ‘most fit’ for ‘pierlesse Poesye’, with all the complex social connotations ‘pierlesse’ entails (II. 79-80).³ Palatial structures loom in the background to the accompanying woodcut, while in the rustic foreground the shepherds discuss poetry’s exclusion from its ‘proper, appropriate, or natural position or spot’.

The depiction is very much of its age. The discovery of true perspective not only altered the course of European painting but affected the Early Modern concept of space; Spenser never fails to depict his poet in a meticulously graduated landscape, precisely foregrounded or distanced by his environment, significantly located or dislocated.⁴ In this

case the displacement is acutely operative since E.K. announces the *Calender's* aim as advancing 'the patronage of the new Poete', and identifies pastoral, generally recognised, despite its rural setting, as a 'courtly' genre, as the form in which young poets make room for themselves in literary tradition and contemporary society: 'So flew Theocritus...So flew Virgile...So flew Mantuane...So Petrarque. So Boccace...whose foting this Author euery where followeth'.⁵ *The Shepheardes Calender* is thus deeply engaged in what Henri Lefebvre has productively termed the 'production of space' – and not just the 'mental' or representational space of a specific genre, but professional and even commercial space, locating the poet in society by successfully locating 'Colin' in pastoral.⁶ In the Spenser-Harvey *Letters* of 1580 Harvey ventured the opinion that 'Master *Collin Cloute*...may happely live by *dying Pellicanes*, and purchase great landes, and Lordshippes, with the money, which his *Calendar* and *Dreames* have, and will affourde him'.⁷ According to this view, poetry might elevate the landless shepherd's boy – 'no better doe him call' – to the ranks of the landed gentry and make the anonymous poet's name. Were it to do so through 'money' rather than patronage, however, it might compound the displacement that Piers and Cuddie lament. Not the least advantage of patronage, or even the appearance of patronage, lay in helping to disguise a market as a gift economy, flattering purchasers into regarding themselves as co-patrons.⁸

The role of the patron is emphasised in *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe* (1595) where Spenser ventriloquizes Cuddie's sense of displacement through the 'Shepherd of the Ocean', alias Sir Walter Raleigh, the poem's courtly dedicatee:

He gan to cast great lyking to my lore,
 And great dislyking to my lucklesse lot:
 That banisht had my selfe, like wight forlore,

Into that waste, where I was quite forgot. (ll. 180-3)

Or, put more succinctly, ‘what’s a nice poet like you doing in a place like this?’ But Spenser’s strategy is worth pausing over. Poetic complaints of the sort uttered by Cuddie are commonplace in the literary tradition: in Mantuan’s fifth eclogue, identified by E. K. as a source for *October*, his counterpart engages in acrimonious dialogue with an unwilling patron. In *Colin Clouts*, by contrast, the patron complains on the poet’s behalf.⁹ In what constitutes a brilliant piece of proleptic irony, the pastoral poet, though highly respected in his own community, is presented from the courtly patron’s perspective, and landscaped into a ‘waste’ as a figure ‘banisht’, ‘forlore’ and ‘forgot’. Since the occasion of the two poets’ meeting is the Shepherd’s own banishment from Cynthia’s court, he can be seen to project his own image unto Colin: ‘his song was all a lamentable lay, / Of great unkindnesse, and of usage hard, / Of *Cynthia* the Ladie of the sea, / Which from her presence faultlesse him debard’ (ll. 164-7). Complaints unspoken by Spenser’s poetic persona are thus cleverly ventriloquized through the persona of his discontented dedicatee. And the courtier’s advice is as uncompromising as its effect is instantaneous:

The which to leave, thenceforth he counseld mee,
 Unmeet for man, in whom was ought regardfull
 And wend with him, his *Cynthia* to see:
 Whose grace was great, and bounty most rewardfull...
 So what with hope of good, and hate of ill,
 He me persuaded forth with him to fare: (ll. 184-93)

The irony is considerable in view of the outcome. Lured by the rhetoric of patronage, the irresistible sound of ‘grace’, ‘bounty’ and ‘reward’, Colin is ‘persuaded’ from home by someone whose place at court is insecure. His response is disingenuously presented by his

knowing creator in all its ingenuous naivety, and the shock of dislocation from 'waste' to court is wryly made to recall Ovid's journey from civility into exile:

Nought tooke I with me, but mine oaten quill:
 Small needments else need shepherd to prepare.
 So to the sea we came; the sea? that is
 A world of waters heaped up on hie,
 Rolling like mountaines in wide wilderness,
 Horrible, hideous, roaring with hoarse crie. (ll. 194-99).

'The sea?': it is impossible to know precisely how often Spenser made the journey he here describes. What is unfamiliar to Colin was familiar to him, but the passage serves a number of strategic functions. The din of the sea, 'horrible, hideous, roaring with hoarse crie', drowns all promises of courtly bounty, and over this 'wide wilderness' the incongruously named 'Shepherd of the Ocean' has no control. Lamenting his loss of favour in *The Oceans Love to Scynthia*, Raleigh had himself commented that 'Our Ocean seas are but tempestuous waves, / And all things base that blessed were of late'.¹⁰ An implicit relationship is hereby established between the perils of sea-faring and courtly politics. All a 'shepherd' needs, according to Colin, is his oaten quill, but a successful courtier needs a great deal more. The moment of realisation, and the line upon which the whole poem turns, is Colin's recognition that he was entertained by Cynthia 'Not for my skill, but for that shepherds sake' (l. 455). He might have said 'not for my quill'. Position at court, he learns, has nothing to do with talent, and everything with patronage, and his patron's hold on Cynthia's favour is demonstrably uncertain. The ability to fabricate imaginary courts provides no entrée to the real one – even the Shepherd of the Ocean had been 'de-bard' – and it is precisely this dissonance between fiction and reality that the poem addresses.

Four editions of *The Shepheardes Calender* had appeared by 1595, but Spenser's re-characterization of Colin was designed to disconcert his former readers. Although invited to remember the *Calender's* Colin at the outset – 'the shepherds boy (best known by that name)' – they soon discover that he is no longer a denizen of Eliza's England nor, presumably, composer of the famous April 'laye'. Indeed the Colin of 1595 appears to be suffering from cultural amnesia. Moreover, as Spenser's first crossing of the 'the sea' was in the opposite direction to that described in *Colin Clouts*, E. K.'s assertion that Colin is the persona 'under which name this Poete secretly shadoweth himself' becomes much harder to interpret. We are dealing, in other words, not just with topographic but cognitive distancing. Although Spenser had become a royal pensioner in 1591, 'Colin' approaches the court of Cynthia as an alien. The Colin of 1595 is a denizen of the wilderness who regards the Shepherd of the Ocean as 'straunge' (l. 60) or 'forreine' (l. 162).

The device of presenting the familiar through the eyes of the unfamiliar was a staple of satire, and Spenser had already used it to advantage to excoriate ecclesiastical patronage in the *September* eclogue. 'Herein', E. K. explains, 'Diggon Davie is devised to be a shepherd, that in hope of more gayne, drove his sheepe into a farre countrye. The abuses whereof...he discourseth at large'. In fact, Colin's experience at Cynthia's court is adumbrated in Diggon's disillusionment with Eliza's Church. Poetic and spiritual pastor share a common fate: 'In forrein costes, men sayd, was plentye: / And so there is, but all of miserye...The shepherds there robben one another, / And layen baytes to beguile her brother' (ll. 28-9, 38-9). An element of distancing had always been implicit in the Colin persona: even in 'April' he is described as 'too alienate and with drawen' to sing the encomium formerly composed in Eliza's honour, but this 'alienation' is now literalised. By projecting the disillusionment of an English-born poet unto an Irish-born persona, Spenser

ensures that 'Colin' can never 'come home' but henceforth exist in the state of 'transcendental homelessness' identified by Lukács as characterising 'alienation'.¹¹ The stage is thus set for the dramatic question that prompts Colin's caustic appraisal of the court:

Why didst thou ever leave that happy place,
In which such wealth might unto thee accrew?
And back returnest to this barrein soyle,
Where cold and care and penury do dwell:
Here to keepe sheepe, with hunger and with toyle. (ll. 654-8)

Colin's disillusionment at Cynthia's court merely dramatizes, some sixteen years on, the dilemma identified by Piers in the *October* eclogue of *The Shepheardes Calender*: the question posed there – 'O pierlesse Poesye, where is then thy place?' – marks the beginning of Spenser's life-long concern with what I have elsewhere termed 'the ecology of patronage', with locating the poetic career, literally as much as metaphorically, in the society of Elizabethan England and English literary tradition.¹² Piers identifies the court as the location 'most fitt' for poetry, but Colin finds that 'it is no sort of life, / For shepherd fit to lead in that same place' (ll. 688-9), because the linguistic skills most in demand are those of flattery and slander.

Spenser's pastoral space is distinguished from that of his predecessors by its native topography and diction – 'mynding to furnish our tongue with this kinde, wherein it faulteth' – and its unprecedented calibration to the passage of time, orthographically signalled in the eclogues' titles and visually depicted in the accompanying woodcuts.¹³ The latter innovation was entirely suited to the work's patronal concerns. As Cuddie presents the problem, he is doubly displaced in space and time: even had he access to 'Princes

pallace', '*Mecænas* is yclad in claye, / And great *Augustus* long ygoe is dead' (ll. 61-2). After the legendary age of Classical patronage, he claims (using a telling ecological image), 'Thog the streames of flowing wittes to cease, / And sonnebright honour pend in shamefull coupe'. The cultural climate has deteriorated and such 'buddes of Poesie' as now manage to 'shoote' are doomed to 'wither' (ll. 71-7). Cuddie is not, therefore, 'the perfecte paterne of a Poete' in any absolute sense, but the perfect pattern of a neglected poet 'which finding no maintenaunce of his state and studies, complayneth of the contempte of Poetrie, and the causes thereof'. The perfect pattern of a poet is Colin, whose neglect is displaced unto Cuddie, although 'some doubt, that the persons be different'.¹⁴ The effect of simultaneously displacing and replacing Colin in this manner is to suggest that Cuddie is the perfect pattern of what Colin will become if his professional 'state' is not upheld, and 'December' shows him well on the way to that fate. Yet hovering somewhere behind Colin and Cuddie is 'Immeritô', a figure who claims to transcend Colin's entrapment in space and time by making 'a Calender for every yeare, / That steele in strength, and time in durance shall outweare'. His motto is 'merce non mercede', for reward not hire, finely negotiating the inherent conflicts between artistic integrity, patronage, and the marketplace. Yet, despite such apparent optimism, the very choice of pseudonym remains unsettling and, by calling attention to the echoes of Horace *and* Ovid within it, E. K. re-inscribes the anxiety it seems to allay. 'Great Augustus' sponsored the one and exiled the other.¹⁵

'Immeritô's contributions to the Spenser-Harvey *Letters* are designed to suggest that he at least had found his 'place', that his *Calender* had won him entry to an exclusive coterie, the so-called 'Areopagus', comprising Sidney, Dyer and Drant. The first two, he assures Harvey, 'have me, I thanke them, in some use of familiarity'. Unlike Colin, Immeritô seemed to have come in from the December cold. Piers had urged Cuddie to secure

patronage by singing of Eliza or ‘the worthy whome she loveth best’ (l. 47), and Immeritô now writes from Leicester House, dating the letter very precisely to October 1579.¹⁶ There is, of course, no corroborating evidence for the existence of the ‘Areopagus’ as Immeritô describes it. The possibility therefore arises that the coterie depicted in the *Letters* is as fictive as the wilderness portrayed in *October*, that Spenser is now engaged in the production of the urban space tantalizingly glimpsed in the background of the *October* woodcut. The one is a fantasy of displacement, the other a fantasy of location, and both are projected unto the same moment in time: October 1579.

Immeritô’s second letter is dated ‘June 1580’ and just two months later Spenser arrived in Ireland as secretary to Lord Grey. Given what we know of the way in which patronage operated in this period, the appointment is more likely to represent favour gained than denied. Ireland was part of the Sidney family business and Grey consulted Sir Henry, who had served three times as Lord Deputy, before setting out.¹⁷ Initially the appointment may have seemed very attractive. It located Spenser within a major centre of power in the service of a man known to have strong literary sympathies. But, as ‘Colin’ would realise in 1595, the position of a client depended entirely on the success of the patron. If Ireland seemed like a place of opportunity in August 1580, it may have looked very different on Grey’s recall in August 1582, and from this point onwards, dislocation is the hallmark of Spenser’s authorial persona.¹⁸ From an authorial viewpoint, residence in Ireland brought severe limitations. Unlike the canons of most major contemporary poets, Spenser’s contains no royal, aristocratic or civic commissions – with the possible exception of *Prothalamion* (1596), a poem that nostalgically relocates its speaker to the banks of the Thames. It is not just the swan brides who seek ‘spousal’ at Essex House but also the swan bard. On arrival there he recognises it as the very the mansion from which Immeritô wrote

his youthful letters to Harvey in 1580, 'a stately place, / Where oft I gayned giftes and goodly grace / Of that great Lord, which therein wont to dwell' (ll. 137-9). That is not the impression one might have formed from the dedicatory sonnet to *Virgils Gnat*, but nostalgia is a powerful engine of desire.

When it finally appeared in 1590 *The Faerie Queene* advertised itself as written 'in savadge soyle, far from Parnasso mount', but where exactly was this 'Parnassus'?¹⁹ When they appeared in 1591 the *Complaints* (1591) were presented as 'gathered together' in the author's absence by the publisher, William Ponsonby, from manuscripts 'diverslie imbeziled and purloyned from him, since his departure over Sea'.²⁰ According to this account, it is neither in court nor coterie that Spenser finds his place but in the printing house and, so far as print was concerned, London was 'Parnasso Mount'. Although Spenser lived in Ireland more or less continuously from 1580 to 1599, he published not a single work in Dublin – and the same is true for all the writers engaged with him in the Irish service, including Thomas Churchyard, Barnaby Googe, Barnaby Rich, Geoffrey Fenton, and John Derricke. The point is made quite expressly in relation to the *Amoretti and Epithalamium* (1595) where Ponsonby (again deputising for a conspicuously absent author) tells the dedicatee, Sir Robert Needham, how the manuscript 'crossed the Seas' in his company without its writer. The commendatory sonnet by Geoffrey Witney Sr. enforces the point by asserting that 'while this Muse in forraine landes doth stay, / invention weepes, and pens are cast aside', ironically anticipating the pens that would be cast into the poet's London grave in 1599.²¹ The highly Ovidian character of these paratexts – recalling the opening of the *Tristia* – is confirmed by the *Epithalamion's* celebration of the speaker's marriage in a wild, ominous Irish terrain. Maecenas had famously gifted Horace his Sabine fame, securing his place in

Roman society and providing the perfect environment in which to write, but an abode in Munster, or Tomis, was a very different matter.

Yet both offered amazing opportunities for verse. In *Getting Back into Place* (1993) Edward S. Casey identifies the 'wilderness' as the simultaneous site of location and dislocation, with multiple, complex uses.²² From Genesis's account of the expulsion from Eden onwards, representations of life in the wilderness have afforded a means of exploring and expressing various forms of political, ideological or psychological discontent. Although described to Lord Ormond as 'wilde fruit, which salvage soyl hath bred', *The Faerie Queene* is actually a highly wrought artistic construct, a 'designer wilderness' that performs a displacement of displacement.²³ By constructing that wilderness, and suggesting Gloriana's sublime transcendence of it, Spenser won his royal pension in 1591, placing him, or so it must have seemed, closer than ever to the centre of power and patronage. The problem was that the centre of patronage was also the centre of censorship – twin concepts inextricably inherent in that of power, as 'Bonfont' discovers to his cost in book five (ix.26) – and on the calling-in of *Complaints* later that same year it was assumed, contrary to what Ponsonby had asserted, that Spenser left England in the wake of the work's publication rather than prior to it. 'Yt is nott yett a yeare sence he writt his booke in the prayse of the Quene', observed Sir Thomas Tresham,

which was so well liked, that her maiestie gave him ane hundred marks pencion forthe of the Exchequer: and so clerklie was yt penned, that he beareth the name of a Poett Laurall. Butt nowe in medlinge with his apes taylor he is gott into Ireland; also in hazard to loose his forsayd annuall reward: and fynallie hereby proove himselfe a Poett Lorrell.²⁴

This would mean that Spenser really had 'banisht' himself to Ireland as the Shepherd of the Ocean suggests, and *Colin Clouts* seems designed to capitalize on that popular misconception, the advantage being that self-banishment could be presented as willed rather than enforced, as a moral preference for the wilderness over the court. Locational irony is therefore the hallmark of *Colin Clout's* poetic structure: by freely choosing to return 'home' to a land where shepherds are endangered by 'griesly famine', 'raging sword', 'ravenous wolves' and 'outlawes fell', he delivers the sort of social critique one might have expected from Skelton's Colin Clout. In fact, the poem performs the same sort of disconcerting manoeuvre that Spenser would have encountered in Du Bellay's *Regrets* where, after 129 sonnets of 'exile' in Italy (including sonnet 30, one of the famous pieces of nostalgia in French literature), the speaker returns 'home' in 130 only to find it more deserving of lament than celebration. Yet, as the concluding sequence of sonnets to Princess Margaret demonstrates, it is only in this imperfect society that the poet had any chance of securing his 'place'.²⁵

While the fortunes of 'Colin' are dramatized to considerable effect in all of this, Spenser was equally anxious not to be displaced by his persona. Anonymity was not allowed to last long: in quoting the first twenty-one lines of the 'Iambicum Trimetrum' from the Spenser-Harvey *Letters* in *The Arcadian Rhetorike* (1588), Abraham Fraunce attributes them to 'Immeritò: Spencer'. Some pages further on, and two years before the work appeared in print, he accurately quotes a whole stanza from 'Spencer in his Fairie Queene. 2.booke.cant.4'. As Fraunce must have been working from a manuscript, these twin acts of disclosure and promotion are likely to have been at Spenser's behest.²⁶ The paratexts to *The Faerie Queene* further the work of reclaiming the *Calender* from anonymity, just as the *Complaints* incorporate into the Spenser canon works that previously appeared without

attribution in 1569. Spenser was building a personal oeuvre while using it to legitimise a claim to social recognition: 'He that writt this discourse', says Tresham, 'is...of the blood of the Spencers'. But how did he know that except through Spenser's own relentless insistence on the claim in the dedications to *The Teares of the Muses*, *Mother Hubberds Tale*, and *Muiopotmos*? These provide a classic instance of the power of paratexts to alter a reader's perception of a poet's place in society. There had been no previous allusion in the *Calender*, the *Letters*, or *The Faerie Queene* to any association between the lowly 'shepherd' and the great Spencer family 'of which', 'Colin' claims in *Colin Clouts*, 'I meanest boast my selfe to be' (l. 538). Wherever he lived Spenser could now claim, as he does in *Prothalamion* (1596), that 'from another place I take my name, / An house of auncient fame' (ll. 130-1) – thereby using dislocation to supply position, identity and lineage simultaneously and indissolubly. At least one contemporary reader responded as Spenser wished. 'You have a learned writer of your name', Sir John Harington told Sir John Spencer of Althorp, 'make much of him, for it is not the least honour of your honourable family'.²⁷ But, as this very injunction suggests, Spenser was not living at Althorp with his grand relatives but in Ireland, and the pastoral community into which 'Colin' is received back is as evident a fiction as that of the 'Areopagus': perhaps even more so in that it contains the *Calender*'s Hobbinol – expressly identified as Gabriel Harvey by E. K. and adopted as a pseudonym by Harvey in his commendatory poem to *The Faerie Queene* – who never visited Ireland in his life, let alone lived there.²⁸ In fact, although the matter has generally escaped attention, the inclusion of Hobbinol in Colin's Irish entourage constitutes a bitter reminiscence of the *June* eclogue where Hobbinol, sounding very much like the Shepherd of the Ocean, advises Colin, again in 'ecological' terms, to relocate for the good of his career:

Then if by me thou list advised be,

Forsake the soyle, that so doth thee bewitch:
 Leave me those hilles, where harborough nis to see,
 Nor holybush, nor brere, nor winding witche:
 And to the dales resort, where shepheards ritch,
 And fruiectfull flocks bene every where to see. (ll. 17-24)

‘This is no poetical fiction’, E. K. comments, ‘but unfeynedly spoken of the Poete selfe, who for speciall occasion of Private affayres (as I have bene partly of himselfe informed) and for his more preferment removing out of the Northparts came into the South, as Hobbinoll indeede advised him privately’.²⁹ Since a subsequent note identifies ‘the South’ as Kent, the reference is most likely to Spenser’s employment as secretary to John Young, the Bishop of Rochester. The gloss plays tantalizingly with biographical allusion, but on a deeper thematic level establishes Colin, and through him Spenser, as a poet in search of ‘preferment’ among the ‘ritch’ and, like most unsettled persons, both responsive and vulnerable to suggestion.³⁰ Contemporary readers might well be reminded of the legendary wanderings and disappointments of Torquato Tasso.

The basis of patronage, ideally considered, was courteous reciprocity and it is this ideal that the highly unusual structure of *The Faerie Queene* reflects. One way or other, we are given to understand, all quests begin and end in the fairy court. So far as that reflected life, the 1590 paratexts were essential in establishing the parameters within which the system might operate. Although the deferral of the seventeen dedicatory sonnets to the conclusion has often been regarded as a matter of accidental dislocation in the print shop, its effect is to inscribe the poem within the circle of reciprocity characteristic of patronage.³¹ As it stands, the work opens with a monumental dedication to Elizabeth ‘by the grace of God Queene of England, Fraunce, and Ireland’ and concludes with the courtly patrons

through whom that grace may be channelled to the poet. Though supposedly written in 'salvage soyl' the whole work is encompassed by courtly dedication, like the painting of a wild landscape mounted in an elaborate golden frame. In the first of the dedicatory sonnets Sir Christopher Hatton is asked to make 'space' for it at court, if only for the sake of its principal dedicatee: 'And to these ydle rymes lend litle space, / Which for their titles sake may find more grace'.³² Indeed the sheer range of social reference in the full sequence of seventeen sonnets suggests a claim not just on particular but general patronage. The Muses are 'the Nourses of nobility' and all who claim it are 'tyde / T'embrace the service of sweete Poetry' and 'patronize the authour of their praise' ('To Northumberland').³³ In this sense the poet becomes the patron's 'author', writing him or her into fame. This was how patronage was supposed to operate:

Then pardon me, most dreaded Soveraine,
 That from your selfe I doe this virtue [courtesy] bring,
 And to your selfe doe it returne againe:
 So from the Ocean all the rivers spring,
 And tribute backe repay as to theire King.
 Right so from you all goodly vertues well
 Into the rest, which round about you ring,
 Faire Lords and Ladies, which about you dwell,
 And doe adorne your Court, where courtesies excel. (VI Proem 7)

But if this is indeed the ideal, it finds ultimate expression at the point of maximum divergence from the established template, with devastating consequences for both narrator and narrative. One of the most innovative features of the poem, considered from a generic viewpoint, is the carving out of distinct formal spaces in the 'proems' for the narrator's self-

presentation, effectively affording repeated occasions for rededication, recapitulation, and revision. There is no precedent for this in any of the authors identified in the 'Letter to Raleigh' as Spenser's principal sources: Homer, Virgil, Ariosto and Tasso. The opening lines of the first proem are particularly unsettling in this regard:

Lo I the man, whose Muse whylome did maske,
 As time her taught, in lowly Shephards weeds,
 Am now enforst a farre unfitter taske,
 For trumpets sterne to chaunge mine Oaten reeds:
 And sing of Knights and Ladies gentle deeds. (I Proem 1)

As in the *Calender* the poet is presented as a figure in a fictive landscape, but now a camouflaged figure, masquerading to different backdrops at different times, and potentially 'unfit' for heroic song – as Colin found the court to be 'unfit' for pastoral. The reminiscences of both Virgil and Ariosto in the stanza, two poets that contemporary critics were more likely to contrast than compare in generic terms, merely adds to the sense of authorial uncertainty.³⁴ Whereas the *Iliad*, *Aeneid*, *Orlando Furioso*, and *Gerusalemme Liberata* all negotiate clear topographies at specific time periods, Spenser's poem opens on 'the plaine', an unspecified place with no clear political or natural boundaries, and in an entirely fictive temporal dimension (since the 'historical' George and Arthur were held to have lived centuries apart).³⁵ Yet if anyone should 'inquire' about the location of fairyland, 'By certain signes here sett in sundrie place / He may it fynd' (II Proem 4). The reader, that is to say, will 'find' their bearings on 'the plaine' by applying an allegorical hermeneutic, just as the royal reader will find 'thine owne realmes in lond of Faery, / And in this antique ymage thy great auncestry' (II Proem 4). The way to find one's bearing in fairyland is to map its contours unto the here and now – always supposing one could find the right projection.

When it appeared in 1596, however, the second instalment of *The Faerie Queene* offered a number of generic and thematic surprises. All that remain of the elaborate concluding paratexts are three of the commendatory sonnets – those by Raleigh and ‘Hobbinol’ – again positioned at the end of book three but now appearing at the very centre of a new six-book structure and serving as ironic prologues to the embittered proems of the following three books. The figure who inhabits these spaces differs as much from the speaker of Proems I-III as the Colin of 1595 from that of 1579. Unlike his predecessor he is a solitary, embattled figure, at once more stridently assertive and paranoically self-defensive. Indeed he writes like someone who had accompanied ‘Colin’ to Cynthia’s court the previous year and formed much the same impression, conjuring a fractious, backbiting society in the proem to book four – ‘To such therefore I do not sing at all’ (4) – and a more thoroughly degenerate age in the proem to book five. In the proem to book six he voices for the first time in the Spenser canon the terrible possibility that the only ‘fit’ place for the poet is within the poetic realm itself:

The waies through which my weary steps I guyde,
 In this delightful 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 ravisht with rare thoughts delight,
 My tedious travel doe forget thereby;
 And when I gin to feelee decay of might,
 It strength to me supplies, and chears my dulled spright. (VI Proem 2)

It is all the less surprising, then, that this should be the book in which 'Colin' unexpectedly re-appears, apparently now at 'home' on 'Mt Acidale', with all its associations of mythic 'grace'.³⁶ It is, after all, one of the supposed functions of romance, according to Fredric Jameson, to construct imaginary solutions to real problems, and the rarified atmosphere of Acidale might seem to afford one such solution to 'transcendental homelessness'.³⁷ But Spenser knew better than most that one could not live in a fictive community, and book six drives the message home mercilessly. In locating his pastoral persona within his heroic poem – a very complex generic gesture in itself (as if Virgil's Tityrus were to appear in the later books of the *Aeneid*) – Spenser creates a meta-place, a fairyland within fairyland, 'a place, whose pleasaunce did appere / To passe all others, on the earth which were' (VI.x.5). The precincts of Acidale afford an ecology antithetical to that described in *October*, an environment where the waters flow 'unmard with ragged mosse or filthy mud' and devoid of 'wylde beastes' and 'ruder clownes' – an environment that excludes the worst of Colin's uncultivated 'waste' and Cynthia's corrupted 'court'. Yet it takes no more than the mere intrusion of Calidore to dispel the vision of the Graces and make Colin, in this final iteration of the persona, not just abandon but break his pipe (VI.x.18). It is a common feature of later 'dystopian' fiction that the protagonists seek to create a 'eutopian' space within it only to see it destroyed, witness Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* or Huxley's *Brave New World*. Spenser, I would suggest, was one of the first to establish that by now familiar template, and he did so twice in the *Legend of Courtesie*. Weary of the quest, Calidore unduly idealises the pastoral landscape he encounters in canto nine only to see it destroyed by brigands, while the mere presence in canto ten of a deluded knight masquerading as a shepherd destroys Colin's idealised vision of Acidale as home to the Graces. The fact that the knight in question is the patron of courtesy, the virtue

etymologically associated with the court at the outset of the book (VI.i.1), implies that poetic vision is dispelled by the very patronage that should sustain it. The point at which 'Colin' is discovered by Calidore is the point at which his art collapses, but the outcome had already been rendered inevitable. At the outset of book four Spenser appeals directly 'to that sacred Saint my soveraigne Queene' (IV Proem 4), yet it is precisely this patron saint who is so conspicuously absent from Colin's vision of the Graces. This matters precisely because the *Aprill* eclogue expressly links the Graces to patronage while inviting Eliza to 'fyll the fourth place' (l. 116)³⁸. From that same 'place' she is now rudely excluded. This, perhaps, is the point at which Colin becomes Cuddie, the perfect pattern of a poet who responds to neglect with rejection.

As is made very clear in canto nine, Calidore is not a *bona fide* member of the pastoral community, nor does he understand its nature. Rather, he idealises the lifestyle in a manner quite unwarranted by his discussion with its principal representative, Meliboe, a self-confessed refugee from the court, like the Colin of 1595:

The time was once, in my first prime of yeares,
 When pride of youth forth pricked my desire,
 That I disdain'd amongst mine equall peares
 To follow sheepe, and shepheardes base attire...
 And leaving home, to roiall court I sought;
 Where I did sell my selfe for yearely hire,
 And in the Princes gardin daily wrought:

There I beheld such vainenness, as I never thought. (VI.ix.24)

In his choice of the name 'Meliboe' Spenser undoubtedly alludes to Virgil's Meliboeus, the dispossessed shepherd of the first eclogue whose fate the Roman poet leaves uncertain.

The omens were never good, however, since the shepherds of the ninth eclogue recognise in poetry no prophylactic against the violence that looks set to engulf them. The pastoral community of book six suffers the very fate Virgil's shepherds fear, and Meliboe/Meliboeus dies among them. In order to rescue 'Pastorella' Calidore needs to re-don his armour beneath his 'shepherds weed' (VI.xi.36), and restore her to her true aristocratic parents (VI.xii.14-22). The landscape of Spenserian pastoral, that is to say, is designed to explore, and indeed elicit, the true values of the court. Paradoxically, it seems, they can be found only in displacement. In what appears to the hero to be a diversion from the main quest, and to the reader a digression from the main theme, Calidore rediscovers what he is fighting for even if he does not quite realise it. The implication might seem to be that, far from proving inspirational, courtliness, as practised by the court, is inimical to poetic endeavour.

The abrupt dispelling of Colin's vision of the Graces merely anticipates the greatest spatial displacement of them all, the attack of the Blatant Beast on the 'gentle poets rime' in canto twelve. In stanza 38 we hear how the Beast 'broke his yron chaine, / And got into the world at liberty againe' (VI.xii.38) – at which point the most natural interpretation of the term 'world' is the fictive world, the world of the poem. However, as the adjective, 'gentle' indicates, it is not 'Colin' but the narrator that the Beast proceeds to attack: 'So now he raungeth through the world againe...ne spareth he the gentle Poets rime' (VI.xii.40). The voice of the poem sounds in the space of the narrative as Spenser reclaims the title of 'Bonfont' from his detractors:

Ne may this homely verse, of many meanest,
 Hope to escape his venenous despite,
 More then my former writs, all were they clearest
 From blamefull blot, and free from all that wite,

With which some wicked tongues did it backbite. (VI.xii.41)

The sixth proem warns us that 'courtesy' has declined from moral virtue to social fashion: 'Its now so farre from that, which then it was, / That it indeed is nought but forgerie' (VI Proem 5). Yet, according to Colin's account of the matter, the best way to rise at court is 'through leasings lewd, and fained forgerie' (ll. 692-6). This, he contends, is a 'courtly' art quite contrary to his own. Realizing at the outset that the court might dismiss his whole enterprise as a different sort of 'painted forgery' (2 Proem 1), he proffered the poem as a representational space in which readers would find their true selves. At the close of book six, however, he suggests that the opposite may be true, that the only solution to the poet's dilemma is to accommodate the poem to type of 'forgerie' favoured by the court:

'Therefore do you my rimes keep better measure, / And seeke to please, that now is counted wisemens threasure' (VI.xii.41). Each and every genre, as Georges Perec has argued, creates its own particular space, so that the process of reading becomes analogous to spatial motion.³⁹ By constantly forcing us to retrace our steps in uncertain terrain, to lose ourselves in a maze without a centre, Spenser brilliantly captures his narrator's sense of entrapment and frustration, the 'endlesse worke' of attempting to chart the round earth's imagined corners.

Despairing of any solution to Cuddie's problem in the *October* eclogue, Piers finally advises him to 'make thee winges of thine aspyring wit, / And, whence thou camst, flye backe to heaven apace' (ll. 83-4). It is therefore suggestive that Spenser locates his final authorial persona in the genre of the hymn even though, or perhaps because, that placement requires a complex 'retractation', or recontextualizing, of earlier poetry alleged to have offended the very patrons to whom the work is now offered.⁴⁰ Ostensibly at least, the poet 'seeks to please' by responding to the patrons' criticisms, sublimating the

sensuality of the two ‘pagan’ hymns into the spirituality of their Christian counterparts. Yet caution is required. Our only reason for believing that the first pair of poems gave offence to anyone is the dedicator’s say so, and that uncorroborated assertion has continued to determine the parameters of our response to the present day. As the hymn was originally a pagan form, Spenser’s manoeuvre directs us to read the work as re-enacting the history of the genre’s reception by previous generations of Christian writers, to suggest a poet maturing into spirituality and Solomonic wisdom. The narrator of the *Fowre Hymnes* ends on a pious note of *contemptus mundi* concluding, as does the narrator of the *Two Cantos of Mutability*, that only in heaven will ‘thy straying thoughts henceforth forever rest’ (*Hymne of Heavenly Beautie*, l. 301). That is to say, the speaker responds to ‘the contempt of Poetrie’, of which Cuddie complains in *October*, with poetically expressed contempt for the world that rejects the poetic. Under the guise of self-accusation, one of the most self-serving tropes of the humility topos, he proleptically locates himself in the heavenly court, the final ‘home’ – or possibly the ultimate fiction.

Central to the conception of ‘heaven’ is changelessness. By contrast, the insistence on mutability evident throughout Spenser’s canon, combined with his repeated acts of textual revision and retractation, serve to problematize every act of self-location if not the very concept of location itself. Poetry creates the spaces, the stanzas or little rooms, in which such matters may be addressed, but its own uncertain place in the spaces of the court, the coterie, and the print-house is one of its most urgent concerns. Its engagement with space is therefore inherently and inescapably self-reflexive. Physically and intellectually Spenser’s canon exists in mutability, in a series of revisions, retractations, and recontextualizations – in the sort of endless metastasis imagined in the chamber of Eumnestes (II.ix.53-9). But that chamber contains both the fairy chronicles and the ‘Briton

moniments', 'historia' as romance and record, thereby implying the common vulnerability of poetry and politics. Even Cynthia, Raleigh's patron goddess, ultimately suffers eclipse at the hands of Mutability who 'raught forth her hand / To pluck her downe perforce from off her chaire' (VII.vi.13). When not even the prince's 'place' is secure what hope can there be for the poet's? If patronage did not provide the answer to Piers's despairing question it is probably because the perfect patron is largely a figment of the author's imagination, existing only in the aspirational space of the dedication or eulogy. To this extent we may identify Spenser's various paratexts as provinces of 'fairyland', created to 'fashion' the patrons located within them, patrons who (it was hoped) would eventually reciprocate by locating the poet in places 'fit' for his art.⁴¹ The growing suspicion that such patrons and places existed only in 'fairyland' raised the terrifying possibility that Spenser's romance had no objective correlative in the real world that, so far as patronage was concerned, his allegory signified nothing. It was not just Colin Clout but his creator who was fated to suffer the condition of 'transcendental homelessness' as he moved from genre to genre and patron to patron repeatedly attempting to locate poetry's 'place' in contemporary culture and so maintain 'his state and studies'. In her final instantiation in the *Two Cantos of Mutability*, Cynthia, now masquerading as Diana, effects Ireland's transition from Golden Age to cursed earth, supplying a 'place' at once inimical to, yet ironically productive of 'pierlesse Poesye' (VII.vi.33-55). Spenser may well have concluded that alienation, with all its aesthetic compensations, provided the best protection against disillusionment.

¹ This essay is developed from a paper delivered at 'The Place of Spenser / Spenser's Places', the Fifth International Spenser Society Conference, Dublin 2015. I deal in greater detail with the manifold complexity of patronage in *'Ungainefull Arte': Poetry, Patronage, and Print in the Early Modern Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

² See Phoebe Lowell Bowditch, *Horace and the Gift Economy of Patronage* (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 2001).

³ Spenser's poetry is quoted from *Edmund Spenser: The Shorter Poems*, ed. R. A. McCabe (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1999), and *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A. C. Hamilton, rvd. ed. (London: Longman, 2001); all quotations of the prose are from *The Works of Edmund Spenser*, edited by Edwin Greenlaw et al., Variorum Edition, 11 vols (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1932-58), IX.

⁴ See S. Y. Edgerton, *The Renaissance Discovery of Linear Perspective* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976).

⁵ *The Shorter Poems*, pp. 25, 29.

⁶ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991); for a critical assessment of such claims see Tim Unwin, 'A Waste of Space? Towards a Critique of the Social Production of Space', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 25 (2000), 11-29.

⁷ Spenser (1932-58), IX, 471.

⁸ See Alison V. Scott (2006). *Selfish Gifts: The Politics of Exchange and English Courtly Literature, 1580-1628* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson Press, 2006); Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos. *The Culture of Giving: Informal Support and Gift-Exchange in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Felicity Heal, *The Power of Gifts: Gift-Exchange in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

⁹ See *Adulescentia: The Eclogues of Baptista Mantuan*, edited and translated by Lee Piepho (New York: Garland, 1989), pp. 40-9.

¹⁰ See Sir Walter Raleigh, *Selected Writings*, edited by Gerald Hammond (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1986), p. 43.

¹¹ Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1971), p. 121.

¹² McCabe, 'Ungainefull Arte', pp. 229, 240.

¹³ *Shorter Poems*, p. 29

¹⁴ *Shorter Poems*, pp. 128, 133.

¹⁵ *Shorter Poems*, pp. 155-6.

¹⁶ *Prose*, pp. 6, 12.

¹⁷ See Arthur Lord Grey, *A Commentary of the Services and Charges of William Lord Grey of Wilton*, ed. Sir Philip de Malpas Grey Egerton (London: Camden Society, 1847), pp. 68-74.

¹⁸ See Richard A. McCabe, *Spenser's Monstrous Regiment: Elizabethan Ireland and the Poetics of Difference* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 89-90.

¹⁹ *The Faerie Queene*, p. 763.

²⁰ *Shorter Poems*, p. 165.

²¹ *Shorter Poems*, pp. 386-7.

²² Edward S. Casey, *Getting Back into Place* (Bloomington Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1993).

²³ *The Faerie Queene*, p. 730.

²⁴ R. S. Peterson, 'Laurel Crown and Ape's Tail: New Light on Spenser's Career from Sir Thomas Tresham', *SSt*, 12 (1998), 1-35 (p. 8).

²⁵ See 'The Regrets' with 'The Antiquities of Rome', edited and translated by Richard Helgerson (Philadelphia PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), p. 181.

²⁶ *The Arcadian Rhetorike* (1588), sigs. C4^r E3^r.

²⁷ Harington, *An Apologie for Ajax* (1596), sig. Bb5v.

²⁸ *Shorter Poems*, pp. 126-7.

²⁹ *Shorter Poems*, p. 91.

³⁰ Compare *Mother Hubberds Tale*, ll. 75-80.

³¹ See Andrew Zurcher, 'Getting it Back to Front in 1590: Spenser's Dedications, Nashe's Insinuations and Raleigh's Equivocations', *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, 38 (2005), 173-98; 'Printing *The Faerie Queene* in 1590', *Studies in Bibliography*, 57 (2005), 115-150.

³² *The Faerie Queene*, p. 727.

³³ *The Faerie Queene*, p. 728.

³⁴ For the generic controversy see Bernard Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*, 2 vols (Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press, 1961), II, 954-1073.

³⁵ Richard A. McCabe, *The Pillars of Eternity: Time and Providence in 'The Faerie Queene'* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1989), p. 82

³⁶ See A. C. Hamilton, *The Spenser Encyclopedia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), pp. 4-6.

³⁷ Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1981), p. 118.

³⁸ Shorter Poems, p. 69.

³⁹ Georges Perec, *Species of Spaces*, ed. John Sturrock, rvd. ed (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1999). See also Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. M. Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994 – first pub 1964).

⁴⁰ Robert T. Tally, *Spatiality* (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 55.

⁴¹ Erasmus famously suggested that panegyric might exercise a reformatory influence. See J. D. Garrison, *Dryden and the Tradition of Panegyric* (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 1975), pp. 20-37.