

The Court, the Rule, and the Queen: *The Faerie Queene* as a Representation of Elizabeth I

Eunhye Choi

1.

Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1590; 1596) has long been lauded for its literary brilliance as a period representative epic poem. This poem is considered a work worthy of constant admiration as well as persistent analysis. Even though the structure and form of the poem are themselves arresting, *The Faerie Queene* was and still is widely remembered for its symbolic merits. Spenser's engagement with the political affairs of his day led to this particular diffusion of historically allegorical containment. As a Renaissance poet, he had an intimacy with the world of power that authorized his existence and provided him an amount of literary authority. He used this special power to make a 'subject' out of Elizabeth I (1533-1603), who he was, in real life, a subject to. In doing so, Spenser audaciously explores the different views toward a female ruler in a largely male-dominated England. Many of his characters reflect and validate the paradigms of both virtue and vice. Employing the characters of Gloriana, Belphebe, Britomart, Caelia, and Lucifera, Spenser attempts to incorporate the dichotomous national sentiment toward a monarch of the weaker sex. Powerful women emerge from the text and linger, regardless of their ethical stances, in the readers' minds long after finishing *The Faerie Queene*. Throughout the entirety of the epic, a myriad of images overlap and compile until the reader is presented with a figurative silhouette of Elizabeth I and her reign, proving Spenser's arduous reexamination on the queen's rule, court, and person to be highly worthwhile.

2.

Behind every work of literature, even that of heroic poetry (a most sensitive literary genre heavily laden with cultural commentary), is the author's opportune motive for composition. Spenser allegedly had a purpose of displaying and lauding both 'private and 'public' virtues. He made this rather objective clear in his "Letter to Raleigh"¹ (1989), notably in the passage, "The generall end therefore of all the booke is to fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline" (623). If the purpose above is to be taken and believed, the whole agenda of the often long windingly diffuse epic poem seems to have been set and sealed early on in this introductory letter. His reader subjects could be individuals who would be subsumed under the mean of orderliness propagation. However, Spenser explicates further on one character:

In that Faery Queen I meane glory in my generall intention, but in my particular I conceive the most excellent and glorious person of our soveraine the Queene, and her kingdome in Faeryland. And yet in some places els, I doe otherwise shadow her. For considering she beareth two persons, the one of a most royall Queene or Emprise, the other of a most vertuous and beautiful Lady. (625)

A rather more worldly intent to earn monetary patronage from Elizabeth I is hinted at in this part of the letter fore appended to his work.

The Faerie Queene remains a memorable testimony of the golden age of Elizabeth's rule. It constantly drives modern literary critics to examine the historical and political intertextuality of the said work. The historical fact that Spenser was a poet with Queen Elizabeth as his patron cannot be seen apart from his literary wake. Even though he was a poet physically away from the

1) Sir Walter Raleigh (1552-1618). Soldier, courtier, philosopher, explorer and colonist, student of science, historian and poet Amassed great wealth thanks to his position at court, leading him to be denounced by some as an up start and hated by others as a rapacious monopolist. His great favor with Queen Elizabeth was interrupted in 1592 when he seduced and manied one of her ladies in waiting, Bess. He dedicated a long poem to the queen, *The Ocean to Cynthia*, now in fragmentary condition (Logan 878).

court itself, by drawing up and writing an elitist-aimed poem under a patronage, Spenser “clearly indicates [his] audience as well as [his] object in [his] temporary context” (Bernard 1). Even if born a man, an individual’s literary ambition and creation in Renaissance time often depended on the power relations of the period. Unprivileged poets had to strive to prove their existence through their gift of the pen. It is rather easy to note in *The Faerie Queene*, Spenser’s readiness and willingness to become known as a literary magnate. He was initially supported by Sir Walter Raleigh and later, Elizabeth²⁾ herself. Spenser, fully aware of his indubitable relation with the court, used his literary skill in “appropriate decorum . . . his knowledge of classics and the pastoral tradition and in courtly hymn . . . such display advertised his professional qualifications as a poet” (Shepard 96), nevertheless with the intention to prove his employability further.

The monarchy itself rested on the substantial pillars of its capacity to reward and to advance its supporters (W. MacCaffrey 97). Elizabeth even had theatrical pageants³⁾ in which she was presented as a creature of beauty, wisdom, and power (Greenblatt 167). Appealing to the moral sense of loyalty in each individual was all very well, but material advantages sweetened the deal. The concepts of self and patronage were definitely linked in the time of Spenser. Spenser’s role in writing an epic romance shows how Spenser’s own assessment of his role views the communal memory of author and reader as the locus for constructing a viable historical mythology. Spenser’s text begins with a pursuit of an end, “to fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline” (625). Such a humble objective is actually only the starting point in his narrative which will ultimately end with “the knights returning to [their]

2) Elizabeth awarded Spenser in 1591 with a pension of fifty pounds a year, a rare example of a generous act from her towards writers (Es 47) This was equivalent to the annual pay of public office officials (treasury management, military services, and regional councils) at the time (W. MacCaffrey 111).

3) The gorgeous court rituals of praise channeled national and religious sentiments into the worship of the prince, deflecting the social, political, and theological divisions in late sixteenth century England. It was through these spectacles that Elizabeth attempted to turn her disadvantage of gender to a supreme political virtue (Greenblatt 168).

origin of desire, the court of Gloriana [their queen]" (Grossman 126). By giving the knights a higher purpose than individual gain, Spenser aims to legitimize the (for his time) current English historical polity by grounding the poem's story on the ideas of virtue, justice, and ultimate truth. Spenser proliferates actions and allegories into numerous scenes, many of them reflecting Elizabeth's own disposition, her court's make up, and her attitude towards her courtiers. After all, as a poet dependent on the graces of the court, Spenser, alongside other contemporaries, had no choice but to "perpetuate the myth of the ideal courtier ... [and] endorse the social structure [the court] exists to sustain" (Bernard 4). Spenser manages to mostly employ the allegory forms in his work to exuberantly praise Elizabeth rather than question the legitimacy of her rule. Indeed, his art is motivated by "the desire to rise and the need to please" (Bernard 7). Thus it is that he proves his loyalty to the patronage order.

Nevertheless, Elizabeth was still biologically a *female* ruler, a fact that was always flung into unwanted discourse by her active subjects as well as her bitter objectors. This led to Spenser's obviously restless and revealing engagement with desire and gender. Although torn between praising Elizabeth wholly and keeping a rather neutral perspective, Spenser does indeed contain implicit criticism of Elizabeth, especially of her decision to control the cult of courtly love among her courtiers and yet never marry herself and produce an heir (Es 45). It is considered a noticeable fact that Elizabeth's second period or reign, circa 1580-1603, coincides neatly with Spenser's entire literary career. By that time, whilst Elizabeth was triumphing in her international achievements, especially with the Armada in 1588, many of Elizabeth's articulate subjects were feeling despair and disillusionment at her failure to secure the succession of England's throne. There was certainly a "type of frustration that many Englishmen felt in the 1590s at their inability to control the future" (Es 51), meshed with the anxiousness toward a ruler of the 'weaker sex'. The European norms of political authority, sexual license, marital practice, and rules of inheritance all came into play as significant concepts. Spenser shows support for Elizabeth, but also at the same time defers any conclusive, one-sided judgment of her as an effective ruler and leader of the English nation. This reluctance could have been influenced by his contemporaries' rather outspoken opinions⁴⁾ on Elizabeth. Such debates of

the time should be taken into context when trying to figure out the degree of Spenser's voiced critique in his own text.

Nothing in this fantasy poem is entirely fantastical. The poem allegorically promotes heroism, that being an exceedingly Christian one. Notable knight or lady characters in the work autonomously act. But when examined closer, it becomes clear that most of their deeds are done in the name of celestial justice, in that of a higher being, namely God, rather than for their own romantic pursuit. Their worldly obligations to a sovereign must also be abided by; the framework of social order or social hierarchy that helps to socially regulate the characters still lingers. Even though *The Faerie Queene* rarely presents any historical situation directly, the current socio-political conditions of England such as the military achievements of the Tudor line are incorporated throughout, with the idea of a dominant monarch occupying the core of such discourse. Spenser's inclusion of the queen in the ideal of Gloriana involves an implicit *quid pro quo*, making it more than necessary to have Elizabeth be perceived as reflecting the ideal of Gloriana enough for the encomium to preclude irony (Borris 164), and thus render the allegory effective in its intended objective. Virtuous ideals and timely discourse intersect, rendering this particular work to become a contemporary civic report, re-examinative history sketch, and exemplary heroic epic all in one.

3.

According to Book I, Canto 4, lines 2-3 of *The Faerie Queene*, Gloriana is a "Mirroure of grace and Majestie divine, great lady of the greatest Isle". If such a description sounds eerily familiar, then Spenser has hit the mark in his allusion

4) John Foxe, in his *Actes and Monuments of the Christian Church* (1581), attempted to present Elizabeth as a firmer supporter of the English Church than she really was. John Knox argued in his *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* (1558) that having females as monarchs was "an inversion of the natural order". Uniquely John Alymer, Bishop of London, attempted to defend Elizabeth's God given right to monarchy and rule in *An Harbourowe for Faithfull and True Subjects, against the late blowne Blaste, concerning the Government of Women* (1559).

to a certain historical figure. His panegyric of the leading monarchical figure character in the book is toward someone who is never actually present in form but nonetheless graciously referred to by other characters in the poem, including Arthur, Guyon, and even Spenser himself in the 'Letter to Raleigh' (Norbrook 106). The Redcrosse Knight, along with other knights in the work, is more than pleased and honored to serve her. Even after his unification with Una, his lady love, the Redcrosse knight is made to leave once more to serve (1.12.18; 1.12.41) Gloriana for six more years, and surprisingly enough, accepts his obligation not so unwillingly. Thus it is proved that Gloriana is in full control of her subjects, in body and in mind. She is skilled in controlling her subjects and admirers just like Elizabeth, who was in her own country and in international affairs incredibly skilled at manipulating her followers through courtly games and whimsical endowments of favor.⁵ Elizabeth managed to control foreign courts, by giving one or another hopes of matrimonial unification with England and then suddenly turning her favors elsewhere (Shepard 118). Just as in real-life, strong and able male characters in this literary microcosm of the English court are the ones under loyal subjugation. Each and every male in the real court were fixated on the solicitude to please their queen.

Arthur, a knight of obvious English identity, keeps a fond if quite erotic memory of Gloriana, narrated in 1.9.7 and 1.9.15. Arthur, who reminds the reader of that ancient king in British legends, endows legitimacy to Elizabeth's rule by serving as a strong male counterpart to, and possibly a future suitor for marriage to Gloriana. He is the perfect figure to complement her physical weakness as a national ruler. Steadfast knight Guyon also describes Gloriana as "My Sovereine, / Whose Glory is in gracious deeds, / and joyes / Throughout the world her mercy to maintaine" (2.1.43). It was Gloriana herself, who had sent Guyon on a quest to defeat the evil witch Acrasia. Making the strong male characters in the text swear allegiance to Gloriana, Spenser successfully implies that the fragile natural body of a ruler can easily be fortified by the assistance of

5) Elizabeth, shrewdly giving and taking away her favors to her courtiers, drove at least two jilted and embittered 'favorites', Thomas Howard, The Duke of Norfolk, and Robert Devereux, the 2nd Earl of Essex, into acts of treason against her position, each in the year of 1575 and 1601 (Alpers 192).

loyal and steadfast subjects. Borris notes the symbolic apocalypticism that underwrites the allegory of Arthur's pursuit of the queen. She does not just topically relate to Elizabeth but also, "veiled within clouds of unknowing, further symbolizes transcendental consummation of desire" (176). The female body of both the "faerie" and the 'English' queen provide a cognitive map for Elizabethan culture, displaying a field upon which the relations of Elizabethan power are manifested.

Caelia, the matroness of The House of Holiness, is hardly a major character in the poem but nonetheless significant in that she is never seen as a sexual figure. Rather, whatever feminine quality she has adds to her disposition as a 'mother', not a 'maiden'. Thus, Caelia is easily a more stable symbol of virtue. In 1.10.4, 1.10.8, 1.10.11, and 1.10.17, she is seen as a generous and kind woman, aged in body but "as thought/From heaven to come" in a "modest guise", with "seemely grace". She willingly takes care of the sick and the distressed. Her House of Holiness, a resting place for those in need, is explicated at length in 1.10.5-1.10.6. Although quite plain in appearance, it is nevertheless pleasant. It is indeed an ideal house, and a place of true courtly establishment. According to Greenblatt, Elizabeth herself was surpassingly able to fashion her own identity as a "natural mother", yet at the same time also as a devoted "virgin queen". "Mutual love" and "self sacrifice" were other major themes emphasized in her role as the monarch of Britain (169). The maternal presentation of Caelia is kept in line with one of Elizabeth's public personas.

Belphoebe is a supremely beautiful, virginal and chaste female figure. She is also a mirror of "Cynthia", according to Spenser's 'Letter to Raleigh'. Her body is emphasized a lot, making the reader blatantly aware of her physical shortcomings as a woman (Bernard 90). Her virginity, just like that of Elizabeth's virginity, has its public aspect. Elizabeth's militant virginity was used as "an effective tool", as a "cornerstone of her efforts to ensure a peaceful rule" (King 112). Belphoebe is exalted because of her virginity, which is seen in a celestial nature. Nevertheless, Belphoebe also provokes lust and disorder from the knights, especially from Timias, her admirer who suffers throughout from sexual incontinence. Belphoebe's discovering and nursing of Timias cures his physical wounds, but inflicts deadlier wounds of love (Alpers 26). Could this part

of Spenser's poem be an allusion to Petrarchan poetry filled with woeful lovers and indifferent damsels? Or could it be a sharp insight into the kinds of embellished poems Elizabeth enjoyed to receive from her admirers in court? Indeed, Belphoebe can be surprisingly remote, seen from her emasculating rejection of Timias in 4.7-4.8., during the period in which she believes Timias to have jilted her pride. Belphoebe is indeed an exemplary figure who reconciles heroic chastity with graciousness but *not* with an active recognition nor reciprocation of the afflicted lover's feelings. Thus the Petrarchan model of a love smitten agon clashes with the Reformation model of chastity.⁶⁾ Marriage is not an option for Belphoebe, therefore Timias must yearn and suffer much like the countless suitors and admirers of Elizabeth the queen. Elizabeth's own choice of an enticing bait was the promise of marital sexual conquest that came with political power.

So are the positively portrayed females in *The Faerie Queene* always a celebration of Elizabeth as a ruler, or could they also become ironies lamenting a lost opportunity? The fact that Belphoebe is revered as a figure of great virtue unattainable maritally or sexually seems to convey the image of Elizabeth as an idealized female in court who had actually failed to fulfill the nature of fertility (Heale 10). The strong (but never selflessly unconditional) devotion of knights and courtiers toward Gloriana and toward Elizabeth is ultimately done in a quest to win the Queen's favor. If seen as a commitment expecting something in return, this might also be a strong indication of the English people's expectations of the Queen. The national want for a male heir was never satiated. Such apprehension is implicit but nevertheless reflected in *The Faerie Queene*. Just like the parliaments and counselors that had interfered, many of Spenser's females are surrounded with males urging them with thoughts of marital union.

Mistress of an exuberant court, Elizabeth's self-indulgence is also under scrutiny through the portrayal of prideful Lucifera, "a bright blazing beautie"

6) Reformation erotic discourse emphasized conjugal affection and holy matrimony as the source of individual and social happiness. Marriage was acclaimed as the divinely commanded condition for humankind, marital copulation deemed more effective than celibacy in banishing sexual lust (Mallette 87).

whose vainness as a monarch accustomed to praise and reverence is what draws a lot of critical parallels between her and Elizabeth (Heale 37). Lucifera's haughty self is explained in 1.4.8, 1.4.17, and then again in 1.5.48, emitting a strong feel of unpleasant grandeur. She is also a "mayden Queene", heavily surrounded by iconographical clues (I. MacCaffrey 170). And like her, Elizabeth, too believed in display, in ceremony, courtly decorum and theatrics (I MacCaffrey 160). However, Lucifera is flawed in that she is seriously lacking in appropriate lineage, having "made her selfe a Queene, and crownd to be" (1.4.12). This makes her either a bluntly contrastive figure of Tudor lineage-equipped Elizabeth, or reversely a parallel figure of Elizabeth in that Elizabeth herself was haunted by the covert yet wide-spread suspicion of her right to the throne, fueled by ensnares toward her lady-in-waiting-turned-Queen mother Anne Boleyn(1507-36)'s legitimacy as a rightful queen.

Lucifera's House of Pride, described in detail in 1.4.4, 1.4.7, shows a decadent and ominously insecure structure:

A stately pallace built of squared bricke,
Which cunningly was without mortar laid,
Whose walls were high, but nothing strong, nor thick,
.....
But full great pittie, that so faire a mould
Did on so weake foundation ever sit:
For on a sandie hill, that still did flit
.....
And all the hinder parts, that few could spie,
Were ruinous and old, but painted cunningly.

Lucifera's court itself is seen as filled with group of beautiful and "noble crew". They are seen to be superficially inclined, constantly in the action of 'prancke[ing] and dight[ing]' their attires (1.4.14). Elizabeth's court was also very embellished and splendid, fixated on the idea of celebration. But if there is any conspicuous sign of anti court writing in Spenser's portrayal of the House of Pride, it is through the 'dungeon' symbol, where he manages to convey that there are "a group of bad courtiers among the good, and not just one kind (Shepard 35)". The resentment, anger, and jealousy displayed by subjects of the

queen was no unfamiliar sight to Spenser, who was, after all, a keen observer of the court and good friend of court-competition-scapegoat Raleigh, It must have been thus that Spenser took care to handle with detail the rotten foundations of the sycophantic setting. Even though graced by courtly patronage himself, Spenser was cognizant of how the court's socially moral problems could not be wholly solved by one individual's effort and self control.

Britomart, the warrior maiden in Book Three, is an androgynous character who embodies the characteristics of both male and female. Powerful yet mysterious, glimpses of her nature are presented throughout her story, her wielding of tactful combat⁷⁾ and fraternizing skills echoing back to the multifariously concentrated power of Elizabeth I. She is the representative of an independent woman with the liberty to rule and dominate, whilst carefully maintaining her feminine power of control retained in her chastity. Her keen spirit of hopeful adventure and astute judgement in matters of fatal peril and bleak despair places her above the majority of male knights who stumble and fumble throughout their quests. In a most memorable passage, Britomart's superiority is exemplified in the tale of her genealogy:

For so must all things excellent begin,
And eke enrooted deepe must be that Tree,
Whose bug embodies braunches shall not lin,
Till they to heavens hight forth stretched bee.
.....
Then shall a royall virgin raine, which shall
Stretch her white rod over the Belgicke shore. (3. 3. 22-49)

Davies notes how genealogies were "staple ingredients of epic poems...[tending] to have a drearily obligatory air and to be taken at a dash by the poet as a necessary digression from the story" (56). Britomart's tree of British lineage

7) The feminine principle as the Renaissance recognizes it often stands in fierce opposition to the ethos of war (Mallette 52). As Queen Elizabeth I calculated her policies to avoid warfare, Britomart's intentions to 'make love, not war' becomes quite obvious. Although a gifted fighter, she bases her purpose of a quest on endlessly search across the world to seek her beloved Artegall.

would ultimately link her to Elizabeth, making her a figure of fertility. Also the sight of Britomart, mounted on her horse with her "golden lockes (4.1.13)" clearly refers back to the image of the virgin queen, who was, with Tudor reddish-golden hair, mounted on a steed in between the Spanish Armada and the English army in the port of Tilbury and vigorously presenting the famous 'heart and stomach' speech.⁸⁾ Just like her 'descendant,' Britomart is stately and imposing in the face of danger. This hermaphrodite has emerged a queen with a man's mind. An anomalistic image of ultimate power in the hand of a female never looked more striking.

However, Britomart is distinctive from Elizabeth in that she ultimately submits to the institution of marriage. Artegall, who had previously sought to seek "spoyle and vengeance (4.6.11)" on her only to realize she was a woman and soon "From his reuengefull purpose shronke abacke (4.6.21)", acknowledges her as worthy of betrothal. The idea of marriage subsumes its objects into the Reformation ideal. If Belphoebe's tale of rejecting marital subordination had called into question the matters of gender power in a marital relationship, the marital union of Britomart seems to reflect the wishes of the English people, anxiously watching a queen adamant against sharing her power with a consort and consequently losing the chance to produce an heir to the Tudor throne.

4.

Davies points out that Spenser's literary embellishments are not entirely singular in their utilization, for his use of "allusive art [in actuality] is the staple of Elizabethan poetry" (68). It is rather Spenser's uniqueness lying in the "eccentric, imaginative way he blends the stories into one another" that makes

8) "I have always so behaved myself that, under God, I have placed my chief strength and safeguard in the loyal hearts and goodwill of my subjects; ... being resolved, in the midst of the heat of the battle, to live or die amongst you all; to lay down for my God, and for my kingdom, and for my people, my honor and my blood, even in the dust. *I know I have the body but of a weak and feeble woman; but I have the heart and stomach of a king, and of a king of England too.* . . . I myself will take up arms, I myself will be your general, judge, and rewarder of every one of your virtues in the field" (Elizabeth I 597; emphasis mine).

his work stand out. Spenser lived in a time of strong political significance, "in a culture where the norm was dictated by the love power language of the virgin queen" (Shepard 90). Was Spenser trying to circumvent the voice of acrid public criticism into his literary representation of Elizabethan England? Or was he, despite of his sworn allegiance to his sovereign, a dissenter in matters of her political choices? Boldly enough, Spenser's literary work shows, at least, a slightly ambivalent attitude toward Elizabeth's person and rule. For every steadfast paragon of virtue and maternity such as Caelia, there is a duplicitous and vain emblem like Lucifera. Characters like Gloriana and Belpheobe are brilliantly chaste and virtuous, but also portrayed as tease females cognizant of their sexual power over men, rather than as perfectly innocent damsels in distress. They cannot be wholly categorized into either criteria of purity or prurience. Many of them are disparate from one another, yet very similar in their endowment of authority to influence their male subjects assertively. Nonetheless, representations of people and their communities with various forms of order and distinction are exuberantly presented to the stimulated reader, who would most likely, post-reading, gear up to present his or her own reassessment. *The Faerie Queene* is most refutable in that it is a great heroic epic, an acute allegory, and a suggestive political report, serving as a temporal account of the time in which a golden queen ruled in "the Greatest Isle". This controversial piece of literature is and will continue to be thought-provoking, perplexing and challenging to the reader, but nevertheless insightful and rewarding as an intensely dynamic literary experience.

Works Cited

- Alpers, Paul J. *The Poetry of the Faerie Queene*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1967.
- Bernard, John D. *Ceremonies of Innocence: Pastoralism in the Poetry of Edmund Spenser*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989.
- Borris, Kenneth. *Allegory and Epic in English Renaissance Literature: Heroic form in Sidney, Spenser, and Milton*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000.
- Davies, Stevie. *The Idea of Women in Renaissance Literature: The Feminine Reclaimed*. Tiptree: Harvester, 1986.

- Greenblatt, Stephen. *Renaissance Self Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1980.
- Elizabeth I, Queen. "Speech to the Troops at Tilbury (1588)." *The Norton Anthology of English Literature: The Sixteenth and the Early Seventeenth Century*. 7th ed. New York: Norton, 2000. 597.
- Es, Bart van, ed. *A Critical Companion to Spenser Studies*. New York: Palgrave, 2006.
- Grossman, Marshall. *The Story of All Things: Writing the Self in English Literature Narrative Poetry*. Durham: Duke UP, 1998.
- Heale, Elizabeth. *The Faerie Queene: A Reader's Guide*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987.
- Mallette, Richard. *Spenser and the Discourses of Reformation England*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1997.
- MacCaffrey, Isabel G. *Spenser's Allegory: The Anatomy of Imagination*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1976.
- _____, Wallace T. "Place and Patronage in Elizabethan Politics." *Elizabethan Government and Society*. Ed. S. T. Bindoff, et al. London: U of London Athlone P, 1961.
- Spenser, Edmund. *The Faerie Queen*. Ed. A. C. Hamilton. Harlow: Person Education, 2001.

ABSTRACT

The Court, the Rule, and the Queen:
The Faerie Queene as a Representation of
Elizabeth I

Eunhye Choi

Edmund Spenser's epic *The Faerie Queene* is considered a brilliant period-representative poem. Whereas its primary literary objective is to display and laud virtues, a more worldly intent geared towards receiving patronage from Elizabeth is also hinted at in the introductory letter. That is to say, Spenser's intimacy with the court of patronage reinforced this allegorical work. Spenser wields his literary authority to its full effect by boldly incorporating contemporary social themes of England in his poem. The historical intertextuality of the work is especially accentuated through the self-assertive female characters (e.g. Gloriana, Caelia, Belpheobe, Lucifera and Britomart), all of whom distinctively draw parallels between themselves and Britain's most celebrated queen in physicality, authority, and conduct.

An historical literary approach towards Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* has been practiced in the critical realm for a long time. Even though literary criticism is most original when the text is appreciated for its own value, it is not at all an uncreative project to examine and discover the many instances of Elizabeth's countenance and character flashing through its mirror characters. Even the famous allegorical factors of the poem revolve around character presentation. Various images of Elizabeth as a ruler, mother, virgin, lover, and warrior are all comprised throughout and the reader is rewarded with a comprehensive outline of Elizabeth's court, rule and person. *The Faerie Queene* is successful not only in that it is an outstanding heroic epic, but also because it is concomitant with implicit historical commentary, an attribute that enriches the work into becoming a dynamic literary experience for the reader.

Key Words intertextuality, allegory, female, monarchy, Elizabeth I, history, politics, court, patronage