RENAISSANCE ICONOGRAPHY OF THE GRACES: Courtesy in Book VI of *The Faerie Queene*

by

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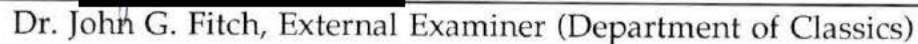

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ABSTRACT

It is a critical commonplace that the episode of the Graces dancing on Mount Acidale is the symbolic core of Book VI of *The Faerie Queene,* providing the key to Spenser's definition of Courtesy. This thesis intends to further establish a previously overlooked relationship between the iconography of the Graces and the natural and divine characteristics of Spenser's complex notion of Courtesy. While the Graces are traditionally related to the themes of liberality and poetic inspiration, an examination of Spenser's iconography reveals Courtesy, in Spenser's rich sense of it, as natural to unspoiled man but unavailable to fallen man unless restored by divine benevolence.

To understand the implications of the vision of the Graces, we must bring to it a wide knowledge of Elizabethan literary and philosophical conventions and the first chapter examines Renaissance theories of Courtesy. Many of these theories, aside from being social codes of proper behavior, have a spiritual aspect which illuminates Spenser's definition of Courtesy. The second chapter discusses Spenser's description of Courtesy in the Proem of Book VI as a heavenly seed planted by the Gods, and also discusses the development of that definition in the diverse tales which lead to the vision of the Graces. Throughout Sir Calidore's many adventures and those of the other characters introduced in Book VI, the true nature of Spenser's Courtesy is revealed not only as the gracious exchange of benefits expressed in terms which foreshadow the dance of the

Graces, but further as requiring a close contact with nature and a reliance upon grace. Finally, Chapter Three focuses on Renaissance iconography of the Graces and Spenser's use of iconography to support his definition of Courtesy. While the conventional iconography of the Graces relates them to Courtesy as it is traditionally defined, further investigation of the iconographical and allegorical significance assigned to the Graces in the Renaissance leads to a deeper understanding of Spenser's Courtesy as it involves both natural and divine characteristics. Furthermore, the encyclopedic symbolism of the Graces relates them to Spenser's poetic art and makes it clear that Courtesy is also connected to art since Courtesy comes, like a poem, by divine inspiration. The vision of the Graces may be a vision of nature perfected by grace, but it is also the product of poetic art, for Spenser self-consciously announces his presence in the figure of the shepherd Colin. With this Spenser seems to be saying that only through the mediation of nature and art may we glimpse -- albeit fleetingly -- the unfallen world. The nominal subject of Book VI is Courtesy, but as the vision of the Graces illustrates, Courtesy is inextricably linked to nature and grace, and to art which has the power to link the two.

The findings of this study demonstrate that the scene of the Three Graces dancing on Mount Acidale concentrates and clarifies Spenser's definition of the virtue of Courtesy. Spenser's syncretism reveals Courtesy's natural and divine qualities and it adds to the resonance and depth of his poetry, moving us between the enchanting promise of grace and the painful loss we feel at nature's imperfection. Fragile though it may be, the vision of the Graces expresses the perfection of nature by grace and the role of art which may also bring nature's forms to perfection.

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INTRODUCTION

Near the end of Book VI of *The Faerie Queene*, the hero of Courtesy, Calidore, sees a hundred naked maidens dancing in a beautiful natural setting. They are arranged in one large and one small circle around a single young maiden, all dancing to the piping of Colin Clout. Colin explains that the maidens forming the circles are all divine creatures, the Three Graces of the smaller circle surrounded by lesser "graces," all gathered in a ritual of crowning a young mortal woman in the center who seems to have become a "goddesse graced / With heauenly gifts from heuen first enraced" (6.10.25). If the vision in canto x serves the same function as the climactic visions of the other books of *The Faerie Queene*, namely to reveal to the hero and to the reader the essential nature of the virtue of the book, then it follows that the vision of the Graces is allegorically illustrating the esssence of Courtesy.[1] The manner in which Spenser uses the image of the Graces to reveal the true nature of Courtesy will be the subject of this study.

The notion of Spenserian pictorialism has been a commonplace of the critical literature since Joseph Spence's mother declared in 1744, after she had been read a canto of *The Faerie Queene*, that her son "had been showing her a collection of pictures" (Spence 182).[2] Yet until recently,

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[1] In *Allegory of Love*, C. S. Lewis asserts that "the shepherd's country and Mount Acidale in the midst of it are the core of the book, and the key to Spenser's whole conception of courtesy" (350).

[2] Gottfried mentions some of the later critics who have developed this idea, including Joseph Warton, Hippolyte Taine, Edward Dowden, and W.B.C. Watkins. See also Frederick Hard, "Spenser's 'Clothes of Arras and of Toure,'" *Studies in Philology* 27 (1930): 162-185; "Princelie Pallaces," *Sewanee Review* 42 (1934): 293-310; Jefferson B.

Spenser's imagery has been frequently dismissed by critics as irrelevant decoration. According to Douglas Bush, Spenser's metaphors are "patches stuck on rather than a growth from within" (93). However, a significant contribution of modern studies of Spenser has been to show that his images are not merely decorative, but that they are integral to the construction of his allegory. As Tuve has shown, the interplay between statement and image in *The Faerie Queene* is subtle: Spenser's

> painting can at any moment slip onto the level of generalized abstraction, where response to it draws on the reader's fund of experience, not on his pictorial imagination. But no greater violence to the *poetry* of Spenser could be done than, by separating the two, to turn the poem into one vast picture gallery. (*Imagery* 59)

Spenser's images are intrinsic to his poetry and as such they cannot be separated from the language which surrounds them. Indeed, as MacLure has found in his study of *The Faerie Queene,* Spenser's "primary working device is the emblem . . . [and] his 'gallery of pictures' is actually a book of emblems, in which the 'essential significance' (*significacio*) of each picture is set out at large" (138). Therefore, while the images provide us with memorable pictures, these pictures are inseparable from the context of Spenser's iconographical comments upon them.

The popularity and the widespread circulation of emblem literature in the sixteenth century is well known, and it has long been understood that emblems and icons entered into the imaginative fabric of Spenser's

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Fletcher, "The Painter of Poets," *Studies in Philology* 14 (1917): 153-66; Rosemond Tuve, "Spenser and Some Pictorial Conventions," *Studies in Philology* 37 (1940): 149-76.

poetry as a whole (Ong 439-40). Rosemary Freeman has demonstrated in some detail that in *The Faerie Queene*, many of Spenser's allegorical figures closely resemble their counterparts in English emblem books (103-13).[3] Furthermore, several scholars have had recourse to iconography to help explain particularly puzzling images in *The Faerie Queene*.[4] While Rosemond Tuve notes the specific influence of the tradition of illustrated manuscripts, the spread of this iconographic tradition through emblem books, courtesy books, and paintings must also be considered as possible influences on *The Faerie Queene*.[5] While it is worth noting that Spenser was, for an Englishman of his time, in a position to become relatively informed about the visual arts of his own day and of the past - both in England and on the Continent - it is not very helpful to speculate upon what Spenser may or may not have seen.[6] Instead, since it is impossible to connect him to any specific works of art, it is far more revealing to

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[3] Freeman has even suggested that Spenser, with his strong visual imagination, himself influenced some of the emblem writers who succeeded him (71, 80-2).

[4] See, for example, R.R. Cummings "An Iconographical Puzzle: Spenser's Cupid at *Faerie Queene*, II, viii," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 33 (1970): 317-21; Graham Hough and Alastair Fowler "Spenser and Renaissance Iconography," *Essays in Criticism* 11 (1961): 233-8.

[5] See "Spenser and Mediaeval Mazers: With a Note on Jason in Ivory," *Studies in Philology* 34 (1937): 138-47, and "Spenser and Some Pictorial Conventions: With Particular Reference to Illuminated Manuscripts," *Studies in Philology* 37 (1940): 149-76.

[6] Rosemond Tuve, "Spenser and Some Pictorial Conventions," *Studies in Philology* 37 (1940): 149-76, has pointed to dozens of possible connections Spenser might have had with collectors and amateurs of medieval books and illuminated manscripts. Spenser also likely knew the collections of the Earl of Leicester and the Earl of Essex, as well as the Royal collections, but there are no specific references to any of these paintings in his poetry. See Oliver Millar and William J. Thoms.

observe the formation of Spenser's imagination by iconographic conventions widely current in his day.

However, since Spenser's images are not merely pictorial, they require more than viewing in order to be deciphered. Spenser, as is now well known, often re-works the symbolic conventions of his time to create the "clowdily enwrapped" allegory he describes in the prefatory Letter to Raleigh. To notice and appreciate these subtle or veiled effects requires a thorough understanding of the traditional symbolism that Spenser exploits. Indeed, Spenser's method underscores the Neoplatonic conviction "that truth must be veiled from the understanding of ordinary men, lest the truth become contaminated" (Phillips 100). A complete understanding of such images, whether iconographic or verbal, was available only to the select and initiated few.[7] In England, for example, Abraham Fraunce, one of Spenser's earliest supporters, described in 1592 the different levels of meaning in a poem:

> Poetical songs are galleries set forth with a variety of pictures to hold every man's eye. Here under a pleasant narrative the humbler sort may be delighted by the tales of heroes, while 'the more intelligent may find a moral sence included therein, estolling virtue, condemning vice, every way profitable for the institution of a practicall and commonwealth man. The rest, that are better born and of a nobler spirit shall meete with hidden mysteries of natural,

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[7] For a discussion of the perception and interpretation of such images in Renaissance painting, see Baxandall, Chapter II, "The Period Eye."

> astrologicall, or devine, or metaphysicall philosophie, to entertaine their heavenly speculation.[8]

With the complexity that the written word adds to the static icon, it is hardly surprising that Spenser's images are layered with significance and that it should take close examination to discover their hidden mysteries.

The first problem in uncovering the significance of the vision of the Three Graces is uncovering the significance of the specific virtue they symbolize. The nature of Spenser's Courtesy is controversial, for most criticism finds it either purely secular and unworthy of being in the company of such virtues as "holiness" and "justice," or idiosyncratically redefined by Spenser.[9] Recent critics, however, increasingly acknowledge Courtesy's theological aspect.[10] Yet while some critics have additionally felt that the prominent references to grace and providence in Book VI find

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[8] Abraham Fraunce, *Third Part of the Countess of Pembroke's Ivychurch, entituled Amyntes Dale* (1592), quoted in Katherine Koller, "Abraham Fraunce and Edmund Spenser," *ELH* 7 (1940): 119.

[9] For example, Kathleen Williams writes, in *Spenser's World of Glass*, "each of the virtues [in Spenser's six books] can be defined only by its legend, and one need not read far to realize that Spenser's courtesy has little enough to do with courtesy books but much to do with nature, providence, love, death and the generous exchanges of compassion and mutual respect among men" (201-2). Humphrey Tonkin presents the case that Spenser is reviving a broad medieval conception of Courtesy that had been lost by the sixteenth century (258-280); Gerald Morgan defines Spenser's Courtesy as essentially "the virtue of generosity" (18).

[10] See especially P. C. Bayley, "Order, Grace and Courtesy in Spenser's World," 178-202; and Maurice Evans, "Spenser's Anatomy of Heroism," Ch. 10. Moreover, various critical studies of the Graces in Book VI, such as Geller's, Nohrnberg's, Snare's and Tonkin's, interpret them in a semi-theological manner; since the Graces episode is central for Spenser's conception of Courtesy, it follows that Courtesy itself should also be interpreted along these lines.

a natural culmination in the vision of the Graces, others are wary of making a direct relation between the Graces and Christian grace.[11] However, Renaissance syncreticists often referred to the Three Graces of classical mythology as a veiled symbol of Christian grace (Phillips 103). Furthermore, consideration of the alterations which Spenser has made in the traditional mythography of the Graces supports the interpretation that Spenser does intend his Graces as symbols, among other references, of Christian grace. In fact, if we examine the context of the vision of the Graces, we see that Book VI provides a resonance which makes the Graces, as Spenser depicts them, a powerful symbol of the reconciliation of the natural and the divine.

Indeed, in Book VI, recognition of the grace in humans comes with the discernment of two kinds of properties, natural and divine, which both exist in a person. Spenser beautifully distinguishes between these two properties by using imagery of "heauenly seedes" that are "Planted in earth" throughout Book VI (6.Proem.3). Furthermore, Spenser makes explicit use of both natural and divine imagery in elaborating the main themes of the episodes in Book VI of *The Faerie Queene*. He describes the virtues of Calidore, the knight of Courtesy, as "planted naturall" (6.1.2), and the Salvage Man, "obaying natures first beheast," shows a kind of

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[11] Kathleen Williams develops this theme in "Courtesy and Pastoral in *The Faerie Queene*, Book VI," and is supported by Maurice Evans and Peter Bayley, *Edmund Spenser: Prince of Poets* , who equates the fourth Grace with Christian grace (148-52). However, Graham Hough is cautious about "overtones" of Christian meaning (*Preface* 210), and Donald Cheney argues that there is an "absence of a specifically Christian imagery in Book VI" (191-2).

rudimentary Courtesy in "senselesse words, which nature did him teach" (6.4.14/6.4.11). "Grace" is also a word repeated often in Book VI, whether it is Mirabella's "wondrous giftes of natures grace," or the Hermit's "grave beseeming grace" (6.7.28, 6.5.36).

It is, therefore, appropriate that Courtesy's most dazzling moment should unite the realms of nature and grace in the form of Calidore's striking vision of the Graces:

> He durst not enter into th'open greene,
> For dread of them unwares to be descryde,
> For breaking of their daunce, if he were seene;
> But in the couert of the wood did byde,
> Beholding all, yet of them unespyde.
> There he did see, that pleased much his sight,
> That euen he him selfe his eyes enuyde,
> An hundred naked maidens lilly white,
> All raunged in a ring, and dauncing in delight. (6.10.11)

Yet when the vision suddenly disappears we note that even this glimpse of the divine is veiled and withdrawn. There can be no doubt that the world Spenser describes in Book VI is a fallen one, and throughout Calidore's quest to defeat the Blatant Beast there is an emphasis on man's descent from a blissful, spontaneously virtuous world into one in which Courtesy "does hidden ly / From view of men, and wicked worlds disdaine" (6.Proem.3). Indeed, the Blatant Beast is a product of fallen nature and as such it cannot be defeated. In the course of Book VI as Calidore comes to this painful realization, he must learn to temper his

pain with the joy he experiences at the promise of perfect nature offered by the vision of the Graces.

While the vision of the Graces may be a vision of nature perfected by grace, it is also the product of poetic Art, for Spenser self-consciously announces his presence in the figure of the shepherd Colin. With this authorial device Spenser seems to be saying that only through the mediation of nature and art may we glimpse - albeit fleetingly - the unfallen world. This thesis intends to establish that the iconography of the Three Graces illustrates Spenser's complex notion of Courtesy. Although the nominal subject of Book VI is Courtesy, this thesis will demonstrate that the vision of the Graces reveals that Courtesy is inextricably linked to nature and grace, and to art which has the power to link the two. This thesis intends to provide an iconographical basis for Spenser's complex notion of Courtesy, not in the iconography of Courtesy itself, but through the symbol of the Three Graces. In Chapter One I will discuss Renaissance theories of Courtesy which account for the relationship of Spenser's Courtesy to Christian grace. Chapter Two examines Spenser's definition of Courtesy as outlined in the Proem of Book VI and expanded in the diverse tales which lead to the vision of the Graces. The episodes which make up Book VI take on an added significance as they demonstrate Courtesy, in Spenser's rich sense of it, as natural to unspoiled man but unavailable to fallen man unless restored by divine benevolence. Finally, in Chapter Three I will discuss Renaissance iconography of the Graces, Calidore's vision of the Graces and Spenser's use of iconography to support his definition of Courtesy. This study will

explore a previously overlooked relationship between the iconography of the Graces in Book VI and the natural and divine characteristics of Spenser's complex notion of Courtesy. Fragile though it may be, the vision of the Graces expresses the perfection of nature by grace and the role of art which may also bring nature's forms to perfection.

CHAPTER 1

Renaissance Theories of Courtesy

The Three Graces are the most complete of Spenser's symbols of Courtesy, and they are the centre of reference for the many episodes, characters, and images of Book VI. However, before examining these key episodes, it is helpful to attempt some clarification of what Spenser means by Courtesy. In the Proem to Book VI Spenser observes that when the world was created, Courtesy was "at first . . . by the Gods with paine / Planted in earth" (6.Proem.3). In the present age, however, virtue now "in siluer bowre does hidden ly / From view of men, and wicked worlds disdaine" (6.Proem.3). In fact, Courtesy is "now so farre from that, which then it was,"

> That it indeed is nought but forgerie,
> Fashion'd to please the eies of them, that pas,
> Which see not perfect things but in a glas:
> Yet is that glasse so gay, that it can blynd
> The wisest sight, to thinke gold that is bras. (6.Proem.5)

People do not see true Courtesy correctly because they do not understand what they are looking at. They see the display of fine manners, the "fayned shows . . . / Which carry colours faire," and that being their idea of Courtesy, they go no further towards an understanding of the virtue by failing to distinguish the brass from the gold (6.Proem.4). Spenser's definition of Courtesy is, of course, much broader than mannerly

behavior, and many critics have noted its complexity.[1] "Vertues seat," he goes on to claim in the Proem, "is deepe within the mynd / And not in outward shows, but inward thoughts defynd" (6.Proem.5). While most criticism finds Spenser's Courtesy to be purely secular, recent critics increasingly acknowledge the religious aspects of Book VI.[2] As this chapter will argue, besides being understood as a general code of polite behavior, Spenser's Courtesy has theological implications relating to Christian grace.

In the development of his idea of Courtesy, Spenser no doubt had recourse to the Courtesy literature of the period. Indeed, Courtesy is the subject of a number of Renaissance manuals which outline the ideal nature of a gentleman or a prince. However, as Dorothy Woodward Culp argues, an examination of this literature often confuses our understanding of Spenser's Courtesy since the writers define the term in several different ways (38-9). Because of the many different interpretations of Courtesy which these manuals offer, many critics, following C. S. Lewis, have suggested that there is a distinction between Courtesy being a virtue in

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[1] This complexity is reflected in modern criticism, which has not been able to clearly define Spenser's Courtesy or to discover its role in Book VI. Assessments range from Dorothy Woodward Culp's suggestion that the Courtesy Spenser describes in Book VI is not merely a social grace, but a moral duty (37), to Hough's defintion of Courtesy as the "final enhancement of a spontaneous grace . . . a natural flowering that crowns the whole with loveliness" (*Preface* 235).

[2] See, for example, P. C. Bayley, "Order, Grace and Courtesy in Spenser's World," 178-202; Kathleen Williams, *Spenser's World of Glass: A Reading of The Faerie Queene*, Ch. 6; Maurice Evans, *Spenser's Anatomy of Heroism: A Commentary on The Faerie Queene*, Ch. 10; Michael Tratner, "'The thing S. Paule ment by . . . the courteousness that he spake of': Religious Sources for Book VI of *The Faerie Queene*," 147-174; and Kenneth Borris, "'Diuelish Ceremonies': Allegorical Satire of Protestant Extremism in *The Faerie Queene* VI. viii. 31-51," 175-209.

itself and Courtesy as a behavior that reveals virtue (*Allegory* 351-2). Thus, Courtesy is often defined to mean a quality which tempers moral virtue with the social graces which are the special adornment of the gentleman. And indeed, when Spenser says that Courtesy is bearing oneself "aright" to others (6.2.1), when he says that it is "the ground, / And roote of ciuill conuersation" (6.1.1), he is placing it among the virtues that govern man's relationships with others in the social community.

According to Michael C. Schoenfeldt, accounts of Courtesy literature have often been marred "by a tendency to idealize or moralize the variegated project this literature undertakes" (3). But Frank Whigham's analysis of the literature emphasizes the irony by which Courtesy books, "a repertoire of actions invoked by, and meant to order, the surge of social mobility that occurred at the boundaries between ruling and subject classes in sixteenth-century England," actually enabled the socially mobile to mime the conduct of their courtly superiors (xi). As Schoenfeldt says, the "materials constituting the fences of the elite thus were reassembled as the ladders of the ambitious" (3). Nevertheless, class distinctions are firmly maintained in the Courtesy books. This is the basis of the Renaissance conflict between nature and grace, as Ruth Kelso claims in her study of the genre: "An inheritable inclination to virtue, a disposition toward good, was claimed as more likely to exist in the man of gentle birth" (109). However, inclination alone was believed to be insufficient, and both instruction and practice were also required to produce a virtuous man (Kelso 109). Although Spenser emphasizes "That gentle bloud will gentle manners breed," this does not mean that the gentle mind or gentle blood,

the source of courteous deeds, refers to qualities associated exclusively with the upper social classes (6.3.2):

> And certes it hath oftentimes bene seene,
> That of the like, whose linage was unknowne,
> More brave and noble knights have raysed beene,
> As their victorious deedes have often showen,
> Being with fame through many Nations blowen,
> Then those, which have bene dandled in the lap.
> Therefore some thought, that those braue imps were sowen
> Here by the Gods, and fed with heauenly sap,
> That made them grow so high t'all honorable hap. (6.4.36)

The question nevertheless remained, for both Spenser in particular and Renaissance society in general, of how to become virtuous. Ruth Kelso explains that

> The renaissance admitted that nature as the force which produces and preserves all things had planted in man as in all other animals an instinct toward the perfection peculiar to him, which was virtue; that as a further aid to the acquiring of virtue nature had also planted reason in man to serve in place of the instinct which guides the lower animals; that she in addition had given him a social instinct which made him unite with his kind for mutual support and comfort, virtues being impossible without society. (108)

Yet although nature had planted the "instinct toward perfection," nature alone is insufficient for its attainment.

In Book VI Spenser makes it clear that nature is fallen, and although some evidence of virtue might remain in the natural world, it is

insufficient and needs the supplement of God's grace. In some Courtesy books, Courtesy is solely the gift of nature. For example, in *The Courtier*, Castiglione writes, "some achieve courtesy wholly by a gift of nature, which enables them to do easily and well whatever they attempt, but most men, more niggardly endowed, must spend infinite pains to perfect themselves in their exercises and then as much pains again to seem to do easily what they do with difficulty" (qtd. in Kelso 83). For Spenser nature may also be of "great helpe":

> Thereto great helpe dame nature selfe doth lend:
> For some so goodly gratious are by kind,
> That euery action doth them much commend,
> And in the eyes of men great liking find;
> Which others, that haue greater skill in mind,
> Though they enforce themselues, cannot attain.
> For euerie thing, to which one is inclin'd,
> Doth best become, and greatest grace doth gaine:
> Yet praise likewise deserve good thewes, enforst with paine.
> (6.2.2)

Yet in Book VI, although an instinct for good may be a gift of nature, Courtesy is not. Spenser affirms the difficulty of drawing such a fine line between the realms of nature and grace. In fact, since a "gift of nature" requires the grace of God, the point of intermediation between nature and grace remains elusive and Spenser's language emphasizes this ambiguity. In Spenser's words Courtesy is given by "heauenly sap," rather than achieved by an individual's effort, a phrase whose natural and divine qualities reproduces the ambiguity of the relationship between the orders

of nature and grace (6.4.36). Nevertheless, in Book VI, Courtesy is given by nature and perfected by grace. Castiglione recognizes the same divine origin of virtue: "Truth it is, whether it be through the favor of the Starres or of nature, some there are borne indued with such graces, that they seeme not to have beene borne, but rather fashioned with the verie hand of some God, and abound in all goodness both of bodie and minde" (32). Similarly, Spenser's Courtesy as the "roote of civill conversation" (6.1.1) consists of more than "comely carriage, entertainement kynde, / Sweete semblaunt," and "friendly offices that bynde" (6.10.23), for it involves many further considerations relating to its reliance upon grace.

The Courtesy books further account for Spenser's approach to the virtue because many depend to some extent on theological views of virtue.[3] As Schoenfeldt states, in the English Renaissance the increased popularity of both manuals of Courtesy and of devotional literature testifies

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[3] As Borris argues "Medieval courtesy often had theological implications, for its affinities with charitable love of one's neighbor opened it to religious treatment" ("Courtesy" 194). Kelso agrees that in the Middle Ages "Knighthood meant essentially devotion, courage, charity and courtesy. The spring of action was religious, desire to defend the faith against all enemies, both heretics and infidels, and to carry out God's justice on earth" (71). However, in the Renaissance "the spring of action was no longer religious but political, and the devotion of the gentleman had become attached to an idea rather than to a deity, and to a class rather than to a person. Hence, though elements in the gentleman's code will be found to have been the same as in the knight's, the emphasis will have changed and the medieval knight would have appeared very old-fashioned indeed among Elizabethan courtiers, or even country gentleman" (Kelso 71). Nevertheless, Kelso later goes on to argue that a "survey of renaissance standards of conduct is incomplete without a consideration of the Christian element, which, while it tended rather to run parallel with the general code of morals than to be an integral part of it, was held essential to the ideal...[Piety]...was assumed to be the foundation for the gentleman's rule of life" (106).

> to the pressing need for imitable patterns of behavior in a time of baffling change. Both literatures involve modes of discourse intended to discipline an unruly self for presentation to a superior being - just what was needed by a culture made anxious by the great social and theological upheavals it experienced but could not fully comprehend. (7)

In fact, in the preface to his manual *The Diamond of Devotion* (1608), Abraham Fleming exploits the parallels between civil and devotional literature by promising "the true Christian Reader" that as Courtesy literature teaches one how "to grow in favour with Princes, Potentates, and Governors," this work will show how "to please [God], & to direct our lives after his good pleasure" (2-4).[4] Indeed, most Courtesy books provide ethical guides to etiquette which include proper religious observance (Schoenfeldt 7). Erasmus' *De Civilitate Morum Puerilium* (translated into English in 1532 as *A Lytell Booke of Good Manners for Children*) has consecutive chapters entitled "Of apparayle," "Of Manners in the Temple," and "Of manners at table," as Schoenfeldt says, "locating religious behavior somewhere between issues of proper dress and commensal etiquette" (6-7). Indeed, many Courtesy books, like Geoffrey de la Tour-Landry's *Livre du Chevalier de la Tour*, link manners directly with virtue and spiritual salvation; and some, like Christine de Pisan's *Epistre d'Othéa* and Jacques Legrand's *Livre de bonnes moeurs*, are essentially devotional

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[4] In fact Courtesy books and devotional literature eventually become so closely linked that in the seventeenth century, "gradually the courtesy book merges into the manual of devotion" (Noyes 4).

manuals dealing with civil life (Borris, "Courtesy" 195). Many further works of the period, such as John Woolton's *Christian Manual* (1576), regard social conduct in even stronger theological terms (Borris, "Courtesy" 195).

Although earlier Courtesy books tend to assume that manners and social intercourse express inner virtue conceived according to Christian doctrine, later ones apply such standards more subtly to social life (Borris, "Courtesy" 194). In these definitions of Courtesy, the term "grace" loses its purely theological meaning and merges with the secular sense of the word. Grace thus became the distinguishing quality of gentlemanly behavior and Courtesy became "knowledge of what behavior was fitting to each man including oneself, and graciousness in bestowing upon each his due" (Kelso 79). As Della Casa writes in *Galateo*, "Therefore, a man must not be content with doing what is good, but he must also seek to do it gracefully . . . Without this measure, even that which is good will not be beautiful, and beauty will not be pleasing" (53). According to Kelso, in these manuals "Courtesy thus becomes a purely external matter, of mercenary aspect, not the fine outward expression of a fine inward feeling" (88). She points out that "courtesy as a gentlemanly virtue was fundamentally . . . a beautifier of society adding grace to the actions of [a man] . . . allowing his real worth and accomplishments to shine forth and draw the eyes of all men to him . . . [for the] renaissance gentleman had his eye chiefly upon himself" (Kelso 88). Nevertheless, although it would appear that this aspect of Courtesy has little to do with theological virtue, as Borris argues, the "new emphasis by these writers on the aesthetics of

social behavior complements their moral standpoint because they associated beauty with good" ("Courtesy" 194). And the same occurs in Book VI where the beauty of the Graces' dance presents a divine standard of gracious behavior:

> These three on men all gracious gifts bestow,
> Which decke the body or adorne the mynde,
> To make them louely or well fauoured show,
> As comely carriage, entertainment kynde,
> Sweete semblaunt, friendly offices that bynde,
> And all the complements of curtesie:
> They teach vs, how to each degree and kynde
> We should our selues demeane, to low, to hie;
> To friends, to foes, which skill men call Ciuility. (6.10.23)

In Calidore's vision of the Graces, grace is not only present as a divine blessing, but also as a reflection of heavenly beauty. The Graces not only bestow "all gracious gifts," they "teach us" exactly how to conduct ourselves (6.10.23). Thus "grace," as both an integral part of Courtesy, and an attribute of it, develops connotations of both graciousness, a quality which can be learned, and God's grace, which must be freely granted or come by divine inspiration.

Therefore, in deriving Courtesy from "the sacred noursery," Spenser, like these writers, supplements his notion of Courtesy with Christian doctrine (6.Proem.3). Yet Spenser surpasses most of the Courtesy literature by asserting that grace is intrinsic to his conception of Courtesy. Furthermore, the endless debate surrounding nature and grace and the ambiguous connection between the two orders, provides Spenser's

Courtesy with a resonance from these elusive areas which the definitions in the literature avoid or miss. Spenser's invocation in the Proem to Book VI assumes that Courtesy has a divine origin and a profound significance worthy of poetic theology:

> Such secret comfort, and such heauenly pleasures,
> Ye sacred imps, that on *Parnasso* dwell,
> And there the keeping haue of learnings threasures,
> Which doe all worldly riches farre excell,
> Into the mindes of mortall men doe well,
> And goodly fury into them infuse;
> Guyde ye my footing, and conduct me well
> In these strange waies, where neuer foote did vse,
> Ne none can find, but who was taught them by the Muse.
>
> Reuele to me the sacred noursery
> Of vertue, which with you doth there remaine,
> Where it in siluer bowre does hidden ly
> From view of men, and wicked worlds disdaine.
> Since it at first was by the Gods with paine
> Planted in earth, being deriu'd at furst
> From heauenly seedes of bounty soueraine,
> And by them long with carefull labour nurst,
> Till it to ripenesse grew, and forth to honour burst. (6.Proem.2-3)

Thus, as Spenser makes clear in his definition, Courtesy stems from a trust in God, and from God arises a trust in nature as it was "at first" created (6.Proem.3). Although, because of the Fall, Courtesy is "now so farre from that, which then it was," as Spenser states in the Proem, it is still available through God's grace (6.Proem.5). In Book VI Spenser accesses God's grace

through the intercession of art, here, with the invocation to the "sacred imps," and later under the guise of the piper Colin whose music summons the vision of the Graces (6.Proem.2).

Spenser's analysis of Courtesy is not only explicit, as in the Proem to Book VI, but it is also presented through the episodes and allegories which follow. The episodes which make up Book VI take on an added significance as they demonstrate Courtesy, in Spenser's rich sense of it, as natural to unspoiled man but unavailable to fallen man unless restored by divine benevolence. While the vision of the Graces is central for understanding this aspect of Courtesy, further insight can be gained through an investigation of the adventures preceding it.

CHAPTER 2

"Heauenly seedes of bounty soueraine": Courtesy, Nature and Grace in Book VI

The vision of the Graces, in Colin's interpretation, tells us that Courtesy consists, at least in part, of "comely carriage, entertainement kynde, / Sweet semblaunt, friendly offices that bynde" (6.10.23). Yet as we have seen in Chapter One, many Renaissance definitions of Courtesy involve a spiritual aspect and Spenser also relates Courtesy to Christian grace. Thus Spenser's definition of Courtesy as the "friendly offices that bynde" involves more than gracious sociability (6.10.23). In Book VI, Spenser's Courtesy is closely related to nature from the Proem on, and indeed nature is responsible for all kinds of things in this part of the poem: Disdaine is "terrible by nature" (6.7.41); Calidore's Courtesy is "planted naturall" (6.1.2); Tristram's Courtesy blossoms "Like as a flowre, whose silken leaues small, / Long shvt up in the bud from heauens vew, / At length breakes forth" (6.2.35). However, Courtesy is not simply the fairest flower among the virtues; it is also planted "by the Gods" (6.Proem.3). In the Proem Spenser tells us that the flower of virtue is derived "From heauenly seedes of bounty soueraine" (6.Proem.3). This line in itself suggests both the natural and divine qualities of Courtesy. Furthermore, the supernatural quality of Courtesy is suggested by Courtesy's antithesis, the Blatant Beast. Although on one level the Beast is Slander, it is also a metaphysical principle that eludes capture. Throughout Book VI, the divine and natural components of Spenser's

Courtesy are exemplified by the episodes which lead the way to Calidore's vision of the Graces in the tenth canto.[1]

Although the first canto of Book VI begins with the line, "Of Court it seemes, men Courtesie doe call" (6.1.1), Courtesy's roots lie much deeper than the court. The central section of the book demonstrates that Courtesy is not simply a matter of behaving well at court, for it involves a feeling of harmony not only with human beings outside formal society but with nature itself. To make his readers dissociate Courtesy from the outward shows of courtly etiquette, Spenser presents the courteous characters in Book VI - such as Calidore, Tristram, the Salvage Man, the Hermit, and Pastorella - as individuals totally removed from court, or dispossessed of their social rank altogether. In fact the Book of Courtesy takes place entirely in a forest setting which culminates in the pastoral vision of the Three Graces. While the court seems to have disappeared from the Book of Courtesy, the prominence of nature in this part of the poem serves an important purpose. As Tonkin writes,

> To claim, as Spenser's narrator claims, that courtesy is no longer to be found at court, is only another way of saying that definition of the proper social order involves a return to first principles. One way of articulating such a return is by adoption of the pastoral mode, a kind of historical jump into the myth of primitivism. The

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[1] Arnold Williams writes "every incident, every character, every detail will have some bearing on courtesy. That bearing need not be direct and obvious, so that every action will be a direct, conscious expression of some character's courtesy or discourtesy. Some leeway must be left for accident and fortune. But there should be some bearing, direct or indirect" (41). Cheney agrees that "all the figures in Book VI are involved in a common range of concerns" (192).

> depiction of a world without cities also helps to stress the fact that neither society itself nor the individual within the society is self-sufficient; there must be a continued contact, a giving and receiving, with what lies outside. (Tonkin 179)

While Spenser's adoption of the pastoral motif not only stresses the importance of a contact "with what lies outside society," as Tonkin suggests, it also underlines the importance of nature to Courtesy (179). In other words, the proper functioning of society depends upon the proper functioning of the gracious exchange of Courtesy, which in turn depends upon close contact with nature.

Yet while many of the actions and characters are removed from court in Book VI, most of these characters prove to be nobly born, and their gentle manners are shown to be an expression of their gentle blood. However, as Javitch argues, "by stressing the idea that 'blood will tell,' the author means to emphasize the inborn, natural qualities of courtesy: it can be enhanced by nurture and courtly training, but an overlay of good manners will not make courteous those who lack the seed of virtue implanted by nature" (155). While the seed of virtue derives in large part from the natural endowment of the individual - from an inward nature which Spenser variously calls the gentle mind, the gentle heart or gentle blood - alone this is not enough to make one courteous.[2] Indeed, it is characteristic of the ambiguity of the debate between nature and grace, and of the ambiguity which is characteristic of Spenser's Courtesy, that this "inward nature" is in fact a spiritual endowment. The seed of Courtesy

[2] See for example, 6.3.1; 6.3.2; 6.7.1.

may be natural but it is planted "by the Gods" (6.Proem.3), and although the point of intermediation between nature and grace remains elusive, it is clear that nature alone is insufficient and must be supplemented by grace.

Twice the Salvage Man appears in a providential role, rescuing Serena and Calidore from Turpine, and waking Arthur, whose life is threatened by Turpine. It would be wrong, nonetheless, to regard him as an unqualified ideal of humanity. The Salvage Man is good by nature:

> In such a saluage wight, of brutish kynd,
> Amongst wilde beastes in desert forrests bred,
> It is most straunge and wonderfull to fynd
> So milde humanity, and perfect gentle mynd. (6.5.29)

Although we are later told that he too is of "noble blood," the Salvage Man has been isolated from human society to such an extent that he lacks manners in the conventional sense, even speech (6.5.2).[3] Yet despite the fact that he has been forced to draw his knowledge from nature, the Salvage Man brings something extra to nature because of his noble inheritance, and it is this quality which provokes him to sympathetic action on behalf of others. Later, however, we discover the limitations of

[3] As "an antitype of corrupted life in court and city," the Salvage Man has been compared to images of the Wild Man in northern Renaissance art (Silver 11). In fact, there are several interesting parallels between the natural and divine aspects of the iconography of the Graces discussed in Chapter 3, and the iconography of the Wild Man which also establishes a connection between nature and grace. Both Silver and Husband have noted this "fundamental dualism" underlying the iconography of the Wild Man, based on one hand, upon the savage existence of natural man, and on the other hand, upon the link between his simple, innocent life of retreat and Christian humility (Husband 12).

this innate goodness. For example, although the Salvage Man is angered by the discourtesy of Turpine and by the viciousness of Disdaine and Scorne, he is so "vndisciplynd," that he must be restrained by Arthur in both cases (6.5.1):

> Tho all in rage, he on him streight did seaze,
> As if he would in peeces him haue rent;
> And were not, that the Prince did him appeaze,
> He had not left one limbe of him vnrent:
> But streight he held his hand at his commaundement. (6.6.40)

Instincts however noble are clearly not sufficient. Some criticism tends to view the Salvage Man as a noble savage, that is, man as he was created by God.[4] Yet although the Salvage Man obeys his natural instincts for good, Spenser nevertheless portrays him as a primitive creature needing to be lifted up by the gracious influence of Arthur. Spenser seems to argue that true Courtesy can only be performed by one who combines natural virtue with grace, as Arthur does, since Arthur is frequently the agent of divine grace in *The Faerie Queene.*

Indeed, when Calidore disappears from the poem's narrative on his quest for the Beast in the central cantos, Arthur appears as an exemplar of Courtesy. As C. S. Lewis writes,

> Arthur is the rescuer *par excellence,* who saves others when all their own efforts have failed. Champions of virtues, the knights of

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[4] For example, Hamilton states that the Salvage Man may perhaps "be identified with the prelapsarian state, man's essential nature without nurture" (654).

> Holiness, Temperance, and Chastity, not to speak of lesser characters, seem irredeemably lost, until they are rescued by him. He is the "prince of grace," it seems, in a more than chivalric sense. Clearly some close relation obtains between rescuer and redeemer, between Arthur and a liberating faith in the person of Christ. (*Images* 135)[5]

Arthur is not only a paragon of virtue, but a symbol of divine grace, as demonstrated by his care of Serena, the sparing of Enias, and his willingness to release Mirabella from her persecutors.[6] Although the Salvage Man has a fundamental impulse to do good, it is in a cruder form. Thus when he joins Arthur his good intentions pass under the guidance of grace, and it is grace which elevates a natural inclination to gentleness to the virtue of Courtesy.

However, it is important to note that while the Salvage Man is dependent upon Arthur's aid, so too must others depend on aid from the Salvage Man. Calepine and Serena depend on him, and so does Arthur when the Salvage Man accompanies him as his page after Timias has been injured by the Blatant Beast. Again Spenser makes the point that Courtesy depends on maintaining contact with nature. As Cheney writes,

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[5] Lewis adds this insight: "Any direct leap from the literal Arthur to the theological would of course have horrified Christian feeling. But the Platonic level provided a meeting-ground between. It was unobjectionable to present an Arthur with philosophical overtones, and the Platonic Arthur was in turn easily syncretized with the Christian" (*Images* 135).

[6] "Whatever Spenser may say in the Letter to Ralegh, Arthur, as the soul whose gaze is fixed beyond the world, is the knight of Faith. Everything makes this clear, down to the details of his accoutrements" (Lewis, *Images* 134).

> The Salvage Man therefore provides another, larger significance to the emphasis on diplomacy seen throughout Book VI: his presence suggests that in order to create and maintain a flourishing society, man must make use not merely of his higher powers but of his lower powers as well. He must unite his brutish and gentle natures to achieve a cultured mildness of manner which is constantly being invigorated, strengthened, and defended by contact with the rigors of nature. (Cheney 210-11)

Therefore, the union of Arthur and the Salvage Man in these central cantos prepares the reader for the pastoral episodes which constitute the Book's climax, for the vision of the Graces symbolizes the courteous union of the natural and the divine.

Opposed to this union of nature and grace, which is what Spenser means by Courtesy, is discourtesy. Indeed, it is not primitivism or even brutishness which is condemned in Book VI. The spirit of discourtesy manifests itself in unnatural disorder. Calidore, the Salvage Man, the Hermit, Serena, all play a part in the continuing circulation of gifts from heaven, among men and back again to heaven in a reciprocity of gifts which is expressed in terms that anticipate the vision of the Graces. Opposed to them are those who interrupt and reverse the natural cycle of benefits. While the Blatant Beast is the main antitype of Courtesy, Crudor, Turpine, Mirabella, and the Cannibals are all important representatives of discourtesy and unnatural behaviour.

Calidore's first adventure is a case of combating and correcting such cruel action. The perilous route past Briana's castle should provide her with the opportunity to perform a "friendly good deede" to those who

"needs must passe that way" (6.1.13). Instead, she turns the opportunity for a natural and generous exchange into an opportunity for exacting a shameful toll from knights and their ladies. The cause of this discourtesy is that Crudor will not love Briana for herself, but demands a price: the mantle. Crudor's refusal to reciprocate Briana's love, "through high disdaine / And proud despight of his selfe pleasing mynd," offends the spirit of free exchange which is at the heart of the meaning of the Graces (6.1.15). The price Crudor demands from Briana implies that, by complying in a certain way with his demands, Briana will finally be able to "purchase" Crudor's love, just as Crudor's pride makes him want to think that his love can eventually be "bought." A genuine benefit, however, must be bestowed freely and generously. Hence, the "gifts" which Crudor and Briana exchange, she "a ring of gould" and he, foolishly, his own "basenet," "that of him she mote assured stand," are a parodic inversion of genuine Courtesy which includes the "friendly offices that bynde" later symbolized by the Graces (6.1.29,6.1.31,6.10.23). Crudor's reformation, with his marriage to Briana and his promise to be merciful to others, is a restoration of Courtesy because, as Cheney writes, it restores the spirit of the courteous "exchange of the gifts bestowed by a gracious Nature" (190). It is important to note that in order to restore the natural and gracious exchange of Courtesy, Calidore makes Crudor pledge his reformation upon a "crosse" (6.1.43) and then leaves him "with a lesson on Christian mercy" (Evans 217):

> Who will not mercie vnto others shew,
>   How can he mercy euer hope to haue?

> To pay each with his owne is right and dew.
> Yet since ye mercie now doe need to craue,
> I will it graunt, your hopelesse life to saue . . . (6.1.42)

Calidore's words not only describe the gracious exchange of benefits, they further underscore the necessity of Christian grace to Courtesy.

Like Briana and Crudor, Mirabella reverses the generous exchange of benefits by abusing the gifts freely given her by nature. She uses her beauty as a God-like power over her suitors, giving or withholding benefits as she sees fit: "She could or saue, or spill, whom she would hight. / What could the Gods doe more, but doe it more aright" (6.7.31). Spenser describes the effects of Mirabella's pride and insolence in terms of a circle of benefits gone awry: "And the more she did all loue despize, / The more would wretched louers her adore" (6.7.20). Indeed, Mirabella's pride causes love to turn in upon itself and thus, turned aside from the creative ascent towards God, it must inevitably lead to a destruction of Courtesy. In order to restore the gracious cycle, therefore, she is sentenced to wander through the wilderness in the company of Disdaine and Scorn: "Till she had sau'd so many loues as she did lose" (6.7.37).

As the examples of discourtesy become more unnatural in Book VI, the gracious exchange of nature's gifts becomes more distorted and the "bands of ciuilitie" become more and more fragile (6.1.26). Serena's capture by the cannibals is a relatively brief but striking passage, illustrating a complete reversal of grace. Here Spenser shows that in contrast to the Salvage Man who obeys "natures first beheast," nature's

children are not necessarily noble and generous by instinct, because at times they act in opposition to nature (6.4.14):

> Thereto they vsde one most accursed order,
> To eate the flesh of men, whom they mote fynde,
> And straungers to deuoure, which on their border
> Were brought by errour, or by wreckfull wynde.
> A monstrous cruelty gainst course of kynde. (6.8.36)

When they find Serena sleeping the cannibals begin to celebrate "For ioy of such good hap by heauenly grace" and finally decide, despite their hunger, to sacrifice her to "their God" before their feast (6.8.37, 6.8.38):

> . . . they all gaue one consent,
> That since by grace of God she was there sent,
> Vnto their God they would her sacrifize,
> Whose share, her guiltlesse bloud they would present,
> But of her dainty flesh they did deuize
> To make a common feast, and feed with gurmandize. (6.8.38)

Yet in a final debasement of their religious will, the cannibals lose sight of their sacrificial purpose to their hunger and their lust, and their Priest has to step in to rebuke them: "dare not to pollute so sacred threasure, / Vow'd to the gods" (6.8.43). Thus, as Spenser comments, "religion held euen theeves in measure" (6.8.43). Despite the overtly religious language and imagery, Spenser makes it clear that these are "diuelish ceremonies" (6.8.45) performed by "infernall feends" (6.8.49).[7] Yet under their

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[7] Borris finds that "numerous details of language and imagery have an allegorically satiric significance relating to doctrinal and other aspects of Elizabethan religious

misguided principles, these "diuelish ceremonies" are the proper way to celebrate "the goodly threasures of nature" (6.8.41). It proves, as Cheney says, how "the religious impulse can be perverted and made an expression of man's bestiality" when that impulse proceeds against the course of nature (116). The cannibals exemplify such misuse at its most extreme, for they live by preying on the weak, serving "their owne necessities with others need," thereby distorting nature *and* grace (6.8.35). As Woodhouse states, "With the forces of evil in nature, the evil in fallen man enters into alliance, and in them it finds a support. Hence the necessity of grace to rescue and rectify nature" (52).

Even worse are the three enemies of Timias - Despetto, Decetto, and Defetto:

> . . . for his three foes
> Sought to encompasse him on euery side,
> And dangerously did round about enclose.
> But most of all *Defetto* him annoyde,
> Creeping behinde him still to haue destroyde:
> So did *Decetto* eke him circumuent,
> But stout *Despetto* in his greater pryde,
> Did front him face to face against him bent,
> Yet he them all withstood, and often made relent. (6.5.20)

They ambush Timias and "heaped strokes did round about him haile," as they "beat about him round" (6.5.18, 6.5.19). The imagery of the circle which seeks to enclose and destroy stands in contrast to the Graces' dance.

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conditions" and that the episode is in fact an attack on Protestant extremists ("Diuelish Ceremonies" ix).

In fact, Fowler has linked Despetto, Decetto, and Defetto in opposition to aspects of the Three Graces and certainly, as the Graces' symbolize Courtesy, these three represent different aspects of the same malice (64-5). Indeed, when this horrible trio fail to ruin Timias they call on the Blatant Beast thereby underlying their connection to the nemesis of Courtesy.

The foremost example of discourtesy is, of course, the Blatant Beast. This is evident from the moment of his introduction in Book VI where his birth is described as a gross distortion of Courtesy's natural blossoming in the Proem:

> Of *Cerberus* whilome he was begot,
> And fell *Chimæra* in her darkesome den,
> Through fowle commixture of his filthy blot;
> Where he was fostred long in *Stygian* fen,
> Till he to perfect ripenesse grew, and then
> Into this wicked world he forth was sent,
> To be the plague and scourge of wretched men:
> Whom with vile tongue and venemous intent
> He sore doth wound, and bite, and cruelly torment. (6.1.8)

Whereas Courtesy grew to "ripenesse" in a "sacred noursery" hidden "From view of men, and wicked worlds disdaine," the Beast grew to "perfect ripenesse" in a "darkesome den" and then was sent "Into this wicked world . . . / To be the plague and scourge of wretched men" (6.Proem.3, 6.1.8). As this passage indicates, the Blatant Beast, "bred of hellish strene" (6.6.9), is the worst of fallen nature's creatures for it is a perversion of gracious nature and yet, as an element of nature, it cannot be defeated. This becomes evident when its victims are attacked and cannot

be treated "With salue, or antidote, or other mene" (6.6.9). In fact its victims are treated by the Hermit under explicitly religious conditions emphasizing the effect that grace can have on fallen nature:

> And nigh thereto a little Chappell stoode,
> Which being all with Yuy ouerspred,
> Deckt all the roofe, and shadowing the roode,
> Seem'd like a groue faire branched ouer hed:
> Therein the Hermite, which his life here led
> In streight obseruance of religious vow,
> Was wont his howres and holy things to bed;
> And therein he likewise was praying now,
> Whenas these Knights arriu'd, they wist not where nor how.
> (6.5.35)

The images of greenery point to the Hermit's life in harmony with nature, but his healing ability goes beyond nature's means. He adds to his knowledge of "many kindes of medicines" a spiritual skill which enables him to "counsell" Serena and Timias (6.6.2, 6.6.13). Nevertheless, the Blatant Beast is evil at its worst, dispersing goodness in its wake:

> A wicked Monster, that his tongue doth whet
> Gainst all, both good and bad, both most and least,
> And poures his poysnous gall forth to infest
> The noblest wights with notable defame:
> Ne euer Knight, that bore so lofty creast,
> Ne euer Lady of so honest name,
> But he them spotted with reproch, or secrete shame. (6.6.12)

Furthermore, the Blatant Beast, or Slander, is such an alarming perversion of Courtesy because of its tenuous relationship to its victims. Serena, wandering in the wood "Without suspect of ill or daungers hidden dred" is attacked by the Blatant Beast, an episode which demonstrates how easily an innocent person can become a victim of slander (6.3.23).[8] As Berger points out, "attacks of slander are not made on the evil but on the virtuous; otherwise they would not be slander. Since the Beast represents nothing whatsoever in the souls of its victims, its forays appear as sudden and inexplicable to us as they do to the sufferers" (221-2).

Related to the theme of virtue under attack are the many instances of innocence interrupted or destroyed. The lovers of Book VI are always broken in upon, however innocent and legitimate their embraces. Aladine and Priscilla are "Joying together in unblam's delight" (6.2.43), when they are attacked by a discourteous knight without reason or provocation. Calidore himself breaks in upon Calepine when "In covert shade him selfe did safely rest, / To solace with his Lady in delight" (6.3.20). Later, as Serena is sleeping, "Fearlesse of ought, that mote her peace molest" (6.8.34), she is seized by the Cannibals.[9] Indeed the world in

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[8] As Borris explains, "The Beast's close relation to adversely capricous chance and Fortune complements its more general relation to disorder and evil, for there was a Christian tradition of associating Fortune with evil that was still current in the Elizabethan period. Spenser's conception of the Beast evidently involves that idea, because we often find that, as Dorothy Culp and others have shown through study of the narrative, virtue often seems at odds with chance and Fortune in Book VI" ("Fortune" 130).

[9] As Cheney points out, this same type of interruption will occur later "in the case of Calidore's intrusion on the private vision of Colin Clout (6.10.18), where his arrival

which Courtesy must be practised is not dominated by reason and order. Both malice and misfortune intervene to frustrate good intentions. Moreover, Spenser makes it clear that Serena is wrong to assume an innocence which the world, as it is, cannot support, as his description of her innocent wandering "about the fields" implies: "as liking led / Her wauering lust after her wandring sight, /. . . thus loosely wandring here and there" (6.3.23-4). The destruction of the shepherds' pastoral community by the Brigants is, though on a larger scale, only the final instance of the pattern of threatened innocence which runs throughout Book VI. As Evans points out, "Although we are apt to think of book VI as the most idyllic of them all, the world it presents is a fallen one, and an important function of the idyll is to remind us that Ardens and Edens are no more to be found" (212). In Book VI grace thus becomes necessary to restore fallen nature and to prompt the gracious circle of benefits which makes the world courteous.

From the beginning of Book VI until the concluding stanzas, both the insufficiency of nature and the necessity of grace to renew nature are emphasized. Finally, with the Blatant Beast's attacks upon the clergy and the monasteries, and Calidore's expulsion of it from "the sacred Church", it becomes clear that Courtesy's quest is inextricably linked to spiritual goals (6.12.25). When Calidore finally overcomes the Beast, however temporarily, his

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again interrupts the courteous exchange and calls for a new demonstration of Calidore's skill at graceful apologies" (198).

> success is portrayed in accord with Christian doctrine about the limits of virtuous achievement in this world, and its reward in afterlife; in this sense, the quest of Courtesy is a highly accomplished exemplar of the way in which Christian heroic virtue engages evil in the world. (Borris, "Fortune" 137)

As an embodiment of fallen nature the Beast cannot be defeated and its permanency stands in opposition to the evanescence of the vision of the Graces which represents nature at its fullest grace. Thus Spenser concludes Book VI with the pastoral episode, where the vision of the Three Graces suggests not only the transience of good fortune but the importance of the spirit which governs a courteous community.

Less primitive than the Salvage Man, but hardly less innocent, are the shepherds of Book VI. Theirs is a simple life to which anyone can aspire, as they tell Calidore: "if ye algates couet to assay / This simple sort of life, that shepheards lead, / Be it your owne: our rudenesse to your selfe aread" (6.9.33). In addition, Meliboe subsequently tells Calidore that

> It is the mynd, that maketh good or ill,
> That maketh wretch or happie, rich or poore:
> For some, that hath abundance at his will,
> Hath not enough, but wants in greatest store;
> And other, that hath litle, askes no more,
> But in that litle is both rich and wise.
> For wisedome is most riches; fooles therefore
> They are, which fortunes doe by vowes deuize,
> Sith each vnto himselfe his life may fortunize. (6.9.30)

Meliboe thus affirms the pastoral philosophy that man can be fortunate whatever his situation, his status or his circumstances are, and that fortune "is a function not of material things but of the spirit" (Borris, "Fortune" 138-9). Meliboe is "So taught of nature, which doth litle need" (6.9.20), and as he explains,

> The litle that I haue, growes dayly more
> Without my care, but onely to attend it;
> . . . .
> What haue I, but to praise th'Almighty, that doth send it? (6.9.21)

Meliboe's description of his simple life expresses the circle of ever-increasing graces which Courtesy creates: he gratefully accepts God's grace and returns thanks to God, the true giver of Nature's goods. Colin's interpretation of the circle of Graces suggests the same idea: "that good should from vs goe, then come in greater store" (6.10.24). Indeed, the shepherds have created a community in which grace can shift from trying to elicit the first growth of the seeds of Courtesy in people to nurturing and sharing in the fruit that grows from those seeds of Courtesy. It is in this natural and spiritual setting that the "heauenly seedes of bounty soueraine" may fully ripen "and forth to honour burst" (6.Proem.3).

It is not a coincidence that this natural and spiritual setting is the location of the vision of the Graces since the vision exemplifies the natural and divine components of Spenser's Courtesy. In his study of *The Faerie Queene*, Woodhouse argues for a reconciliation of nature and grace

in the poem.[10] As Woodhouse explains, there was a long tradition of Christian humanism which

> insisted that the order of grace was the superstructure whose foundations were securely laid in nature; that there was no interval between the two orders; that grace came to perfect nature, an idea including discipline and a miraculous remedy for man's fall; that well-being must be defined in terms of the two orders simultaneously, and that what was for man's good as a natural being could not be to his detriment as a supernatural, or *vice versa.* (26)

Spenser's definition of Courtesy in the Proem as a reconciliation of the natural and the supernatural, and the development of this idea in the narrative of Book VI, therefore, conforms to a Renaissance theory of nature and grace, and in addition, as we have seen, to contemporary notions of Courtesy.[11] It is significant that in the various episodes of Book VI, Spenser emphasizes the relationship of the natural and the divine to Courtesy, before moving to the vision on Mount Acidale where the Graces will link the natural even more closely to the divine. Here, the distinct tales of Book VI will be reconciled in a single vision. As Kathleen

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[10] However, Woodhouse argues that since "we have only the first half of the pattern of the *Faerie Queene*, "that synthesis is "prepared for, but held in solution, perhaps even till Book XII" (39).

[11] During the Renaissance, there was endless debate surrounding the orders of nature and grace and the intermediation of the two orders. Nevertheless, the links between nature and grace remained essentially elusive, and although Book VI can be placed firmly in the centre of the nature-grace question in general, the poem also takes life from Spenser's use of the ambiguity surrounding the debate. For background on the debate see Alister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification*, while both Woodhouse and Gless discuss Spenser's position on the question.

Williams writes: "The values which have been partially exemplified, both positively and negatively, in the stories of Serena, Turpine, Tristram, are here fully embodied, so that the pastoral interlude is not really an interlude at all, but a thematic centre which unifies the dispersed adventures preceding it" ("Courtesy" 337). If we approach the tenth canto with these ideas in mind, the importance of the iconography of the Graces will become evident.

CHAPTER 3

Renaissance Iconography of the Graces

Preceding chapters of this study have attempted to suggest that Spenser's theory of Courtesy involves both nature and grace. It remains to discuss the ways in which Calidore's vision of the Three Graces expresses this definition of Courtesy. It is significant that the vision occurs as Calidore ventures further away from the court:

> Him first from court he to the citties coursed,
> And from the citties to the townes him prest,
> And from the townes into the countrie forsed,
> And from the country back to priuate farmes he scorsed. (6.9.3)

Finally, Calidore reaches the "open fields" of the shepherds and joins their natural community, "doffing his bright armes" and his "courteous guize" (6.9.4, 6.9.36, 6.9.35). The pastoral interlude is full of references to nature; ultimately, Calidore's quest leads him to an ideal natural landscape:

> . . . a place, whose pleasaunce did appere
> To passe all others, on the earth which were:
> For all that euer was by natures skill
> Deuized to worke delight, was gathered there,
> And there by her were poured forth at fill,
> As if this to adorne, she all the rest did pill. (6.10.5)

Although the landscape is the work of "natures skill," there is an element of the supernatural about it since its beauty "seem'd th'earth to disdaine"

(6.10.5, 6.10.6). Furthermore, the landscape is protected by "Nymphes and Faeries" who "by the banks did sit, / In the woods shade, which did the waters crowne, / Keeping all noysome things away from it" (6.10.7). As Cheney writes, "Not only wild beasts, but even the imperfections of the pastoral landscape - 'ragged mosse or filthy mud' - are absent from this pastoral vision" (229). This landscape is also "far from all peoples troad," similar to the "sacred noursery" which Spenser describes in the Proem as "hidden . . . / From view of men" (6.10.5, 6.Proem.3). Indeed, it appears that Calidore has discovered the "siluer bowre" of virtue, and it is fitting that he should likewise discover a vision of perfect Courtesy (Javitch 148). With the appearance of the Graces, Spenser's invocation to the Muses in the Proem is answered, and the description of Courtesy as requiring both nature and grace is symbolized by the divine Graces dancing in this perfect landscape.

Although their connection to nature is underscored by their origin as deities of fertility and as "goddesses of spring," the Graces are most commonly interpreted as exemplifying the themes of civil intercourse and liberality (Dempsey 330). Most critical discussions of the Graces point out that their dance "reflects the notion of giving and receiving benefits in a harmonious, disciplined, and well-integrated social order" (Weiner 92).[1]

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[1] Many critics have explored these associations, among them, Donald Cheney, *Spenser's Image of Nature: Wild Man and Shepherd in "The Faerie Queene,"* 229-35; Maurice Evans, *Spenser's Anatomy of Heroism*, 213-16; Graham Hough, *A Preface to "The Faerie Queene,"* 208-20; Kathleen Williams, "Courtesy and Pastoral in *The Faerie Queene*, Book VI," 342-45, and *Spenser's "Faerie Queene": The World of Glass*, 212-18; Lila Geller "The Acidalian Vision: Spenser's Graces in Book VI of *The Faerie Queene*," 267-77.

However, as Geller writes, what is not clear is how the Graces "ordinarily would relate to the theme of grace so predominant" in Book VI (Geller 276). Among the works most frequently mentioned as sources for Spenser's vision of the Graces are Hesiod's *Theogony*, Seneca's *De Beneficiis*, Servius' *In Vergilli Carmina Comentarii*, Boccaccio's *De Genealogia Deorum*, and Natalis Comes' *Mythologiarum Libri* (Starnes 268).[2] Any of these could have provided Spenser with knowledge of the names of the Graces, the significance of their names, their paternity, their role as handmaidens to Venus and as companions of the Muses, and various other characteristics (Starnes 271-5). The identification of specific sources for Spenser's images is encumbered by the problem of Spenser's use of iconography since he is regularly inexact in his treatment of classical mythologies, distorting them for his own ends (Hough, "Iconography" 234).[3] There are, for example, several inconsistencies within the allusions to the Graces in *The Faerie Queene* and in Spenser's other poetry.[4] In fact,

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[2] Starnes also lists several other dictionaries which contained accounts of the Graces: Perotti's *Cornucopia* (1489), Dominicus Nanus Mirabellius' *Polyanthea* (1503), Friar Ambrosius Calepinus' *Dictionarium* (1502, 1510, 1559), Robert Stephanus' *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* (1573), Charles Stephanus' *Dictionarium Historicum, Geographicum, Poeticum* (1561), Thomas Cooper's *Thesaurus Linguae Romanae & Britannicae* (1565), Richard Huloet's *Dictionary* (1572), Textor's *Officina* (1581), Joseph Langius' *Florilegii Magni, seu Polyantheae* (1659) and Alciati's *Emblemata*.

[3] This is a point often made in the critical literature. For example, see the argument made by Graham Hough and the response by Alaistair Fowler in *Essays in Criticism*, "Spenser and Renaissance Iconography" 11 (1961): 233-8.

[4] *The Shepheardes Calendar*, April, 109, June, 25; *The Teares of the Muses*, 180, 403; *Dedicatory Sonnet*, 5; *The Faerie Queene*, 1.1.48; 2.3.25; 2.8.6; 3.6.2; 4.5.5; 6.10.9; *Amoretti*, 40; *Epithalamion*, 103-9; 257-8; *Hymne in Honor of Beautie*, 254. One instance of the inconsistencies in Spenser's treatment of the Three Graces in *The Faerie Queene* is the

these inconsistencies imitate the inconsistencies of Renaissance iconography itself which does not offer a set of standard and universal meanings that can be applied to the world of *The Faerie Queene* (Hough, "Iconography" 234). Among the numerous mythological dictionaries of the Renaissance there is a complex diversity of opinion regarding the symbolism of the Graces (Snare 352). However, the Graces, with their wealth of pagan and theological associations form a fitting symbol for Spenser's Courtesy and indeed, Spenser uses a multiplicity of references of the Graces to bridge the gap between pastoral and theological conventions, thereby emphasizing both the natural and divine qualities of Courtesy.

The nature of Calidore's vision is particularly interesting because it does not simply consist of the Three Graces by themselves. There are many details of the vision which play an important role in understanding Spenser's use of the iconography of the Graces. Calidore's vision consists of "An hundred naked maidens, lilly white," dancing around the Three Graces, who dance around "another grace" who "graces" the others with her presence (6.10.11, 6.10.16):

> All they without were raunged in a ring,
> And daunced round; but in the midst of them
> Three other Ladies did both daunce and sing,
> The whilest the rest them round about did hemme,
> And like a girlond did in compasse stemme;
> And in the middest of those same three, was placed
> Another Damzell, as a precious gemme,

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conflicting variations of the parentage of the Graces Spenser offers in Book II (8.6) and Book VI (10.22).

Amidst a ring most richly well enchaced,
That with her goodly presence all the rest much graced.
(6.10.12)

Traditionally, the Three Graces, as the attendants of Venus, are taken to be the personification of beauty and graciousness, and Spenser preserves these usual associations:

Those were the Graces, daughters of delight,
Handmaides of Venus, which are wont to haunt
Uppon this hill, and daunce there day and night:
Those three to men all gifts of grace do graunt,
And all, that Venus in her selfe doth vaunt,
Is borrowed of them. (6.10.15)

Yet beyond this conventional meaning, the Graces have also been the subject of much allegorizing. Wind tells us that "Perhaps no other group from antiquity has so persistently engaged the allegorical imagination, or served so well to conceal and preserve, as in an innocuous-looking vessel, some perilous alchemy of the mind" (26). Indeed, Spenser himself allegorizes the Graces when he attaches this motto to his image of the triad: "That good should from vs goe, then come in greater store" (6.10.24). In Book VI, therefore, the configuration of the Graces comes to illustrate the gracious exchange necessary to Courtesy.

The notion of reciprocity evident in the motto Spenser ascribes to his image of the Graces stresses the circularity of the iconography. The image of rings and garlands itself is an important element of the vision, and it recurs often in Book VI. First there is the "goodly band" of dancers,

the hundred naked maidens surrounding the inner circle of the Graces "like a girlond," with the Graces themselves circling Colin's lady (6.10.14, 6.10.12). Second, there is the "rosie girlond" mentioned in the fourteenth stanza, the pastoral crown bestowed on the lady in this dance (6.10.14). The latter is reminiscent of similar garlands which have figured earlier in Book VI: the garland which Serena was attempting to gather for herself when she was attacked by the Blatant Beast; the garland bestowed on Pastorella by the shepherds; the garlands which Calidore receives and passes on to Coridon in a courteous manner which anticipates the symbolic exchange of the Graces. Indeed, as Colin interprets this vision for Calidore, it is a vision of the harmony of giving and receiving, represented by the position of the Graces:

> And eeke them selues so in their dance they bore,
> That two of them still froward seem'd to bee,
> But one still towards shew'd her selfe afore;
> That good should from vs goe, then come in greater store.
> (6.10.24)

Spenser's picture of the Graces dancing hand in hand in a ring is a traditional depiction of the Graces based on their antique Roman form as known and copied by Renaissance mythographers, emblematists and artists.[5] Furthermore, the notion of reciprocity evident in the circling

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[5] According to *The Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae* "no exclusive and instantly identifiable iconography of the Charites existed before the creation of the Hellenistic nude type which became so widely popular in the Roman period" (200).

dance of the Graces is underscored by the allegorical meaning assigned to the Graces themselves since antiquity.

Two classical sources, prominent in sixteenth-century accounts of the Graces, may be used to examine the relation between this traditional depiction of the triad and Spenser's Courtesy.[6] Each of the sources outlines a slightly different configuration of the Graces' dance. The first is Seneca's *De beneficiis*:

> Of the nature and property of these I shall speak later if you will permit me first to digress upon questions that are foreign to the subject -- why the Graces are three in number and why they are sisters, why they have their hands interlocked, and why they are smiling and youthful anf virginal, and are clad in loose and transparent garb. Some would have it appear that there is one for bestowing a benefit, another for receiving it, and a third for returning it; others hold that there are three classes of benefactors -- those who earn benefits, those who return them, those who receive and return them at the same time. But of the two explanations do you accept as true whichever you like; yet what profit is there in such knowledge? Why do the sisters hand in hand dance in a ring which returns upon itself? For the reason that a benefit passing in its course from hand to hand returns nevertheless to the giver; the beauty of the whole is destroyed if the course is anywhere broken, and it has most beauty if it is continuous and maintains an uninterrupted succession. In the dance, nevertheless, an older sister has especial honour, as do those who earn benefits. Their faces are cheerful, as are ordinarily the faces of those who bestow or receive benefits. They are young because the memory of benefits

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[6] Renaissance mythographies citing Seneca and Servius are listed in the *Variorum Spenser*, 289.

> ought not to grow old. They are maidens because benefits are pure and undefiled and holy in the eyes of all; and it is fitting that there should be nothing to bind or restrict them, and so the maidens wear flowing robes, and these, too, are transparent because benefits desire to be seen. (I.iii.2)[7]

Seneca describes the Graces as young, cheerful maidens, transparently clothed, and interprets them as the threefold aspect of generosity: the giving, receiving and returning of gifts, or benefits.

The second interpretation comes in Servius' commentary on *The Aeneid.* In contrast to Seneca, Servius describes the Graces as naked maidens, and refers to an interpretation of the Graces as the twofold aspect of generosity, the giving and returning of benefits: "That one of them is pictured from the back while the two others face us is because for one benefit issuing from us two are supposed to return."[8] Despite their differences, the interpretations of Seneca and Servius are thematically compatible and indeed the two are often confused or combined with one another.[9] Spenser too combines Senecan and Servian descriptions, as this passage demonstrates:

> Therefore they alwaies smoothly seeme to smile,

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[7] It should be noted that this passage is a disgression in Seneca's discussion of the nature of benefits. Indeed, Seneca is critical of such digressions and of the allegorical interpretations he discusses in this passage. He later offers this apology to his readers: "But for fear that I shall be guilty of the fault that I am critizing, I shall abandon all these questions, which are so remote that they do not even touch the subject" (I. iv.1).

[8] Servius, *In Vergilii Aeneidem* I, 720. Quoted by Wind, 28.

[9] This confusion is discussed by Wind, 26-35.

That we likewise should mylde and gentle be,
And also naked are, that without guile
Or false dissemblance all them plaine may see,
Simple and true from couert malice free;
And eeke them selues so in their daunce they bore,
That two of them still froward seem'd to bee,
But one still towards shew'd her self afore;
That good should from vs goe, then come in greater store.
(6.10.24)

In Spenser's image one of the Graces "still towards shew'd her selfe afore," reflecting the configuration of the Graces which Seneca describes (6.10.24). Yet the poet describes the Graces as naked, in accordance with Servius, and seems to reflect the latter's emphasis on the twofold aspect of generosity since "good should from vs goe, then come in greater store" (6.10.24). Strikingly, however, Spenser reverses the classical position of the Graces, traditional since before the time of Servius and perpetuated by Renaissance mythographers: two of Spenser's Graces are turned away.[10] Starnes suggests that Spenser may have reversed the traditional order of the Graces in order to avoid any suspicion of a mercenary motive (281). Such a reversal, however, does not appear to occur in Spenser's moral

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[10] Although the 1596 edition reads "forward," all of the editors since 1611 have taken this to be a misprint and have corrected it to "froward." Starnes further argues that and that the emendation of "forward " to "froward" is supported by Cooper 's *Thesaurus* which states: "Wherfore they paint the Graces in this manner, that the ones back should be towarde us, and hir face fromwarde, as proceeding from us, the other two towarde us: noting double thanke to bee due for the benefite we have done" (qtd. by Starnes 281). According to Starnes, Spenser's use of "froward" is equivalent to the use of the word "fromward," which is defined to mean "turned from or away" (281). Since this is the meaning implied in line 7 of 6.10.24 in *The Faerie Queene*, Starnes concludes that Spenser employed Cooper's word.

comment upon the Graces in the last line of the stanza: "That good should from vs goe, then come in greater store" (6.10.24). However, as Tonkin points out, given the inconsistencies of sixteenth-century spelling, the word "then" could just as well be "than," in which case the line would read "That good should from vs goe, than come in greater store," which indeed implies that we give more than we receive (256).[11]

Spenser was no doubt aware of the traditional meaning of the iconographic portrait of the Graces since this position is found in E.K.'s gloss of *Aprill* in *The Shepheard's Calendar*:

> *The Graces* be three sisters, the daughters of Jupiter, (whose names are Aglaia, Thalia, Euphrosyne; and Homer only added a fourth, s. Pasithea) otherwise called Charites, that is, thanks: whom the poets feigned to be the goddesses of all bounty and comeliness, which therefore (as saith Theodontius) they make three, to wit, that men first ought to be gracious and bountiful to other freely; then to receive benefits at other men's hands courteously; and thirdly, to requite them thankfully; which are three sundry actions in liberality. And Boccace saith, that they be painted naked (as they were indeed on the tombe of C. Julius Caesar) the one having her back toward us, and her face fromward, as proceeding from us; the other two toward us, noting double thank to be due to us for the benefit we have done. (37-8)[12]

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[11] As Tonkin states: "the word 'then' is an ambiguity pure and simple -- an ambiguity, be it noted, for the ordinary reader of Spenser at the time the *Faerie Queene* was published. But it is an ambiguity inherent in the very character of grace itself, those gifts to mankind received through Christ's death -- the free flow of love made possible by the supreme sacrifice of God's only-begotten Son" (256).

This description of two Graces continually coming towards us and one always facing away agrees with Servius, and thus Spenser's reversal of the traditional iconographic configuration of the Graces in *The Faerie Queene* is significant. While this reversal may be an adaptation of either Seneca or Servius, as Lilla Geller has pointed out, the position of Spenser's Graces may have come to him through the interpretative mediation of the Italian Neoplatonists (273). Indeed, there is at least one Renaissance precedent for Spenser's departure from Seneca and Servius and both Tonkin and Geller have cited Pico della Mirandola's commentary on Benivieni: "Of the Graces one is painted looking toward us. . . The other two with their faces from us, seeming to return . . . What comes from God to us, returns from us to God."[13] Here, Pico describes a configuration similar to Spenser's iconography of the Graces in Book VI, for two of Pico's Graces are also turned away. Indeed Spenser knew the writings of the Neoplatonists, and accordingly it is not difficult to accept his image of the Graces as an extension of Neoplatonic thought (Ellrodt 113).[14]

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[12] Starnes argues that E.K.'s gloss is based on Cooper's *Thesaurus* which in turn is based upon the work of Charles Stephanus and thereby infers Spenser's familiarity with these two sources (278-9).

[13] Quoted by Geller, 273.

[14] Many scholars have recognized Spenser's indebtedness to Neoplatonic mythologizing (Allen 306). Furthermore, Wind, Geller and Nohrnberg have all pointed to the influence of Neoplatonic philosophy on Spenser's poetry, specifically in the triadic rhythms of the Graces' dance. Although in his book on the subject Ellrodt attacks the indiscriminate attribution of Neoplatonic sources to Spenser, he himself acknowledges that "Spenser must have been aware of the Neoplatonic significance attached to classical myths" and furthermore, that Spenser "drew on all available notions indiscriminately" (212, 38).

While the Graces signified liberality to Seneca and Servius, to the Neoplatonists the triad "was a symbol of love, inviting celestial meditations" (Wind 36). In *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance,* Edgar Wind has explained the principle of unfolding in Orphic imagery. Wind demonstrates how one of Pico's *Conclusiones* expresses this principle:

> He that understands profoundly and clearly how the unity of Venus is unfolded in the trinity of the Graces, and the unity of Necessity in the trinity of the Fates and the unity of Saturn in the trinity of Jupiter, Neptune and Pluto, knows the proper way of proceeding in Orphic theology.[15]

According to this philosophy, divine units unfold themselves in triads, and these subsequently unfold themselves in other triads. Venus, for example, "is conceived of as containing within herself the attributes of the Three Graces" (Snare 353). Thus, as Wind states, when Venus "becomes 'unfolded' in the three Graces . . . each grace represents a less 'complicated' state of mind than the infolded Venus from whom they descend" (205). This has led some critics to a new understanding of Spenser's iconography of the dance of the Graces (Snare 354). In the midst of the Three Graces is "Another Damzell" who infolds the attributes of the Three Graces and, therefore, can be interpreted as the fourth Grace (6.10.12). After Calidore has intruded and the Graces have disappeared, Colin explains:

> That all those Ladies, which thou sawest late,

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[15] Quoted by Wind, 36.

> Are *Venus* Damzels, all within her fee,
> But differing in honour and degree:
> They are all Graces, which on her depend
> Besides a thousand more, which ready bee
> Her to adorne, when so she forth doth wend:
> But those three in the midst, doe chiefe on her attend.
> (6.10.21)

Since all the Graces are identified as "*Venus* Damzels" it is possible to see the hundred maidens, the Three Graces, and the fourth grace as unfolding Venus (6.10.21). As Colin says earlier, "Those three to men all gifts of grace do graunt, / And all, that *Venus* in her selfe doth vaunt, / Is borrowed of them" (6.10.15).

Thus, while Renaissance mythographical sources often depict the Three Graces as handmaidens to Venus, platonizing humanists of the Renaissance came to interpret their relationship to Venus in a more philosophical and theological way (Panofsky 168). In fact, while the allegorical significance of the iconography of the Three Graces relates them to the exchange of benefits necessary to Courtesy, the Three Graces also eventually came to symbolize Christian grace. The Neoplatonists saw the Three Graces as the ultimate trinitarian symbol, representing triads in logic, three-fold cycles of beneficence, and the triple ordinance of the cosmos (Chastel 146). According to Panofsky it was "thus possible to replace their traditional names (Aglaïa, Euphrosyne, Thalia) by others directly indicative of their co-essentiality with Venus" (168-9). The Neoplatonists saw the Graces as three phases of love: beauty, desire and fulfilment; and alternatively as the personification of Chastity, Beauty and

Love. They were called, for instance, *Pulchritudo, Amor, Voluptas,* or *Pulchritudo, Amor, Castitas.* Thus, Pico della Mirandola writes: "The poets say that Venus has as companions and as her maidens, the Graces, whose names in the vulgar tongue are Verdure, Gladness and Splendour. These three Graces are nothing but the three properties appertaining to that Ideal Beauty."[16] Pico goes on to explain that "Verdure" indicates perfection and permanence, while the other two properties of ideal beauty are the "Splendour" with which it illuminates the intellect and the desire which it arouses in the will for the possession of that splendour. Thus, he can offer another interpretation of the position of the Graces:

> As permanence is not a reflective act, one of the Graces is painted with her face towards us, as if she would go forward and not turn back; the other two refer to the operation of the intellect and the will, whose operations are reflective, for which reason they are painted with the back towards us as one who turns back. . .[17]

Thus assigning characteristics of the deity to the Three Graces became a commonplace, and the Graces' "co-essentiality" with Venus came to underlie their "co-essentiality" with divinity in general (Panofsky 169). Ficino connects the Three Graces even more directly to deity:

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16 "Commentary on Benivieni's *Canzone d'Amore* " (Venice, 1522), libro II, cap. 15. Quoted by Gombrich, 56.

17 "Commentary on Benivieni's *Canzone d'Amore* " (Venice, 1522), libro II, cap. 15. Quoted by Gombrich, 56.

> Beauty is nothing but grace, a grace, I say, composed of three Graces, that is of three things which descend in a similar way from three celestial powers: Apollo attracts the hearers by means of the grace of musical harmonies; Venus enraptures the eye by means of the grace of colour and shape; Mercury, finally, by means of the wonderful grace of intelligence and eloquence, turns contemplation mainly towards himself and kindles it with the love of divine contemplation and Beauty. . .[18]

Here, Ficino not only unfolds the Graces from a central deity but confers upon each of the Graces its own divine power. Their connection to Apollo is particularly significant since as Goldberg explains, in the Neoplatonic trinitarian view of the universe, "Deity was centred in the sun, or Apollo, a god traditionally attended by the Graces" (207). In Ficino's *De Sole*, for example, the Aristotelian system of the universe is explained by the properties of the sun (Goldberg 207). In this system, "Apollo occupies the tenth, or Empyrean sphere, which is equivalent to the Trinity" and thus "God-Apollo's trinitarian nature might be symbolized by his attendant Graces" (Goldberg 207). For example, in the frontispiece of Franchino Gafurio's *Practica musice* of 1496, the opposing trinities of the Graces and Serapis are placed at opposite ends of the great cosmic scale connecting heaven and earth (Wind 265). Therefore, as attendants of the deity, the Graces became a significant heavenly triad.

It follows that the Three Graces should be employed to represent one of the most important Christian trinities, Faith, Hope, and Charity.

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[18] Ficino's *Opera Omnia* (Basle, 1576), 862. Quoted by Gombrich, 59

Goldberg has pointed to Geoffroy Tory's *Triumph of Apollo* from his *Champ fleury* of 1529, in which the god's chariot is led by the nine Muses, the seven Liberal Arts, the four cardinal Virtues and the Three Graces (208). In a similar drawing of the *Triumph of the Virgin* from Tory's *Hours* of 1542, the Muses, the Arts, and the cardinal Virtues are all in comparable positions, but the Graces are replaced by the three theological Virtues (Goldberg 208). Here, the Graces become a heavenly triad, equivalent in fact to the three Christian Virtues (Goldberg 208).[19]

Renaissance syncreticists thus often assigned the Graces a divine significance and eventually the Three Graces became a veiled symbol of Christian grace (Phillips 103). As Tonkin writes, "If Pico does not go so far as to associate the Graces with God's grace, there are others who do" (255). Cristoforo Landino, for example, in his commentary on Dante, makes the name of grace his starting point:

> Euphrosyne means happiness, and indeed we owe our happiness to heavenly grace; Thalia means green and flourishing, and truly heavenly grace refreshes our souls and makes them bloom. The poets add that the two last are turned towards the first; and in fact on the splendour of grace our souls depend for their joy and health.[20]

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[19] Tonkin cites Alexander Ross's *Mystagogus Poeticus or the Muses Interpreter* (1648), which, though later than *The Faerie Queene*, identifies the classical Graces with the three theological virtues quite explicitly (254).

[20] C. Landino, *Commento sopra la Commedia di Dante*, I.2. Quoted by Gombrich, 57. Tonkin also cites this passage from Landino's commentary on Dante (255).

Landino expands this thought with yet another interpretation of the significance of the Graces. Commenting on Mary, Lucy and Beatrice, the three women who descend to assist Dante in the second canto of the *Inferno*, as three aspects of heavenly grace, he recalls that: "Hesiod writes in the *Theogony* that the Graces are three in number, nor does he depart from the truth. They are daughters of Jove; which means nothing else but that from God alone proceed all graces".[21] Neoplatonic thought therefore provides a direct link between the pagan Graces and Christian grace. Furthermore, the role assigned to the Graces in the Neoplatonic trinitarian view of the universe reinforces their association to Christian grace. As Wind writes,

> the bounty bestowed by the gods upon lower beings was conceived by the Neoplatonists as a kind of overflowing (*emanatio*), which produced a vivifying rapture or conversion (called by Ficino *conversio*, *raptio*, or *vivificatio*) whereby the lower beings were drawn back to heaven and rejoined the gods (*remeatio*). The munificence of the gods having thus been unfolded in the triple rhythm of *emanatio*, *raptio*, and *remeatio*, it was possible to recognize in this sequence the divine model of what Seneca had defined as the circle of grace: giving, accepting, and returning. (Wind 37-8)

Thus Venus and the Graces were used by the Neoplatonists to define "the universal system of exchange by which divine gifts are graciously circulated" (Wind 38). Although Spenser does not divide Courtesy into three parts, as in the Neoplatonic unfolding, we have seen throughout

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[21] C. Landino, *Commento sopra la Commedia di Dante*, I.2. Quoted by Gombrich, 57.

Book VI that he perceives the virtue as one that involves a circulation of graciousness from God to man and from man to God like the circle of grace in the *emanatio-raptio-remeatio* cycle. The central image of Courtesy itself signifies "That good should from vs goe and come in greater store" (6.10.24). Thus, as Geller has pointed out, "Perhaps Spenser is thinking of the Graces . . . as mediatrixes between the higher and lower beings. If so, then the one grace, showing herself afore, goes toward God, who sends back double, the two 'froward' Graces, doubling what man has given in an overflowing of divine grace" (Geller 275). Spenser's iconography of the Graces, as it expresses both the circle of benefits described by Seneca and the beneficence of God's grace described by the Neoplatonists, thus supplies a perfect figure to illustrate not only the gracious exchanges necessary to Courtesy, but further the necessity of Christian grace to Courtesy.

The syncretic symbolism of Spenser's image of the Graces therefore reinforces the natural and divine qualities of Courtesy in Book VI. But the courteous vision is also the product of poetic art, for Spenser self-consciously announces his presence in the figure of the shepherd Colin whose music inspires the Graces' dance. The iconography of the Graces therefore also relates Courtesy to art. The connection of the Graces to Apollo is not only of divine significance but of poetic significance, since Apollo was also the leader of the Muses (Seznec 133). The notion of the Graces as the benefactors of poetry originated in antiquity with the association of the Graces and Muses. It is mentioned by Sappho, Hesiod, Aristophanes and Horace (Goldberg 209). A French philosopher and poet of the Renaissance, Pontus de Tyard (1521-1605), discusses a theory of

poetic inspiration which had already been expounded by Ficino, and in which he discusses the relationship of the Graces and the Muses (Goldberg 209). Tyard says that in ancient history there were not nine Muses but only three, making the Graces not only the companions of the Muses, but virtually interchangeable with them (Goldberg 208-9). The connection of the Graces to the Muses is further emphasized in *The Faerie Queene* by Spenser's presentation of the fourth grace.[22] The presence of a fourth grace suggests that she may be representative of the unfolding of a triad from a central virtue, as employed in Neoplatonist philosophy. However, in Calidore's vision it is not Venus who is attended by the Graces, but a "iolly Shepheards lasse" (6.10.16). According to Colin, it is she, not Venus, who displays in herself all the attributes of the Graces (6.10.16):

> Another grace she well deserues to be,
> In whom so many Graces gathered are,
> Excelling much the meane of her degree;
> Diuine resemblaunce, beauty soueraine rare,
> Firme Chastity, that spight ne blemish dare; (6.10.27)

Spenser's presentation of the fourth grace as a natural maiden of humble birth may relate to Spenser's conception of Courtesy as natural to

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[22] The fourth Grace is also part of a central tradition. In ancient times the Graces were associated with the four Hours, and Homer in the *Iliad* names another Grace (Pasithea), so the mythographers of the sixteenth century often mention four Graces (Snare 351). As Snare suggests "The figure of a fourth Grace and a tradition for making one's lady the summation of the Three Graces was therefore available to a poet of Spenser's time" (351). Colin's view of his beloved conforms to this tradition as does his apology for his claims in 6.10.28.

unspoiled man but unavailable to fallen man unless restored by grace. Furthermore, the fourth grace relates Courtesy to Art since she is not only the "loue," but also the creation of the piper Colin. In fact, she disappears along with all the other Graces when Calidore intrudes upon the vision, and Colin becomes so distraught upon her loss that he breaks his pipe and makes "great mone for that unhappy turne" (6.10.18). For while the vision is Colin's creation he is entirely dependent upon inspiration for the appearance of the Graces and his "lasse" (6.10.16):

> . . . by no meanes thou canst recall againe,
> For being gone, none can them bring in place,
> But whom they of them selues list so to grace. (6.10.20)

Although the artist has the power to link nature and grace with his Art, he too is dependent upon divine benevolence for his inspiration.

An examination of the iconography of the Graces reveals the importance of this image as it illustrates the notion of Courtesy Spenser describes in the Proem:

> Since it at furst was by the Gods with paine
> Planted in earth, being deriu'd at furst
> From heauenly seedes of bounty souerine,
> And by them long with carefull labour nurst,
> Till it to ripenesse grew, and forth to honour burst. (6.Proem.3)

Because of the Fall of nature, Courtesy has had to remain hidden "From view of men, and wicked worlds disdaine" (6.Proem.3). But here in this perfect natural landscape, under the guidance of the artist and the

benevolence of divine inspiration, the vision of the Graces reveals that grace can restore nature to perfection and Courtesy can once again "forth to honour burst" (6.Proem.3). For while there are innumerable iconographic and philosophical interpretations of the Graces, any of which may have influenced Spenser, the multiplicity of references itself suits the complexity of Spenser's image. As Tonkin writes: "The fleeting vision of the Graces, with its visual and verbal ambiguities precisely exemplifies the mystery of God's relationship to men as Paul expresses it: it is supreme benefit and supreme obligation" (257). The disappearance of the Graces when Calidore intrudes upon the vision suggests that it is a sacred mystery, available to a select few. Yet Spenser uses the multiplicity of references of the Graces to emphasize not only their connection to Christian grace, but their natural, pastoral associations as well as their link to artistic inspiration.

CONCLUSION

Book VI concludes with an explicit insistence on Calidore's failure to achieve any lasting victory over the Blatant Beast, and like the disappearance of the Graces, that failure underscores the fallen nature of the world (Bayley, "Order" 189). It is significant that Spenser's central image of Courtesy comes in the form of a vision which then disappears. The Graces' dance is a vision of a harmonious creation, of this world as it should be, and as such it is precarious. Calidore believes that Colin can bring the Graces back, but as Colin says, "None can them bring in place / But whom they of them selues list so to grace" (6.10.20). Courtesy is thus described in the context of fallen nature since the perfect gracious exchange necessary to Courtesy "can find its permanent realization only in the heavens" (Cheney 232). Calidore cannot capture a closer glimpse of the vision, just as he cannot capture the Blatant Beast, for in a fallen world some things are beyond the grasp of even the most virtuous.

Although Calidore is able to understand the vision of the Graces in terms of the mythic and iconographic information which Colin gives him, this information is not sufficient compensation for the loss of the vision. Calidore's poignant question to Colin emphasizes his efforts to understand this mystery: "But why when I them saw, fled they away from me?" (6.10.19). Indeed, confronted by the mysterious dance of the Graces, even "the critic's usual tools of analysis are strangely inadequate" (Tonkin 240):

> In fact the critic finds himself in a methodological quandary. He may base his analysis on the literal meaning of Colin Clout's explanation. He may emulate this explanation by examining the iconography of the scene presented to him. He may look for literary antecedent - the symbolism of the dance, the fairy ring, the Golden Age, and so on. He may identify literary archetypes in the episode; they abound. All these lines of approach have partial validity, but even a combination of all of them leaves a great deal unsaid. (Tonkin 240)

The image of the Graces is complex beyond the sum of its iconographical sources. The transience of the vision of the Graces reflects the elusive character of the issues Book VI addresses, and like Calidore, the critic must struggle to come to terms with these intricate questions. Although no firm answers are likely to be found to these questions, the inquiry itself is worth pursuing in order to come to a fuller understanding of the resonance of Spenser's syncretic poetry.

Calidore's interruption of the Graces is part of a larger theme in Book VI in which numerous courteous moments, and moments of human happiness, are disrupted by the unpredictable force of circumstances. Even when Calidore seems to have found a perfectly natural and gracious society among the shepherds, this innocent state cannot endure in an imperfect world. The Brigants, a "lawlesse people" who have abandoned the "plough" and "spade" to live on "spoile and booty," finally destroy the pastoral community (6.10.39). Indeed, it is characteristic of the pastoral mode, as employed by Spenser, that the pastoral escape is a temporary one, at the end of which the shepherd has

watched his simple, natural life lose its innocence and become an exact image of the fallen world (Cheney 238). Despite the vision of the Graces which is granted to Calidore during his pastoral interlude, Spenser realizes that idylls, and the precious balance between nature and grace, cannot last in a fallen world.

Based on this note of pessimism, critics such as Bayley have suggested that *The Faerie Queene* "is not, ultimately, an escapist celebration of the universal triumph of virtue; . . . it becomes, whatever it was originally intended to be, a poem concerned with the imperfection, indeed the imperfectability, of the world" ("Order" 191). Yet, as I will attempt to show, it is the triumph of Book VI that it insists on being concerned with both the imperfectability of the world *and* a longing for perfection. Although the vision of the Graces must disappear because nature is fallen, as Tonkin says, the "joy, the beauty, the music, the graceful movement of the dancers suggest a glimpse of cosmic harmony which responds to that yearning for perfection" (244). In Book VI we are frequently caught between feelings of enchanting promise and of painful nostalgia at the world's imperfection. The separation of nature and grace, the cause of both the corruption of the world and the longing for perfection, is treated throughout the poem as a tension between opposites.

Spenser refers to these paradoxes of our experience from the first stanza of Book VI:

> The waies, through which my weary steps I guyde,
>   In this delightfull 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 rauisht with rare thoughts delight,
> My tedious trauell doe forget thereby;
> And when I gin to feele decay of might,
> Its strength to me supplies, and chears my dulled spright.
> (6.Proem.1)

Here the poet first acknowledges the "sweet variety, / Of all that pleasant is to eare or eye" as a tonic to his "tedious trauell," his "decay of might" and his "dulled spright." As Spenser says in this opening stanza, these pleasant "thoughts" ravish him with "delight." However, the poet's language implies that while these moments of uninterrupted "delight" are exceptionally beautiful, they are also all too "rare." Indeed, danger lurks everywhere in Book VI, and strikes particularly when it is least expected. Serena wanders away allured by the "rare delight" of her enchanting setting, "Without suspect of ill or daungers hidden dred," only to be viciously attacked by the Blatant Beast (6.3.23). Calepine decides "To take the ayre, and heare the thrushes song, / Vnarm'd, as fearing neither foe nor frend" when "There him befell, vnlooked for before, / An hard aduenture with vnhappie end" (6.4.17). Even the fortunes of love must face unavoidable adversity as in this passage where Spenser describes the courtship of Calidore and Pastorella:

> So well he wood her, and so well he wrought her,
> With humble seruice, and with daily sute,
> That at the last vnto his will he brought her;
> Which he so wisely well did prosecute,

> That of his loue he reapt the timely frute,
> And ioyed long in close felicity:
> Till fortune fraught with malice, blinde, and brute,
> That enuies louers long prosperity,
> Blew vp a bitter storme of foule aduersity. (6.10.38)

Spenser describes the details of Calidore's "daily" effort to win Pastorella's love, but as soon as he reaps "the timely frute" of his love, we are suddenly informed that the "bitter storme of foule aduersity" rips the lovers apart (6.10.38). The sadness of this loss is expressed with poignant nostalgia when the pastoral landscape, which had provided Calidore not only with comfort, rest and love, but with the music of Colin and the vision of the Graces itself, now becomes a source of bitter anguish as he searches for his lost love in the path of the devastation left by the Brigants:

> Ne wight he found, to whom he might complaine,
> Ne wight he found, of whom he might inquire;
> That more increast the anguish of his paine.
> He sought the woods; but no man could see there:
> He sought the plaines; but could no tydings heare.
> The woods did nought but echoes vaine rebound;
> The playnes all waste and emptie did appeare:
> Where wont the shepherds oft their pipes resound,
> And fed an hundred flocks, there now not one he found.
> (6.11.26)

Always danger lurks to destroy the enchanting promise of lasting beauty and to create the sadness which comes with their loss. The fact that Calidore cannot find anyone to explain to him what has happened, and

why, increases "the anguish of his paine" (6.11.26). Indeed, the unanswered questions increase the bitterness of the loss and reflect the elusiveness of the answers themselves.

Throughout Book VI we are continually caught up in "the bitter storme of foule aduersity" (6.10.38). The most poignant image of Book VI is therefore, the most beautiful and the one which causes the greatest pain upon its loss: the vision and the disappearance of the Graces (6.10.38). Spenser seems to prepare us for the appearance of this vision from the beginning of Book VI when we are told to beware of "forgeries" which are

> Fashion'd to please the eies of them, that pas,
> Which see not perfect things but in a glas:
> Yet is that glasse so gay, that it can blynd
> The wisest sight, to thinke gold that is bras. (6.Proem.5)

Here, the imperfect vision is so convincing that brass can appear to be gold. But as Spenser tells us, "vertues seat is deepe within the mynd, / And not in outward shows, but inward thoughts defynd" (6.Proem.5). The importance of this idea is reinforced when Spenser returns to the image of "outward shows" at the beginning of the tenth canto where once again we are warned against the "painted show / Of such false blisse, as there is set for stales, / T'entrap vnwary fooles in their eternall bales" (6.Proem.5, 6.10.3). Therefore, when confronted by the vision of the Graces, Calidore resolves to determine whether it is an "enchaunted show" before his eyes (6.10.17):

> Much wondred Calidore at this strange sight,

> Whose like before his eye had neuer seene,
> And standing long astonished in spright,
> And rapt with pleasaunce, wist not what to weene;
> Whether it were the traine of beauties Queene,
> Or Nymphes, or Faeries, or enchaunted show,
> With which his eyes mote haue deluded beene.
> Therefore resoluing, what it was, to know,
> Out of the wood he rose, and toward them did go. (6.10.17)

Once again a moment of beauty is abruptly interrupted, since as soon as Calidore approaches the Graces, they vanish and the bridge which they formed between nature and grace vanishes with them. Colin becomes so distraught at the interruption that he breaks his pipe, suggesting "a reassertion of the division between Grace and Nature" (Tonkin 235). However, Calidore's first words to Colin after the Graces' disappearance suggest that he is not immediately aware of what he has lost:

> Haile iolly shepherd, which thy ioyous dayes,
> Here leadest in this goodly merry make,
> Frequented of these gentle Nymphes alwayes,
> Which to the flocke, to heare thy lovely layes;
> Tell me, what mote these dainty Damzels be,
> Which here with thee doe make their pleasant playes?
> Right happy thou, that mayst them freely see:
> But why when I them saw, fled they away from me? (6.10.19)

The effusiveness of Calidore's speech, overflowing in adjectives, emphatically underscores the beauty of the vision of the Graces and the joy it provides to its viewers. The poignancy then of the final line is

emphasized all the more with its monosyllabic simplicity: it is a gentle plea for understanding. At the same time, the question, juxtaposed as it is with the preceding profusion of joy, has an undertone of sadness. Most significantly, although Colin responds to Calidore's speech, he never answers Calidore's plainly posed question:

> Not I so happy, answerd then that swaine,
> As thou vnhapy, which them thence didst chace,
> Whom by no meanes thou canst recall againe,
> For being gone, none can them bring in place,
> But whom they of them selues list so to grace. (6.10.20)

Once again Calidore is left with no explanation of his loss, increasing "the anguish of his paine" (6.11.26). In fact, there can be no answer to such a complex question, no matter how simply the question is phrased. The Graces disappear because nature is fallen and therefore, we can no longer expect the unadulterated happiness which, like virtue, "at first was by the Gods with paine / Planted in earth" (6.Proem.3). Instead, as Spenser indicates everywhere in Book VI, joy will be disrupted by sorrow, peace will be interrupted by strife, comfort will be upset by disquiet.

These visionary moments are both uncommonly beautiful and uncommonly sad because nature is fallen and they are no longer ordinary, natural experiences. Instead, their supernatural, extraordinary nature makes them elusive to our ordinary existence. The "glorious" vision of the Graces appears miraculously before Calidore's eyes, and just as quickly

vanishes (6.10.4). Thus Spenser's insistence in Book VI on the inevitability of strife as a condition of this life:

> The ioyes of loue, if they should euer last,
> Without affliction or disquietnesse
> That worldly chaunces doe amongst them cast,
> Would be on earth too great a blessednesse,
> Liker to heauen, then mortall wretchednesse.
> Therefore the winged God, to let men weet,
> That here on earth is no sure happinesse,
> A thousand sowres hath tempred with one sweet,
> To make it seeme more deare and dainty, as is meet. (6.11.1)

These moments of grace are therefore as essential as they are rare, for each one tempers a "thousand sowres" (6.11.1). Spenser stresses that we must search in vain for such blissful moments since we cannot "rashly seek that, which we might not see" (6.10.29). Instead, it is the irony of human existence that

> Oftimes it haps, that sorrowes of the mynd
> Find remedie vnsought, which seeking cannot fynd. (6.4.28)

Colin's response to Calidore does not remark upon the reason why the Graces disappeared, but emphasizes the aspects of the vision of the Graces upon which we should concentrate: "For being gone, none can them bring in place, / But whom they of them selues list so to grace" (6.10.20). We are reliant upon grace to provide us with moments of inspiration, but grace is

beyond our control and like the explanation Calidore is seeking from Colin, its complexity is beyond our understanding.

Nevertheless, there is a promise of something beyond the mutability of this world. Appreciation of the mutability in human experience is not merely a feeling of loss; it is a knowledge which consequently graces each circumstance of real human happiness with unique significance.[1] With the loss of the Graces, Calidore also experiences and understands the elusiveness of these harmonious moments and, therefore, the limits of fallen nature's access to divine grace. As Spenser states earlier in Book VI this recognition is essential to a proper understanding of the human experience:

> Such is the weakenesse of all mortal hope;
> So tickle is the state of earthly things,
> That ere they come vnto their aymed scope,
> They fall too short of our fraile reckonings,
> And bring vs bale and bitter sorrowings,
> In stead of comfort, which we should embrace:
> This is the state of Keasars and of Kings.
> Let none therefore, that is in meaner place,
> Too greatly grieue at any his vnlucky case. (6.3.5)

Although Courtesy's victory is limited in this world, Calidore can take comfort. Images of heavenly perfection like that expressed by the dance of the Graces can be glimpsed only occasionally on earth and they cannot last.

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[1] The nature of experience in Book VI appropriately anticipates the subsequent *Two Cantos of Mutability*.

Yet despite the fact that the vision of the Graces is beyond Calidore's "fraile reckoning," it nevertheless looks beyond the transience of imperfect nature to the permanence of divine grace (6.3.5).

The vision of the Graces indicates that we are sometimes granted access to divine grace. Yet, as Spenser insists throughout Book VI, although it is an access we can seek, it is not one we will find by searching: it must be granted. Nevertheless, in Book VI access to grace can be mediated by art, or more specifically, by the role Spenser assigns poetry in the circular movement of benefits from heaven to earth. The idea that in Book VI Spenser is paying a tribute to poetry itself -- that, as Kathleen Williams claims, "the ordering power of the book of Courtesie . . . is really the ordering power of the poet, creator of the small universe of the poem" -- is an extension of C. S. Lewis's interpretation of the Graces, as standing, in relation to Colin Clout, for poetic inspiration ("Courtesy" 343). Certainly poetry itself has a role in Book VI which it does not have elsewhere in *The Faerie Queene*. Spenser begins Book VI by calling on the Muses, the "sacred imps, that on *Parnasso* dwell," to guide his footing and conduct him well (6.Proem.2). Furthermore, the pastoral episode in Book VI can be interpreted as standing for the ordered world of Art in an otherwise disordered world, particularly since Colin Clout appears here, representing the poet himself (Bayley, "Order" 192-93). On Mount Acidale we are shown along with Calidore how the poet, represented by Colin Clout, is granted access to ideal forms of virtue when divinely inspired. Indeed, the extraordinary dance invoked by Colin could be taken to symbolize the essence of Courtesy as it manifests itself to the poet alone,

before he communicates his higher insight to others by his mediation. Poetry plays an important role not only by summoning the vision of divine harmony and beauty, but by enabling it to endure as art. As Kathleen Williams says:

> In one aspect, the pastoral story is Spenser's comment on his own creation, on the kind of strength and the kind of fragility poetry has. He wrecks his inset miniature world twice over, for the Brigants' destruction of the shepherds and their life is foreshadowed earlier in the same canto in the vanishing of the Graces from the Acidalian mount. Even for the poet, the nature of things can be apprehended only in moments of vision which are easily shattered by the intrusion of the everyday. Vision fades, but it can be eternalized in words, for "workes of learned wits and monuments of poetry abide for ever." ("Courtesy" 343)

Furthermore, poetry, with the other arts, can especially catch the sense of the beauty and sadness of these visionary moments. At no point is the reader permitted to forget the mixture of feelings of disdain for this world and longing for the absolute delight of those "pleasures rare" which can be found only occasionally on earth (6.10.30). "It is the poem's richness, its refusal to reduce its world to any neat conceptual pattern, or to exclude any discordant impulse when it arises, which must in the end constitute its chief claim to imaginative validity" (Cheney 247). The poet's triumph lies in his imitation of the complexity of the world, in his celebration of the endless pattern of oppositions through which both fallen nature and the effects of the gift of God's grace are to be perceived.

Thus the image of the Graces suits Spenser's syncretic style in a number of different ways. The picture of the dancing Graces itself creates a pleasing picture to satisfy the multitude; the many allegorical and iconographical interpretations of the Graces provide further layers of meaning for the learned; and the significance of the vision beyond the sum of its sources forms the core of the mystery (Fraunce 119). Because the Graces vanish before Calidore's eyes, they shadow forth a divine mystery beyond man's power to possess, and Calidore's struggle to understand them expresses that. In all of these ways, the episode of the Graces dancing on Mount Acidale is the symbolic core of Book VI of *The Faerie Queene*, providing the key to Spenser's definition of Courtesy. As we have seen above, in order to understand the implications of the vision of the Graces, we must bring to them a wide knowledge of Elizabethan literary and philosophical conventions. Many Renaissance theories of Courtesy, aside from being a social code of proper behaviour, have a spiritual aspect which is echoed in Spenser's definition of Courtesy in the Proem as heavenly seeds planted by the gods. Throughout Calidore's many adventures and those of the other characters in Book VI, the true nature of Courtesy is revealed as requiring grace and a close contact with nature, and is expressed in terms which foreshadow the dance of the Graces. While the traditional iconography of the Graces relates them to beauty, graciousness and liberality and thus to Courtesy as a generally defined social code, further investigation leads to a deeper understanding of Spenser's Courtesy as it involves both natural and divine characteristics. Furthermore, the encyclopedic symbolism of the Graces

relates them to art, and the vision of the Graces, while it is a vision of nature perfected by grace, is also the product of poetic art, for Spenser self-consciously announces his presence in the figure of the shepherd Colin. In this way Courtesy is inextricably linked to nature and grace -- and to art which can show nature perfected.

Thus, nature, grace, and art -- all the syncretic resources of the iconography of the Graces -- are drawn upon to define Courtesy. Nevertheless, the richness of Book VI provides Spenser's image of the Graces with a complexity beyond traditional definitions of Courtesy, and beyond the traditional iconography of the Graces themselves. By having the vision disappear, Spenser infuses the image of the Graces with a sense of the imperfection of fallen nature and the bitterness of natural experience. Poetry, which is linear and temporal by nature, can produce what a visual image cannot: a transitory experience which can evoke more effectively than any static image how fragile a moment can be. Spenser uses his art in this manner and places it in the circling movement of gracious benefits,

> for it too is divinely given, and all Spenser's poetry is a repaying of the "divine gift and heavenly instinct . . . poured into the witte by . . . celestiall inspiration" which E. K. tells us was described in *The English Poete*. In the book of Courtesie, he shows us in what the repayment consists, in the dedicated vision of the shepherd poet who re-creates the benevolent life of the universe in his picture of the Graces, circling in their dance of reciprocal goodwill around a human figure. (K. Williams, "Courtesy" 346)

For Spenser the most effective images are those in which art, conceived of as working upon nature and with the aid of divine inspiration, brings nature's forms to perfection. Spenser's syncretic iconography of the Graces infuses his idea of Courtesy with elements of the natural, the spiritual and the beautiful, so that this virtue becomes the supreme poetic possibility in human existence.

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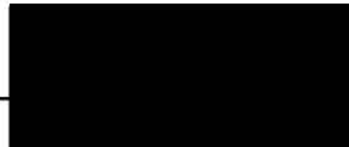
Author 

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24 August 1994