Patronage, Gentility, and 'Base Degree': Edmund Spenser and Lord Burghley

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The social asymmetry of patronage is reflected in the language of dedication, but in complex ways: hyperbole registers the inequality of dedicator and dedicatee yet, in the very act of offering hyperbole as a 'gift', the author struggles to establish a relationship across the divide through the rhetoric of service, friendship, kinship, or 'affinity' of some kind. 'The chiefest thing', Philip Barrough apologetically explained to Lord Burghley in 1583, 'that emboldneth men to dedicate, their labours unto any personage, is the affinitie betweene the matter of the worke, which they offer and the minde of him to whom it is presented'. Barrough is apologetic because unlike 'our common writers [who] doe fashion and shape the subject of which they entreat, according to the affection of him, whose patronage they require in countenauncing their writings', he has 'swarved and digressed from so general a custome' by offering a work on physic to a politician. But hyperbole comes to his aid: Burghley is no ordinary politician but a better counsellor than Nestor, Xenophon or Plutarch yet 'these comparisons do faile in representing so much as I do conceive, for that I may not feare the suspition of flatterie in so manifest a truth'. The 'truth' is that there has never been so great a monarch as Elizabeth, so godly a counsellor as Cecil, nor so close a relationship between monarch and counsellor. The ironic upshot is that Burghley's ceaseless engagement with 'the earnest affaires of the Common wealth' may afford him little time read Barrough's *Methode of Phisicke*, so he appeals from his status to his 'humanitie' in seeking 'protection' for a work intended for the common good. The true 'affinitie' between lowly dedicator and grand dedicatee is their common 'zeale' to 'benefite' their 'countrimen'.[1]

Barrough's dedication is in many respects typical of approximately ninety printed tributes accorded to Burghley over the course of his career, but no less so in its diffidence than its flattery. Indeed the latter responds to the former: the perpetual fear is that the great statesman may have little interest in the dedicator's endeavours, or take the 'humility topos' literally. Indeed the competitive circumstances in which dedications such as these are made often infuse a subtext of

reserve into apparently laudatory diction – as though the 'gift' anticipates its rejection. There was always the possibility, when rejection was perceived to occur, for eulogy to degenerate into satire, twin forms equally reliant on hyperbole.[2] It is in this apparently counter-intuitive context that I wish to re-examine not just the relationship between Spenser and Burghley but what it reveals of the dynamics of literary dedication and its implications for the 'gentility' of both parties.

Theoretically, establishing an 'affinitie' between Spenser and Cecil should have been easy. Both were products of the same university, Cambridge, and both owed their advancement to a reputation for 'learning'; both were overtly Protestant in outlook; both entered government service, and both had an established interest in literature.[3] Cecil effectively launched his political career with a laudatory preface to Queen Kathryn Parr's *The Lamentation of a Sinner* (1547) in which he described in some detail the moral effect the work was intended to have on the reader: 'see thou her confession, that thou maist lerne her repentaunce; practyse her perseveraunce, that thou maist have lyke amendemente… Thus far thou maist learne to knowe thy selfe'.[4] He was the dedicatee of several volumes of poetry and poetic translation including Barnabe Googe's *Zodiak of Life* (1561-76); John Studley's *Agamemnon* (1561); Richard Willes's, *Poematum Liber* (1573); Henry Dethick's *Feriæ Sacrae* (1577); the third book of Gabriel Harvey's *Gratulationes Valdinenses* (1578); and Aaron Hill's *Ten Books of Homer's Iliades* (1581). He personally financed the posthumous publication and editing of Sir Thomas Chaloner's Latin epic, *De Republica Anglorum Instauranda* (1579), for which he wrote a set of commendatory verses, and he was considered to be sufficiently engaged with aesthetic theory to attract the dedications of Henry Dethick's, *Oratio in Laudem Poëseos* (c. 1572) and George Puttenham's *Art of Poesie* (1589).[5] Moreover, he was intimately involved in the politics of Ireland during Spenser's residence there and anticipated, in *The Execution of Justice in England* (1583), the poet's stalwart defence of Lord Grey's controversial massacre of disarmed mercenaries at Smerwick.[6] Perhaps even more significantly for our purposes, both poet and politician were greatly exercised by issues of social status.

Cecil was the scion of minor gentry and the family owed its rise to his grandfather's support for the Earl of Richmond and subsequent career in royal service. He matriculated at St John's College Cambridge (although he did not take a degree) before moving to the Inns of Court to lay the basis for a professional career in public service. All of which is to say that he was very much a *novus homo*: indeed he appears to have been directly inspired by Cicero, the classical *novus homo* par excellence.[7] From the viewpoint of the ancient aristocracy that made him a parvenu – one who used his Mastership of the Court of Wards to marry his daughter to the young Earl of Oxford, thereby aligning himself with the ancient family of De Veres.[8] But by that stage the De Veres too had something to gain. Cecil's personal talents had been amply recognised and rewarded: he was knighted at the behest of Northumberland in 1551, appointed Secretary of State to Elizabeth in 1558, raised to the peerage as Baron Burghley in February 1571, and appointed Lord Treasurer in July 1572. The letters patent for his peerage cite service not blood. Cecil is ennobled,

> as well for the long services in the time of our progenitors, kings of England, as also for the faithful and acceptable duty and observance which he hath always performed from the very beginning of our reign, and ceaseth not daily to perform many ways, not only in the great and mighty affairs of Council but generally also in all other enterprises for the realm, and also for his circumspection, stoutness, wisdom, dexterity, integrity of life, providence, care and faithfulness.[9]

Commenting on the phenomenon of such 'new men' in his *De Republica Anglorum*, Sir Thomas Smith asserted that gentility, properly considered, is connected to ancient blood, 'for the Etimologie of the name serveth thefficacie of the worde. *Gens* in Latine betokeneth the race and sirname'. But, he concedes, it is not always so: 'This matter made a great strife among the Romanes, when those which were *Novi homines* were more allowed, for their vertues new and newly showen, then the olde smoke of auntient race newly defaced by the cowardise and evill life of theire nephewes and discendauntes could make the other to be. *Cicerones*, *Catones*, and *Marii* had much adoe with those men [the patricians]'. But Smith sees no alternative to the rise of the *novi homines*.

For the simple reason that old families decline through the common course of mutability, 'the prince and common wealth have the same power that their predecessors had, and as the husbandman hath to plant a new tree where the olde fayleth, to honour vertue where he doth find it, to make gentlemen, esquires, knights, barons, earles, marquises, and dukes, where he seeth virtue able to beare that honour or merits, to deserve it'[10]. Smith's planting imagery is common in such discussions, but *novi homines* seldom felt comfortable with it. Instead, every attempt was made to graft new stock unto old by asserting consanguinity with ancient blood: like the Tudors before them, the Cecils exploited their Welsh antecedents to link them to a fabulous Arthurian past.[11]

Spenser's ancestry is a good deal less certain than Cecil's. His father may have been a cloth-worker attached to the Merchant Taylors. Spenser benefited from charitable support while at the Merchant Taylor's school, a fact that does not necessarily indicate indigence in itself, but he certainly entered Pembroke College, Cambridge as a sizar, a poor scholar paying his way by doing chores.[12] His betters entered as gentlemen commoners. Yet everything about *The Shepheardes Calender* is designed to confer on Spenser the status of gentleman by merit: if Cecil was a *novus homo*, Spenser is introduced to the world as 'the new poet' or *novus poeta* destined, according to E. K., to rise from anonymity to great fame. His dedicatee, the not yet knighted Philip Sidney, is designated on the title-page as a 'Noble and vertuous Gentleman, most worthy of all titles both of learning and chevalrie' – a significant association in itself – and E. K. deploys the term 'worthy' in a way that today might be regarded as 'over-determined', to elevate all his 'friends' to the same level ('your worship' being the common designation for a gentleman):

> These my present paynes if to any they be pleasurable or profitable, be you iudge, mine own good Maister Haruey, to whom I have both in respect of your worthinesse generally…vowed this my labour, and the maydenhead of this our commen frends Poetrie, himselfe having already in the beginning dedicated it to the Noble and worthy Gentleman, the right worshipfull Ma. Phi. Sidney, a special fauourer and maintainer of all kind of learning.[13]

In effect, humanist 'friendship' here creates an affinity between unequals. Sidney was, at least in prospect, the heir to two earldoms, but gentility was a very malleable term. At this period, as Hugh Trevor-Roper argues, 'nobility' was commonly regarded as an exalted subsection of the gentry, divided from 'those that be no lairds, as knight, esquires and simple gentlemen' by 'a distinction of nomenclature and legal rights, not a difference of either habits of mind or economic practice'.[14] This implication was strengthened the following year when the Spenser-Harvey *Letters* were published as passing between 'two Universitie men', one of them, the author of the *Calender*, resident in Leicester House and claiming to be on familiar terms with Leicester's nephew and presumptive heir, Philip Sidney.[15]

This act of self-promotion took effect: Spenser is expressly referred to as a gentleman by William Webbe, George Puttenham, Thomas Nashe, Gabriel Harvey and others in the 1580s and 90s.[16] But on this matter, as on that of *novi homines*, Smith had something to say. Whereas knights and barons are made by the monarch, he points out, the title of gentlemen is different: 'as for gentlemen, they be made good cheape in England. For whosoever studieth the lawes of the realme, who studieth in the universities, who professeth liberall sciences, and to be shorte, who can live idly and without manuall labour, and will beare the port, charge and countenance of a gentleman, he shall be called master…and shall be taken for a gentleman'. But Smith was well aware that not everyone was content with the mere repute of gentility without the ancestry to match: '(and if neede be) a king of Heraulds shal also give him for mony, armes newly made and invented, which the title shall beare that the said Herauld hath perused and seen olde Registers where his auncestors in times past had borne the same'. If, however, the herald wishes to exercise his function 'more truely and of better faith', he will record the arms as awarded for desert not blood, 'for the merittes of that man, and certaine qualities which he doth see in him, and noble actes which he hath done'.[17]

It was not until 1590, so far as we know, that the poet took public cognizance of the peer. When the first edition of *The Faerie Queene* appeared that year it contained, among 16 similar tributes, a handsome compliment to Cecil:

To you right noble Lord, whose carefull brest
To menage of most graue affaires is bent,
And on whose mightie shoulders most doth rest
The burdein of this kingdomes gouernement,
As the wide compasse of the firmament,
On *Atlas* mighty shoulders is vpstayd… [18]

These lines sound a note that would be familiar to Spenser's readers. Gabriel Harvey's *Gratulationes Valdinenses*, praised at some length in *The Shepheardes Calender*, devotes the whole of its third book to lauding Cecil. A key *topos* of these tributes, and of numerous dedications to Cecil in the capacity of Lord Treasurer, was his service to the commonwealth, often inflected, as in Barrough's case, to suggest that the weight of public affairs would leave him with little time to read what the dedicatee had written. This is an ancient *topos* stretching back to Horace's famous 'Epistle to Augustus' where the poet apologises for wasting the great statesman's time: 'seeing that you alone carry the weight of so many great charges, guarding our Italian state with arms, gracing her with morals, and reforming her with laws, I should sin against the public weal if with long talk, O Caesar, I were to delay your busy hours' (*Epistles* II.1).[19] The emphasis on shouldering 'weight' suggested the Atlas image which Spenser borrowed from the *Gratulationes* where it featured in an epigram by Pietro Bizari: 'Fame relates that Atlas shoulders the sky and is so equal to the heavy task he cannot buckle beneath it. Such is your gravity and such your prudence that you [too] can sustain whatever burden you deem it fitting to bear'. A preceding epigram by Walter Haddon commends Bizari for 'equating Atlas and Cecil'.[20]

The image Spenser borrows was well established, but so too was the point behind it. Cecil had carefully cultivated a reputation for making time for learning despite his labours: in Roger Ascham's *Scholemaster* (1570), for example, we learn how, 'M. Secretarie hath this accustomed maner, though his head be neuer so full of most weightie affaires of the Realme, yet, at diner time he doth seeme to lay them alwaies aside: and findeth euer fitte occasion to taulke pleasantlie of

other matters, but most gladlie of some matter of learning: wherein, he will curteslie heare the minde of the meanest at his Table'.[21] Even more compelling was the account provided by Hugh Broughton in the dedication to *A Treatise of Melchisedek* (1591). There he recalls how five years previously Cecil called him to court to consult on the accuracy of the Greek translation of the Hebrew prophets and 'afforded most wyllingly three houres spech for matters of chiefe and generall vse, and of great hardnesse: in such sort that I was amazed how you shoulde haue eyther such leysure, to be ready in them, from your politicall affayres and studies'. Cecil, he reports, had read critical works that he, a professional scholar, had not. He can imagine no more suitable dedicatee: 'Your shortnesse in propounding questions, readinesse in conceyuing a full answere, diligence in trying Scriptures…and lastly, singuler gentlenes of encouraging my studies, with entreatie to repaire often to you…do assure me of a Judge fitte for wyll and skyll'. Cecil's patronage emerges from Broughton's account as affording a unique blend of learning, sympathy, and accessibility – and a reputation for *noblesse oblige* was more useful to the newly ennobled than the old.[22]

Closely related to these motifs in a significant number of dedications is the assertion that Cecil's three principal seats – Burghley House in Stamford, Lincolnshire; Theobalds in Hertfordshire; and Cecil House in Westminster – functioned as learned academies for his sons, the aristocratic wards in his care, and the scholars and writers he patronized.[23] To whom, asked Arthur Golding, should *The Historie of Leonard Aretine* be dedicated but to Cecil 'under whose roofe it hath beene harbroughed and fostered from the infancie'. The work, he asserts, was 'finished at your home in the Strond the second of Aprill 1563'.[24] Golding was uncle to the young Earl of Oxford, then Cecil's ward, and appears to have taken up residence in his house in that capacity, having previously served the earl's father. Dedicating his *Eyght books of Caius Julius Cæsar* (1565) to Cecil two years later, he claims that the work was inspired by a partial translation of John Brende, 'whose Copie from your honour came to my handes'.[25] Similarly Aaron's Hill's dedication to his *Ten Books of Homers Iliades* (1581), addressed to Thomas Cecil, the peer's eldest son, recalls how he began the work 'being a Scholer with you in my Lord your fathers house'.[26]

The dedicatory sonnet to *The Faerie Queene* shows Spenser buying into Cecil's self-image, inviting him to use his learning to read the poem allegorically, so it will not seem that 'ydle rimes' are offered 'unfitly' to a busy man. In other words, Spenser asks Cecil to deploy a typically humanist hermeneutic of the sort promoted by Dethick, Puttenham and Aaron Hill (who suggested that Homer's gods be read allegorically).[27] While it may seem that he presents 'the labor of lost time, and wit vnstayd' to the great statesman,

> Yet if their deeper sence be inly wayd,
> And the dim vele, with which from comune vew
> Their fairer parts are hid, aside be layd.
> Perhaps not vaine they might appeare to you.
> Such as they be, vouchsafe them to receaue,
> And wipe their faults out of your censure graue.

According to this account, *The Faerie Queene* was no less 'serious' than the epic Burghley had sponsored, Chaloner's *De Republica Anglorum Instauranda*. Its editor, William Malim, maintained that the author 'sometimes hid certain historical truths under veils of words [historicam quandam veritatem verborum nonnumquam integumentis obumbrat]', but that its overt obscurity would yield to 'frequent reading and careful consideration'.[28] Spenser demands the same sort of attention from Cecil, attempting to create an 'affinity' between the patronage he seeks and that previously bestowed.

In the short term at least, the publication of *The Faerie Queene* proved remarkably successful in raising Spenser's social and professional profile. He was apparently given the opportunity to present his gift to the queen personally, most likely through the influence of Sir Walter Raleigh to whom he addressed his 'Letter of the Authors expounding his whole intention in the course of this worke'.[29] He was duly awarded an annual pension of £50 on 25 February 1591 – the closest thing to laureate status then on offer.[30] Capitalizing on what he described as the 'favourable passage' of the epic among the public, its publisher, William Ponsonby, quickly brought

out Spenser's *Complaints*, allegedly in the poet's absence in Ireland, to satisfy further demand.[31] Events then moved rapidly. *Complaints* was entered in the *Stationers' Register* on 29 December 1590; the pension was awarded on 25 February 1591, and sometime before 6 March 1591, as we learn in a letter of that date from Sir Thomas Tresham to Lord Mordaunt, all available copies were confiscated owing to perceived attacks on Cecil in *Mother Hubberds Tale*. The latter, according to Tresham, is a beast fable designed to 'showe by what channce the apes did loose their tayles'. 'Thowghe this be a jest', he observes, 'yett is itt taken in suche earnest, that the booke is by Superior awthoritie called in; and nott to be had for anie money. Where ytt was att the first sould for vi d. it is nowe of redie money a Crowne.'[32] The offending passages are not hard to find. In describing the devious practices of the fox, 'Mother Hubberd' effectively deconstructs not just the image of Cecil Spenser had presented in the sonnet of 1590, but the image created by an accumulated lifetime of dedications. If the sonnet buys into Cecil's official propaganda, the satire exploits the anxieties it was designed to offset – and he was acutely sensitive, as we shall see, to accusations of profiteering, arrogance, and monopolizing access to the queen.

Why Spenser should have chosen this precise moment to attack Cecil remains unclear, but the context in which he does so is certainly suggestive. Until 1590 Spenser's main allegiance, so far as it can be determined, appears to have been to the Sidney-Dudley-Devereux axis and his extravagant celebration of the young, and still untested, Earl of Essex in one of *The Faerie Queene*'s dedicatory sonnets points in the same direction. But the Earl of Leicester's death threatened to diminish the party, and its status needed to be reasserted. The attack on Cecil in *Mother Hubberds Tale* is accordingly foreshadowed in *The Ruines of Time*, a poem dedicated to the Countess of Pembroke, Philip Sidney's sister, and intended, 'to the renowming of that noble race, from which both you and he sprong, and to the eternizing of some of the chiefe of them late deceased' – the foremost being their uncle, Leicester.[33] Since his death in 1588, Leicester's reputation had suffered considerably, both through slander and neglect: 'he now is dead', the speaker notes, 'ne anie Poet seekes him to revive; / Yet manie Poets honourd him alive' (ll. 223-4). 'Revival' is Spenser's mission,

despite the assertion at the outset of *Virgils Gnat* that Leicester had somehow 'wrong'd' him.[34] The contrast between the two poems makes it appear that he has transcended personal disappointment to celebrate a lost public hero – while also tactfully suggesting that the family owes him something. The emphasis throughout *The Ruines of Time* falls on the 'renowmed' antecedents of the Dudleys (who claimed descent from the medieval Beauchamp Earls of Warwick) and the text probably incorporates material originally intended for the 'Stemmata Dudleiana', a genealogical tribute Spenser promised to write in 1580 in honour of the host in whose house he was then staying.[35] Leicester's social status is thus immensely heightened by comparison with his lowly enemy:

> It is not long, since these two eyes beheld
> A mightie Prince, of most renowmed race,
> Whom *England* high in count of honour held,
> And greatest ones did sue to gain his grace;
> Of greatest ones he greatest in his place,
> Sate in the bosome of his Soveraine,
> And *Right and loyall* did his word maintaine. (ll. 183-9)

On the death of this 'Prince', we now hear, his place is taken by the 'fox':

> He now is gone, the whiles the Foxe is crept
> Into the hole, the which the Badger swept.
> *Ruines of Time* (ll. 216-7)

In the wake of Leicester's death, Cecil vigorously pursued the estate for the recovery of crown debts, but the motivation was less personal animosity than the queen's hostility to the widow.[36] To characterise him as the antagonist, if not the antithesis, of Leicester was to distort what had been for many years a complex and largely co-operative relationship. But it was also to anticipate the emergent factionalism of coming years by juxtaposing praise of the Dudley, Devereux and Sidney families with uncompromising denigration of their rivals. The adverse contemporary reaction – even from so close a friend as Gabriel Harvey – suggests that Spenser rather embarrassed

than advanced his cause.[37] He had attempted instead to embarrass his victim by identifying the fox as 'he that now welds all things at his will' (l. 447), a significant shift from the loyal Atlas of the sonnet towards the imperious autocrat of *Mother Hubberds Tale*. This was a form of satire to which Cecil felt acutely vulnerable. In an extraordinary letter of 1585 he attacks those 'that say in a rash and malicious mockry, that England is become *regnum Cecilianum*'. But, he asks, what proof can they bring? 'If they do think me guilty therof, they need not fear to accuse me. For I am not worthy to continue in this place; but I will yield my self worthy, not only to be removed, but to be punished for an example to others that should not abuse her majesty, and the office I hold'.[38] In place of proof Spenser brought allegation. *The Ruines of Time* accordingly berates the lowly fox, raised to great place for apparent 'virtue', but despising the arts by which he rose:

> O griefe of griefes, O gall of all good heartes,
> To see that vertue should dispised bee
> Of him, that first was raisde for vertuous parts,
> And now broad spreading like an aged tree,
> Lets none shoot up, that nigh him planted bee:
> O let the man, of whom the Muse is scorned,
> Nor alive, nor dead be of the Muse adorned.
> *Ruines of Time* (ll. 449-455)

Associated with the 'planting' of *novi homines* by Smith, the image of the tree would also be familiar from Haddon's tribute in the *Gratulationes Valdinenses*: 'The Cecil tree [Cæciliana…Arbor] begins to spread its branches and blossom in clear sunlight. In this way, in this way, O gods, may a [famous] name develop from a great [family] name and be carried down the centuries. All ages will recall the famous Father; may the glory flowing from so great a fountain be perpetual. As fortunate as is now this *Pater Patriae*, may his offspring prove to be. That is my most urgent prayer'.[39]

It is as though Spenser were deliberately attempting to subvert every tribute gathered for Cecil by Harvey, but Harvey's compilation is typical of its kind. Large numbers of dedications praise

Cecil for his personal scholarship and patronage of learning, particularly in the roles of Chancellor of Cambridge and patron of Westminster School. Virtually all maintain that he used his talents in the selfless service of the queen and commonwealth. 'Mother Hubberd' sees the matter differently:

> For whatsoeuer mother wit, or arte
> Could worke, he put in proofe: no practise slie,
> No counterpoint of cunning policie,
> No reach, no breach, that might him profit bring,
> But he the same did to his purpose wring. (ll. 1138-42)

This 'pater patriae' is intent only on advancing his family, and 'ill might it prosper, that ill gotten was':

> He fed his cubs with fat of all the soyle,
> And with the sweete of others sweating toyle…
> He cloathed them with all colours saue white,
> And loded them with lordships and with might,
> So much as they were able well to beare,
> That with the weight their backs nigh broken were… (ll. 1149-1158)

Apart from hinting at Robert's deformity of the spine, the final line suggests his unsuitability to succeed his father as 'Atlas'. 'Yet', Mother Hubberd complains, 'none durst speake, ne none durst of him plaine' (l. 1199), using the trope of *recusatio* to disclaim the activity in which she is engaged. The point was quickly taken by contemporary readers. In *A Declaration of the True Causes of the Great Troubles, Presupposed to be Intended against the Realme of England* (1592), Richard Verstegan instanced *Mother Hubberds Tale* as employing the sort of oblique reference necessitated by Cecil's power:

> And because no man dare frame an endytement against him, I will heere omit many other articles of highe treason, but yf any will undertake to justifie his actions in his course of government, let him know, that there is sufficient matter of reply reserved for him, which is

not extracted out of *Mother Hubberds* tale, of the false fox and his crooked cubbes, but is to be uttered in plaine prose, and shal lay open to the world, his birth, his lyf, and perhaps his death, seing his detestable actions are such, as do aske vengeance of heaven and earth.[40]

'Perhaps his death': this put Spenser in rather extreme company. Verstegan, like Tresham, was a recusant, and Cecil was generally hailed as champion of the Protestant church – in multiple dedications by William Whitaker, for example – but in Spenser we hear how he 'he crammed them [his cubs] with crumbs of Benefices, /And fild their mouthes with meeds of malefices' and 'chaffred Chayres in which Churchmen were set' (ll. 1153-54, 1159).[41] Though aggressively opposed to Roman Catholicism, Spenser was inadvertently providing its adherents with excellent material.

Perhaps the most serious charge Mother Hubberd levels against the Fox is that he abuses his role as Treasurer to the Ape. A sign of his rapacity is the ability to build vast mansions which are anything but the centres of hospitality and patronage described by Ascham, Hill, Broughton and others:

> And when he ought not pleasing would put by,
> The cloke was care of thrift, and husbandry,
> For to encrease the common treasures store;
> But his owne tresure he encreased more
> And lifted vp his loftie towres thereby,
> That they began to threat the neighbour sky;
> The whiles the Princes pallaces fell fast
> To ruine: (for what thing can euer last?)
> And whilest the other Peeres, for pouertie
> Were forst their auncient houses to let lie,
> And their olde Castles to the ground to fall,
> Which their forefathers famous ouer all

Had founded for the Kingdomes ornament,

And for their memories long moniment. (ll. 1169-1182)

Cecil's building activities attracted a lot of attention, and he was very sensitive to the impression they might create. 'My house of Burghley', he argued in 1585, ' is of my mothers inheritance; who liveth and is the owner therof: and I am but a farmour…I trust my son shall be able to maintain it, considering there are in that shire a dozen larger, of men under my degree'.[42] For Cecil and Spenser alike it was all a matter of 'degree'. But the 'loftie towres' Mother Hubberd has in mind are more likely to belong to Theobalds, Cecil's most extravagant project, and on this matter he was particularly defensive. On the occasion of Elizabeth's first visit to Theobalds in 1571 there appeared an unusual broadside, entitled *Carmen Gratulatorium Aedium Cecilianarum in Adventum Serenissimae Reginae. 22. Sept. 1571*, alleging that the extensive renovations to which the event drew attention were undertaken to provide her with appropriate hospitality. Thereafter, anyone who objected to the expense might be seen to imply that the guest was not worth it.[43] But criticism persisted and Cecil returned to the matter in 1585. 'If my buildings mislike them [his enemies]', he concedes, 'I confess my folly in the expences' – but only because it was 'folly' in the best of causes. Theobalds 'was begun by me with a mean mesure, but encreast by occasion of her majestys often coming: whom to please I never would omit to strain my self to more charges than building it. And yet not without some special direction of her majesty upon fault found in the smal mesure of her chamber, which was in good mesure for me.'[44]

The truth was more complex. A *novus homo* needed a display of status more than most. Cecil was aware of 'Slanders, Lies and Scoldings, maliciously , grossly and impudently vomited and jangled out in certain traiterous books and pamphlets' that he was of 'base degree'.[45] Theobalds was designed to contradict that impression. Its three 'base' courts were carefully distinguished from the other two, a middle court accessed by an ornate inner gatehouse inhabited by the family, and beyond it again 'the Fountain Court' reserved for the sovereign. 'As if by encyclopedic effort', William McClung comments, 'Cecil has managed to pull every class of society, from the monarch to

the artisan, into the confines of one house, delineating the status of each in the architecture of his building'.[46] The layout was designed to place Cecil on a par with the ancient aristocracy, many of whom were struggling, as Mother Hubberd says, to maintain their 'olde Castles':

> But he no count made of Nobilitie,
> Nor the wilde beasts whom armes did glorifie,
> The Realmes chiefe strength and girlond of the crowne
> All these through fained crimes he thrust adowne,
> Or made them dwell in darknes of disgrace:
> For none, but whom he list might come in place. (ll. 1183-88)

Lowly born, the fox despises true nobility and uses his ill-gotten gains to build vulgar palaces while ancestral mansions decay. In Harvey's *Gratulationes Valdinenses*, needless to remark, Cecil is credited with ancient lineage ['vetustas…imagines'], and Theobalds boasted elaborate genealogical tables designed to maintain that fiction.[47] Richard Verstegan duly alleged that Cecil sought 'to extole his owne glory in painted pedegrees, borrowed and farr fetched'.[48]

Yet if the avowed purpose of Cecil's building was to entertain the queen, its covert purpose was seen as monopolizing access to her – the sort of access that 'the Shepheard of the Ocean' [Raleigh] generously provides for the lowly poet in *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe*:

> Ne would he anie let to haue accesse
> Vnto the Prince, but by his owne addresse:
> For all that els did come, were sure to faile,
> Yet would he further none but for auaile. (ll. 1201-04)

Verstegan alleges that he prevented the queen from rewarding her servants:

> He kepeth (I knowe not by what vnhappy constellation, or rather devilish enchauntement) the fauour of his prince, which neuer subject somuch abused. He hathe made himself the very owner of her determinations, not permitting her to recompence the seruice of her other officers & seruantes, and divers tymes when she hathe promised reward, he denieth

> her the meanes of performance, and so forceth her to breake and go from her woorde: yea he maketh her accomptable to him, how she entendeth to dispose of her owne: which yet must neuer be, but as himself lyketh.[49]

Some such notion probably promoted the myth, already current at the turn of the century, that Cecil attempted to deprive Spenser of his royal pension.[50] Cecil was acutely aware of the allegation that he sought, like the fox, to limit access to the queen so that 'councillours are forced to seek at my hands means for their suits', but presents himself rather as the victim of royal manipulation: 'true it is, that her majesty throweth upon me a burthen, to deal in all ungrateful actions; to give answers unpleasant to suitors that miss; where others are used to signify pleasant answers affirmatively'.[51]

It is highly unlikely that Spenser had ever seen Cecil's self-exculpatory letter of 1585, yet he targets with unerring precision every one of the Treasurer's anxieties. But who was this 'new poet' to look down with such disdain on the new man? One element in Tresham's letter is of particular note in this regard: 'He that writ this discourse', Tresham tells Mordaunt, 'is a Cantabrigian and of the blood of the Spencers', and notes that the offending poem is 'dedicated to the wydowe, Lady Compton'.[52] Lady Compton and Mountegle was Anne Spencer, one of the three daughters of Sir John Spencer of Althorp; her first husband Lord Monteagle had died in 1581, her second, Lord Compton in 1589. Dedications are also made in the *Complaints* to her two sisters: The *Teares of the Muses* to Alice, Lady Strange; and *Muiopotmos* to Elizabeth, Lady Carey. This was a relatively unusual strategy but designed with a clear end in view. In the dedication to Lady Strange Spenser asserts that, 'the causes for which ye have thus deserved of me to be honoured (if honour it be at all) are, both your particular bounties, and also some private bands of affinitie, which it hath pleased your Ladyship to acknowledge'.[53] It was one thing to 'fashion' affinity in the manner recommended by Barrough, another to have affinity 'acknowledged'. It is difficult to over-emphasise the importance of 'acknowledgement' in such a context: gaining recognition was one of the primary goals of dedication. *The Shepheardes Calender* was sent into the world 'as child whose parent is unkent', a foundling, and possibly 'base begot with blame'.[54] By claiming to be 'in some use of familiarity' with

its dedicatee in the *Letters* of 1580, Spenser implies that the foundling has found a foster father.[55] Yet Sidney appears to have made no public acknowledgement of Spenser's gift. Even in *The Defence of Poesie* he treats the work as anonymous, neither naming the author nor noting any particular association with a text he deems 'woorthie the reading' but indecorous in its use of 'olde rusticke language'.[56] His 'affinity' to this version of pastoral is limited. But the 'acknowledgement' claimed in the dedication to Lady Strange locates its author in a different social milieu. Kinship is one of the strongest types of 'affinity' one might assert and the following dedications make it clear that this is precisely what is involved. Spenser thanks Lady Carey 'for name or kindreds sake by you vouchsafed', and reminds Lady Compton of 'the humble affection, and faithfull duetie, which I have alwaies professed, and am bound to beare to that House, from whence yee spring'.[57] As no such assertion features in the sonnet to Carey appended to the 1590 *Faerie Queene*, one can only speculate on the role that dedication played in the Spencers' acknowledgement of their poor relation. How much it mattered in terms of the poet's future strategies of self-presentation is evident from *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe* (1595).[58] Spenser had become a landed gentleman some years previously in the Munster plantation, but he never uses that fact (in this poem or elsewhere) to claim gentility. His claim is through ancestral blood, not the profits of government service. Thus he refers to,

> the sisters three,
> The honor of the noble familie:
> Of which I meanest boast my selfe to be,
> And most that vnto them I am so nie. (ll. 536-39)

The youngest, he notes, in a characteristic show of concern for such matters, 'is highest in degree' (l. 543). The following year he asserted in *Prothalamion* (1596) that though he was born in London, 'from another place I take my name, / An house of auncient fame' (ll. 130-1). In declaring the Spencers both 'noble' and 'auncient' in these poems, Spenser was contributing to the elaborate fiction that traced their ancestry back to the Medieval Despencers. Thus the tables of gentility are

turned. Despite appearances to the contrary, the lowly new poet is of ancient stock, the lofty new man is a parvenu posing as aristocracy. While the device is certainly clever, it problematizes the more socially liberal criteria for gentility examined in Spenser's own *Legend of Courtesie* and Humanist literature generally.[59]

In any case, Spenser's timing could hardly have been worse, or the outcome less in doubt. The satire presented in *The Ruines of Time* and *Mother Hubberds Tale* seeks to drive a wedge between Cecil and the queen, but he continued to be regarded, and often resented, as her most trusted counsellor. In May 1591 she made a very public gesture of support when she visited Theobalds yet again and was presented with a series of entertainments designed to present Robert Cecil, the younger of the 'cubs' denigrated by Mother Hubberd, as his father's successor. He was knighted on 20 May and appointed to the Privy Council on 2 August.[60] It was quite clear where the queen's sympathies lay. Writing in 1592, Verstegan takes Robert's elevation as evidence of the truth of Spenser's allegations, making brutal play with his physical deformity:

> he hathe lately brought in his second sonne, to be of the Queenes councell· and keper of her priuy seale: the which of wyse-men is much maruailed at, and the rather for that the Queene is reputed learned, and therefore seemeth to be the more ouerseene in the choise of so il shapen and crooked a counselor (hauing neither wisdome nor experience) to forgett the precept of the graue Philosopher, who giueth espetial warning of such so marked by nature, in these woordes: *Caue ab his, quos natura signauit* [beware of those whom nature has marked].[61]

When the second instalment of *The Faerie Queene* appeared in 1596, Spenser portrays Cecil as incapable of reading the poem in the allegorical manner suggested in the dedicatory sonnet of 1590. Instead, his preoccupation with weighty 'affaires of state' leads him to see only the surface romance:

> The rugged forhead that with grave foresight

Welds kingdomes causes, and affaires of state,
My looser rimes (I wote) doth sharply wite,
For praising loue, as I haue done of late,
And magnifying louers deare debate;
By which fraile youth is oft to follie led,
Through false allurement of that pleasing baite,
That better were in vertues discipled,
Then with vaine poemes weeds to haue their fancies fed. (4 Proem, 1)

In 1590 Spenser had argued that if Cecil read his verses correctly, 'perhaps not vaine they might appeare to you'. Now, in his inability to penetrate the 'dim vele, with which from commune vew / Their fairer parts are hid' he has displayed a lack of that 'humanitie' to which Broughton appealed and Spenser identifies as the 'roote' of honour:

Such ones ill iudge of loue, that cannot loue,
Ne in their frosen hearts feele kindly flame…
For it of honor and all vertue is
The roote, and brings forth glorious flowres of fame… (4 Proem 2)

He therefore appeals above the defective reader's head to the one reader who is, as Thomas Smith pointed out, the principal source of honour:

To such therefore I do not sing at all,
But to that sacred Saint my soueraigne Queene,
In whose chast breast all bountie naturall,
And treasures of true loue enlocked beene… (4 Proem 4)

Cecil may be the Lord Treasurer, but the 'treasures of true love' allude him. The second instalment of *The Faerie Queene* contrives to begin and end with an insult to Cecil's title: 'Therfore do you my rimes keep better measure, / And seeke to please, that now is counted wisemens threasure' (*FQ*, VI.xii.41). All the 'wisdom' of the man hailed by Thomas Danett in 1593 as the 'greatest Politique of

the age' and 'sole pillar and onely Atlas as it were under hir maiiesty' is expertly eroded in that corrosive phrase.[62] Yet the explicit reference some lines earlier to the daunting effects of 'a mighty Peres displeasure' makes it clear that Cecil's attitude has hurt the poet. The Blatant Beast escapes at the end of Book VI and attacks the narrator:

> Ne spareth he most learned wits to rate,
>
> Ne spareth he the gentle Poets rime,
>
> But rends without regard of person or of time. (*FQ* VI.xii.40)

Most notable here is the adjective 'gentle'. From the outset of his career, Spenser tends to stress his 'gentility' in circumstances of neglect. To the extent that loss of love figures failure of patronage in the *Calender*, it is remarkable how Colin's status rises almost imperceptibly as his 'love' becomes more desperate.[63] He is introduced in *Januarye* as 'a shepeheards boye (no better doe him call)', but his immense poetic talent is praised in *Aprill*, his learning in *June*, and by *December* he is no longer 'a shepeheards boye' but 'the gentle shepherd'. In Spenser's source, Clement Marot's 'Eglogue au Roy soubz les nons de Pan & Robin', the phrase is simply 'un pastoureau' [a shepherd]. The adjective is Spenser's addition, and made in circumstances similar to those that obtain in Book VI where Colin is variously referred to as 'gentle Shepheard' (x.29) and 'gentle swaine' (x.32). While Marot's Robin ends in the belief that Pan has heard his prayers, Spenser's Colin ends without hope.[64] Cecil's 'crooked cub' became Secretary of State in the year of the Blatant Beast.

That same year the speaker of *Prothalamion* represented himself as discontented by 'my long fruitlesse stay / In Princes court, and expectation vayne / Of idle hopes that still do flit away' (ll. 6-8). Now it is not the verses that are 'vayne' but the writer's hopes of recompense. Following a pair of beautiful swans along the river he passes Essex House, formerly Leicester House:

> a stately place,
>
> Where oft I gayned giftes and goodly grace
>
> Of that great Lord, which therein wont to dwell,

Whose want too well, now feeles my friendles case:

(*Prothalamion*, ll. 137-40)

This was the venue from which 'Colin' had dispatched his gentlemanly missives to Harvey in 1580. Its current owner was Leicester's step-son, husband of Philip Sidney's widow, and the Cecils' major rival. For a poet suffering the effects of 'a mighty Peres displeasure', Essex house must have appeared like a haven:

Yet therein now doth lodge a noble Peer,

Great *Englands* glory and the Worlds wide wonder,

Whose dreadfull name, late through all *Spaine* did thunder… (ll. 145-7)

The speaker's attitude to 'stately place' is accordingly very different from Mother Hubberd's. Now the grand architecture is seen to express the occupant's magnificence rather than his presumption. As Essex issues 'From those high Towers…Like Radiant *Hesper*' to greet the young lovers landing at the wharf (ll. 163-4), the contrast with the allegedly loveless Cecil is stunning. Yet the event is left in doubt. The speaker reports the gracious reception of Essex's aristocratic guests but does not number himself among the party.[65] Similarly, *Prothalamion* lays Spenser's final claim to a 'place' among the Spencers of Althorp, yet notes his distance from it. Still domiciled in Ireland, he was no more at 'home' in the great houses he praised than those he derided. Ultimately, and perhaps ironically, his main claim to gentility was his ability to assert it so eloquently in verse.

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[1] Barrough, *Methode of Phisicke*, sigs. *ii^{r}-iii^{v}.
[2] See further McCabe, *'Ungainefull Arte'*, pp. 73-87.

[3] See Barnett, *Place, Profit, and Power*; Van Dorsten, 'Mr Secretary Cecil'; Graves, *Burghley*, pp. 114-29; Croft, ed., *Patronage, Culture and Power*.
[4] *Lamentation of a Sinner,* 'The Preface'.
[5] Chaloner, *De Republica Anglorum*, sigs. *ii^{r-v}.
[6] See Cecil, *Execution of Justice in England*; Alford, *Burghley*, pp. 248-51; Maginn, *William Cecil*.
[7] See Husselby, 'Politics of Pleasure', p. 21.
[8] See Hurstfield, 'Lord Burghley as Master of the Court of Wards'.
[9] Read, *Lord Burghley and Queen Elizabeth*, pp. 33-4.
[10] Smith, *De Republica Anglorum*, p. 71.
[11] Husselby, 'Politics of Pleasure', pp. 33-4.
[12] See Hadfield, *Edmund Spenser*, pp. 17-50.
[13] Spenser, *Shorter Poems*, pp. 23, 25, 30. All quotations are from this edition.
[14] Trevor-Roper, *The Gentry*, p. 8.
[15] Spenser, *Works*, IX , 3-18. All quotations from the prose are from this edition.
[16] See, for example, Wells, ed., *Spenser Allusions*; Pt 1: 8, 14, 28.
[17] Smith, *De Republica Anglorum*, pp. 71-2.
[18] Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, p. 727. All quotations are from this edition. The 1590 edition exists in variant states with differing numbers of dedicatory sonnets. See Johnson, *Critical Bibliography*, pp. 15-16.
[19] Horace, *Satires, Epistles and Ars Poetica*, p. 397.
[20] Harvey, *Gratulationes Valdinenses*, sig. Gii^{r}.
[21] Ascham, *Scholemaster*, sig. Bi^{r}.
[22] Broughton, *Treatise of Melchisedek*, sigs. ¶2^{r}-4^{r}.
[23] Hurstfield, 'Lord Burghley as Master of the Court of Wards', pp. 105-7.
[24] Golding, trans., *Historie of Leonard Aretine*, sig. aiii^{r-v}.
[25] Golding, trans., *Eyght Bookes of Caius Julius Cæsar* , sig. *ii^{v}.
[26] Hill, trans., *Ten Bookes of Homers Iliades*, sig. Aii^{r}.
[27] Ibid., sig., aiv^{r}.
[28] Chaloner, *De Republica Anglorum Instauranda*, sig. **1^{r}.
[29] *The Faerie Queene* , pp. 714-8.
[30] See Berry and Timings, 'Spenser's Pension'.
[31] Spenser, *Shorter Poems*, p. 165.
[32] Peterson, 'Laurel Crown and Ape's Tail', pp. 7-8.
[33] Spenser, *Shorter Poems*, p. 166.
[34] Ibid., p. 210.
[35] For the 'Stemmata Dudleiana' see *Works*, IX, 18. See Goldring, *Robert Dudley*, p. 237.
[36] Kendall, *Robert Dudley*, 225.
[37] For Harvey's response see Wells, ed., *Spenser Allusions,* Pt 1: 24.
[38] Strype, *Annals of the Reformation*, III, Pt. 2: 379-83; see Mears, '*Regnum Cecilianum*?', pp. 46-64.
[39] *Gratulationes Valdinenses*, sigs. Gi^{v}-Gii^{r} (my translation).
[40] Verstegan, *Declaration of the True Causes*, p. 68.
[41] See the dedications to William Whitaker, *Ad Rationes Decem Edmundi Campiani* (1581); *Responsionis ad Decem illas Rationes…Defensio* (1581); *Ad Nicolai Sanderi Demonstrationes* (1583); *An Answer to a Certeine Booke Written by M. William Rainolds* (1585); *An A. B. C. for Laymen* (1585).
[42] Strype, *Annals*, III, Pt. 2: 381.
[43] See John Nichols, *The Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth I*, 1:706-7. For a discussion see Kolkovich, *Elizabethan Country House Entertainment*, pp. 26-31.
[44] Strype, *Annals*, III, Pt.2: 380-1.
[45] Quoted in Airs, '"Pomp or Glory"', p. 11.
[46] McClung, *The Country House*, pp. 74-5; Sutton, 'Decorative Program at Elizabethan Theobalds', pp. 33–64.
[47] *Gratulationes Valdinenses*, sig. Giii^{v}.
[48] *Declaration of the True Causes*, p. 66.
[49] Ibid., p. 72.
[50] See Geimer, 'Spenser's Rhyme or Churchyard's Reason?'.
[51] Strype, *Annals*, III, Pt.2: 382.
[52] Peterson, 'Laurel Crown and Ape's Tail', p. 7.
[53] Spenser, *Shorter Poems*, p. 190.

[54] Ibid., p.24.
[55] Spenser, *Works*, IX, 6
[56] Wells, ed., *Spenser Allusions*, Pt 1: 4-5.
[57] Spenser, *Shorter Poems*, pp. 234, 290.
[58] See further, McCabe, *'Ungainefull Arte'*, pp. 248-9.
[59] See Tonkin, *Spenser's Courteous Pastoral*, pp. 166-77.
[60] See Sutton, 'The Retiring Patron'; Kolkovich, *Elizabethan Country House Entertainment*, pp. 42-6.
[61] *Declaration of the True Causes*, p. 70.
[62] Danett, trans., *Description of the Low Countries*, sig. ¶3^{r}.
[63] See Marotti, '"Love is not Love"'.
[64] Marot, *Œuvres*, V, 285. See Patterson, 'Re-opening the Green Cabinet'.
[65] At roughly the same time, Spenser argued in *A View of the Present State of Ireland* for the appointment of Essex as Lord Lieutenant of Ireland. *Works*, IX, 228.