THE SHEPHEARDES CALENDER AND A SUIT OF NETTLES

IMITATION AND INNOVATION IN SPENSER'S THE SHEPHEARDES CALENDER AND REANEY'S A SUIT OF NETTLES

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ABSTRACT

This thesis surveys the nature of imitation in the pastoral *genre* by examining Spenser's The Shepheardes Calender and a Canadian poem which overtly descends from it--James Reaney's A Suit of Nettles. The Introduction establishes the chronological evolution of pastoral by focusing on Theocritus's Idylls, Virgil's Eclogues and Mantuan's Adulescentia as generic touchstones. It also outlines briefly the Renaissance distinction between "Arcadian" and "Mantuanesque" pastoral. Chapter One deals with the extent to which each of The Shepheardes Calender and A Suit of Nettles specifically imitates its pastoral predecessors from Theocritus through Spenser. Chapter Two examines the degree of social engagement: while Spenser clearly comments on or even satirizes specific contemporary events and people in the world's eye--such as the French marriage question--in The Shepheardes Calender, Reaney--under the influence of Northrop Frye--seems to be concerned with drawing the reader's attention to general flaws he observes in twentieth-century Canadian culture. Finally, Chapter Three addresses the poetic craftsmanship of Spenser and Reaney by paying particular attention to their respective April eclogues through close technical analyses.

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INTRODUCTION

The Pastoral Tradition

Although the notion of *imitatio* is central to the literature of humanism--on which Spenser's The Shepheardes Calender, clearly influenced by Virgil and Theocritus, undoubtedly relies--it remains an imperfectly understood principle of poetic composition, perhaps because in our time it has often been viewed pejoratively in contrast with its apparent opposite, "originality." These terms, however, are not as they may seem mutually exclusive. When one examines, for example, the pastoral *genre*, "imitation" and "innovation" go hand in hand. For instance, Virgil looks to Theocritus's Idylls (280 B.C.), Mantuan relies on the Arcadia of Virgil's Eclogues (37 B.C.) to create, paradoxically, primarily ecclesiastical eclogues in the Adulescentia (1498). Edmund Spenser appropriates the work of all three men in his attempt to "overgoe" his pastoral predecessors in The Shepheardes Calender (1579), and James Reaney, under the influence of Canadian cultural guru Northrop Frye, depends on a notion of imitation in A Suit of Nettles (1958) that places his work in the continuum of pastoral tradition. In a study of literary *genre*, in this case of pastoral, direct imitation is often a question of mere surface resemblance. However, as Steven Walker observes, what is more crucial are

the hidden analogies, the independent discoveries of similar motifs, images and structures, and the literary transmission of the same sense of human existence (Walker 5). Moreover, pastoral, perhaps more than any other literary *genre,* impels the modern reader back to its ancient sources: Theocritus's Idylls and Virgil's Eclogues. It is to these two poets that one must turn to gain insight into the nature of pastoral.

Theocritus's *Idylls*

To his Idylls, written in Greece circa 280 B.C., Theocritus brings the elevated style of Homer and Hesiod and mixes it with rustic talk of billy-goats, thorns and grasses whereby he creates a *genre* by discriminate employment of a disparate literary heritage, and by his "perceptive and rigorous moulding" of herdsmen's songs (Boyle 31). Although Theocritus wrote his seventeen idylls in a refined form of Homeric hexameter, he attempted to place his shepherd singers socially by using a **Doric** dialect. This revolutionary method of combining a local accent with epic meter offered a courtly version of rustic activities as Theocritus had observed them in Sicily. Bruno Snell claims that "Theocritus's herdsmen, notwithstanding their pastoral status, often prove to be urban intellectuals in disguise" (Walker 24). Snell's observation is legitimate enough. However, we cannot deny that there is a freshness in Theocritus's

description of landscape and a genuinely sympathetic *nexus* between the poet and the shepherds' life which his Idylls tend to evoke.

Before striking up their songs, Theocritus's herdsmen must be able to let their sheep, goats, or cattle safely graze. In *Idyll* I, for example, Thyrsis offers to tend the goats of his friend while the latter sits down in the shade to play his pipes.[1] A universal matter of pastoral is the image of contentment which is commonly embodied in the figure of a herdsman at peace with the animals for which he cares, and with himself. Such an image occurs in the opening lines of Theocritus's first idyll: "There's subtle music in the whispers of that pine/down by the spring; yet your piping goatherd,/rivals it" (Shore 11). The tragic song about Daphnis's death in the first idyll would provide later poets with useful *topoi*: the lamentation of Nature, the procession of mourners, the refrain and invocation to the Muses, the appeal to Pan and the relinquishing of the pipe (Walker 45). Not only do Theocritus's herdsmen sing, but they sing for a prize. For example, while in *Idyll* I Thyrsis is rewarded with goat's milk and with a beautiful bowl, Comatas in *Idyll* V wins a lamb (Walker 26).

Man's innate impulse toward fragmentation and disorder is defined in Idylls III, X, and XI as an overwhelming capitulation to sexual passion

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[1] A precondition for the creation of song is the choice of a suitable landscape--a *locus amoenus* (Latin, "lovely place")--in which shepherds may relax and enjoy themselves.

(Boyle 19). Too frequently the emotion engendered in the lover is an all-consuming destructive *eros* which leads to another type of contest in the Idylls in which the deserving candidate is unjustly vanquished by the silence of his adversary. Luckless suitors such as Polyphemus in *Idyll* XI sing in vain to attract their sweethearts and get no reward at all. Or perhaps the song is its own reward; the most potent *panacea* for the lover's madness.[2]

Ostensibly, the prototypical Theocritean singer (like all pastoral singers after him) manifests the potential for ordering his lovelorn existence through his developed creative perception: that is, through the act of poetic creation--singing. Thus, one discovers in pastoral a continuing tension between "order and chaos, art and irrationality" (Boyle 21). The final idyll with its evocation of a country festival implicitly associated with fertility and fecundity and of Aratus's contrastingly fruitless vigils at his beloved's threshold, demonstrates such a tension. Moreover, the dualism illustrates what the *kala* (finer side of life) and the *mê kala* (ugly side of life) are for Theocritus (Walker 35). Clearly the reader is expected to glean that the beauty of one world consoles one for the harsh pain of the other--the very meaning of poetry as the "cure for love."

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[2]Mantuan in his Adulescentia in "*Religio*" looks to song as a balm (Mantuan VIII. 176).

Virgil's *Eclogues*

A reader who comes to Virgil's Eclogues directly from Theocritus recognizes that much is familiar. Why Virgil chose to imitate Theocritus has been most adequately addressed by Bruno Snell, who regards the pastoralism of the Eclogues as a flight from reality, but at the same time views Virgil as coming to grips with a major cultural crisis and opening up new spiritual possibilities (Alpers 1979, 113). According to Paul Alpers, it seems possible that Theocritus's shepherd singer suggested to Virgil a way of engaging larger problems, themes and ambitions without forsaking the sense that poetic authenticity involved a lyrical presence on the poet's part and was grounded in a knowledge of one's limitations (Alpers 114).[3]

Alpers suggests that "composing" best describes the way Virgil interprets Theocritean conventions. In addition, with what Klinger refers to as his "penchant for the significant," Virgil regularly makes the conventions more susceptible to interpretation and more internally consistent (Alpers 210). Although Theocritus's poetry remains closer to the earth, more concerned with the rhythms of nature, than Virgil's Eclogues, viewed against the backdrop of

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[3]Brooks Otis's economical account of the Eclogues offers an overview to Virgil's debt to Theocritus as follows:
"The eclogues clearly fall into three main categories: the fully Theocritean poems (2, 3, 7, 8); the Theocritean poems with a specifically Roman, contemporary bearing (5, 10); and the non-Theocritean poems (1, 4, 6, 9)" (Alpers 107).

social, political and moral disruption incorporated into a bucolic frame, appear to be far more realistic than Theocritus's Idylls (Segal 11). And, since the poignant Virgilian tension between war and rustic ease, between "threatening *urbs* and defenceless *rus*" is largely absent in Theocritus, the Idylls make fewer demands on the reader (Segal 85).

Virgil appropriates the theme of love and the treatment of it as a wretched condition from *Idyll* XI in which Theocritus prescribes a cure for *eros*--"the Muses," by which he means (or so critics have suggested) the writing of poetry. Virgil, however, is less optimistic and has no remedy to offer the shepherd Corydon of *Eclogue* II, for example, who "burn[s] in love's fire" for "beautiful Alexis, the master's favorite" (Virgil II. 68 and 2). Furthermore, as in Theocritus, in Virgil *amor* or passionate love is inextricably linked with *dementia* or madness.

Eclogue III clearly relies on the Theocritean convention of a singing match and the structure of *Idyll* V (fourteen rounds of answering couplets) as Virgil sets up a competition between Menalcas and Damoetas in twelve rounds of answering couplets. Their *repartee* introduces the *puer/senex* motif: the dialogue between youth and old age that will continue to engage pastoral writers. The judge of the contest, Palaemon, draws the reader's attention to the *locus amoenus* as he encourages the competitors to

Sing then, because we sit together on soft grass,

> And every field now, every tree is burgeoning;
> Now woods are leafing, now the year is loveliest (Virgil III. 55-7).

But the most celebrated of Virgil's eclogues, known as the "famous fourth" or "Messianic" eclogue, does not depend on Theocritus for its source. Instead, the cosmic regeneration of *Eclogue* IV is a version of the familiar myth of the divine child who brings hope to a fallen age and a despairing race of men (Segal 11). Despite all of their heavy reliance on mythical patterns, Theocritus's Idylls offer nothing of this scope. Instead of offering a prophecy of the child's nature and effect, here the poet addresses Lucina (the goddess of childbirth) and asks her to "look with blessing on the Boy" in its hour of birth (IV. 8). What is most intriguing is that human presence and actual relationships now characterize the stuff of prophecy (Alpers 162).

Mantuan's *Adulescentia*

Following the precedent of Petrarch's largely satirical eclogues, Mantuan established pastoral as a vehicle for satire with the publication of his Adulescentia in 1498 (Walker 103). Although complaints about the niggardliness of patrons had a long literary history in pastoral, Mantuan's main model for his complaint lies outside the pastoral realm in Juvenal's seventh satire which he clearly echoes in his fifth eclogue called "*Candidus*: On The Treatment of Poets by Rich Men" (Piepho 1989, 114). Unlike the life of

otium prevalent in Theocritus's Idylls and Virgil's Eclogues, Mantuan stresses a life of toil and vigilance in the Adulescentia. However, like the works of his pastoral predecessors, the prime source of disruption in Mantuan's work--that disturbs what he regards as necessary vigilance in a difficult and often dangerous world--is love. Mantuan stresses that love is a hidden fire, a madness that, blinding the eye of reason, cancels out the faculty separating man from beast (Piepho 1989, xxxiv). This assumed stratification of nature is a departure from Virgil, who recognized that the nature of beasts and men alike is passion-based.

Renaissance Pastoral

By the Renaissance one can discern two different, though related, strands within pastoral, the "Arcadian" and the "Mantuanesque." The difference between these two versions is best articulated by Patrick Cullen. For the most part, "Arcadian" pastoral adopts as the pastoral ideal the *pastor felix* or happy shepherd and the leisured life of *otium*, and correspondingly locates its characters in a landscape lush and pleasant but at the same time almost always vulnerable (Cullen 2). But Arcadian pastoral can and does satirize the artifices and corruption of the nonpastoral world (i.e. court)--indeed, in the very fact of withdrawal from that world, criticism is implicit. While pastoral can portray an escape from reality, the pastoral mode itself from Theocritus onward involved a critical exploration and counterbalancing of attitudes,

perspectives and experiences. Thus, ambivalence behind pastoral's countermovements (city vs. country, high vs. low) manifests itself in its combined tendencies to deprecate itself as low and unworthy and to celebrate itself as humble and natural--more a preliminary to a higher style (Cullen 18).[4]

Like Arcadian pastoral, Mantuanesque pastoral involves a counterpointing of disparate values and it is constantly concerned with the nonpastoral world of city, court and church (19). However, unlike Arcadian pastoral, Mantuanesque pastoral opposes the shepherd of worldly felicity and instead takes as its ideal the Judeo-Christian *pastor bonus*: the shepherd unwaveringly committed to the flock and to the requirements for eternal salvation (Cullen 3). In light of this ideal, the function of pastoral became one of enlightening man on the virtues of the *pastor bonus* and exposing him to the vices of the *pastor malus*. Mantuan's distrust of passionate love and pleasure as powers capable of seducing man away from reason, responsibility to the flock and eternal things permeates the Mantuanesque pastoral's *contemptus mundi* perspective on the city, court and love (23). Whereas Arcadian tradition attempts to create a world in which man's desire for *otium* can be satisfied,

[4]The *rota Vergilii* or "wheel of Virgil" was a familiar convention in the Renaissance. It respected a time-honoured tradition concerning the path from lowly pastoral to the heights of epic as established by Virgil's generic progression through the Eclogues, the Georgics and the Aeneid.

Mantuanesque pastoral creates a largely predatory world from which only religion and eternity promise relief: the city, the court and Eros are instruments of the devil who lures man to abandon his soul (25).

Louis Adrian Montrose observes that "pastoral pervades the forms and performances of Elizabethan culture" (Montrose 1983, 420). For Montrose, the precondition of pastoral was the erasure of all genuinely rural concerns and the reinscription of those "country" values within a court ideology, the result of which was a reinvented pastoral form available for the discussion of royal power and courtiers' ambitions in symbolic terms (Patterson 130). Nevertheless, as Montrose admits, the fictional time-space of such Elizabethan pastoral eclogues as The Shepheardes Calender is governed by the diurnal rhythm of shepherding: driving the flock out to pasture at daybreak and driving them back to fold at dusk (Montrose 427). More importantly, within this frame, the literary shepherd's day may be occupied by singing, piping, wooing and other such indulgences of a leisured pastoral life. Elizabethan practice confirms that pastoral has an affinity for paradox as the chiastic formulation "playfully ironic and ironically playful" suggests (452). As Jonathan Goldberg explains, Montrose argues against the escapist, nostalgic readers of pastoral who separate pastoral from reality and argues for pastoral play as real work (Goldberg 525).

CHAPTER ONE: IMITATION

Imitation in *The Shepheardes Calender*

In the English tradition, Edmund Spenser's The Shepheardes Calender (1579) represents the apex of pastoral development. When in the late 1570s Spenser chose pastoral as the mode for his first important work, he chose it no doubt in part because Virgil had chosen it and because as "E.K." notes in his prefatory "Epistle," "So flew Mantuane as being not full somd. So Petrarque. So Boccace; So Marot, Sanazarus, and also divers other excellent both Italian and French Poetes" (Spenser *Epistle*). Continuity of Greek and Roman pastoral conventions in The Shepheardes Calender is evident in Spenser's use of a similar setting and its characters (shepherds, goatherds, pastors), in their dialogues and the contrasts implicit in them, in the central theme of love and the plaintive mode in which it is treated (especially in "Januarye"), and in the use of roughened meter and archaic diction to recreate the artificial colloquialism of Theocritus's mixed Doric dialect (Fogelman 114). The ancient tradition that served as a matrix for Renaissance pastoralists like Spenser was highly conventional.[1] Its herdsmen, its characteristic forms such

[1]"Eclogue" in Greek literally means "selection." From its application to Virgil's pastoral poems, the term came to have its restricted meaning of a

as the amoebaean singing contest, the plaintive love-lay and the lament for a dead shepherd-figure, its idiosyncratic *mélange* of rural simplicity and urban sophistication each contributed to "an aesthetic framework abstracted from the sphere of daily experience" (Fogelman 111).

Virgil's Influence

The Shepheardes Calender is the text in English literary history that most closely resembles Virgil's Eclogues. As Annabel Patterson says, the presentation of the Calender as a coherent "eclogue-book," its elaborate provision of "learned" glosses by "E.K.," and its woodcuts at the head of each eclogue (reminiscent of Sebastian Brant's Virgil) all intimate a holistic attempt to recreate in English the cultural phenomenon that Virgil's Eclogues had become--a phenomenon that combined the politics of self-representation (the lowly poet-shepherd figure) and a historically constituted system of textual exegesis (Patterson 106). Virgil's influence on Spenser may be clearly marked in over half of the eclogues in the Calender, notably "Januarye," "June," "August" and "November."

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formal pastoral poem fashioned after Theocritus's Idylls. In the Renaissance the pastoral eclogue served satiric and allegorical purposes and to comprehend a wide variety of themes. As used by Theocritus, Virgil, Petrarch, Boccaccio and Spenser, the convention of the eclogue is one of humility to be used by a poet before he is ready to declare his full powers (Lee 53).

"Januarye"

"Januarye," for example, thematically based on Virgil's *Eclogue II* in which the shepherd Corydon burns in love "for beautiful Alexis, the master's favorite" (Virgil II. 1), introduces the reader to Colin who is equally debilitated by his "unfortunate love, being but newly enamoured of a countrie lasse called Rosalinde" ("Januarye" *Argument*). Colin's love for Rosalinde interferes to some extent with his pastoral responsibilities--a pastoral commonplace from Theocritus onward--and Colin himself laments that interference:

> Thou feeble flocke, whose fleece is rough and rent,
> Whose knees are weake through fast and evill fare:
> Mayst witnesse well by thy ill governement,
> Thy maysters mind is overcome with care ("Januarye" 43-6).

In Spenser's pastoral world, human nature and the nature of conventional seasonal description are "entwined in an original and even startling fashion in order to explicate the psychological and moral qualities of love pain" (Hoffman 45). "Januarye" defines not only a metamorphic use of nature's landscape, but also a technique of exploiting fully pastoral convention. Through the rhetorical cross-coupling of *chiasmus*--evident in Colin's statement "With mourning pyne I, you with pyning mourne" ("Januarye" 48)--the boundary between nature and human nature is broken down in order to show that each category participates in the other so that nature and human nature become inextricably intertwined. Colin visualizes the winter landscape as a mirror of his plight and

subsequently both man and nature are "barrein ground, whome winters wrath hath wasted" (19). Spenser's use of nature's landscape in "Januarye" is metamorphic in so far as the raging storms associated with the season reign also in Colin's heart and freeze his "life blood...with unkindly cold" (26). Yet, unlike a traditional pastoral complaint, the correpondence between shepherd and his surroundings is a paradoxical sign of division, because, although the calender year is old and the "stormy stoures" are those of winter, Colin is nevertheless in the prime of his youth:

> Such stormy stoures do breede my balefull smart.
> As if my yeare were wast, and woxen old.
> And yet alas, but now my spring begonne,
> And yet alas, yt is already donne (27-30).

Colin's language in its carefully balanced phrasing, its reliance on hyperbole and in its use of paradox suggests less the shepherd lover of pastoral tradition than the courtly lover of Petrarchan tradition, for whom love is the source of every delight, every sorrow amd every oxymoron (Shore 73). Rejected in love by Rosalinde who "deignes not [his] good will, but doth reprove,/And of [his] rurall musick holdeth scorn" ("Januarye" 63-4), Colin is very close to entering the world of the Petrarchan lover, a world "begotten by despair upon impossibility" (Shore 74).[2] In this state of despair, neither Colin's therapeutic piping nor his "unlucky Muse" can ease his "musing mynd" ("Januarye" 69 and

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[2]Andrew Marvel writes of the world of the Petrarchan lover in these terms in "The Definition of Love" (Shore 74).

70). Consequently, he breaks "his oaten pype" (thereby renouncing his pastoral art and presumably his ability to create) and "down [does] lye" (72).

"June"

When in "June" Colin is betrayed by Rosalinde and "in his steed Menalcas, another shepherd" is also "received disloyally" ("June" *Argument*)[3], readers of Virgil would scarcely forget that the effects of a similar situation severed Gallus from the *otium* of Arcadia in *Eclogue X* (Piepho 1985, 580). Fortunately, mid-cycle, no such absolute severance takes place in Colin's case; rather, from "June" onward he seeks out only those elements within the landscape that will reflect his own tormented emotions. Colin's "ryper age" reminds us that just as Colin is midway through the calender year, Spenser is nearly finished half of the first phase of the prescribed Virgilian career-pattern from pastoral to epic ("June" 36). Moreover, Hobbinoll's apotheosis of Colin as a poet and his representation of his songs of "silver sound" as surpassing the talent of the Muses anticipates Colin's (and Spenser's) progression from pastoral to epic ("June" 61).

"August"

Spenser's most undeniably Virgilian eclogue is "August"--a singing contest--wherein the argument gestures to imitation of Theocritus: "whereto

[3]Spenser takes the name Menalcas directly from Virgil's fifth eclogue.

also Virgil fashioned his third and seventh AEglogues" ("August" *Argument*). In *Eclogue III*, Menalcas (the elder shepherd) challenges Damoetas (the younger shepherd) who previously "murdered miserable tunes on squeaking straw" (Virgil III. 27) to a singing-match; the stake is agreed upon and a judge found. Likewise, in "August," the emotionally unattached Willye challenges the lamenting lover Perigot to a "game/Wherefore with myne thou dare thy musick matche" ("August" 1-2). In addition, just as Virgil's Palaemon pronounces the contest a draw (as he explains to Menalcas "Both you and he have earned the heifer-so have all/Who fear the sweet or feel the bitterness of love," III. 109-10), so does Spenser's Cuddie "deeme ech have gayned" ("August" 131). Moreover, Cuddie, like the goatherd Meliboeus in *Eclogue VII* who quotes from memory the songs from the infamous singing-match between Corydon and Thyrsis, recites perfectly Colin's "heavy laye" in which he vows that, like "the Nightingale.../That blessed byrd, that spends her time of sleepe/In songs and plaintive pleas, the more taugment/The memory of his misdeede, that bred her woe," he will continue to complain about his unrequited love for Rosalinde ("August" 149 and 183-6).

"August" is characteristically Spenserian in the attention given to the different verse forms: the framing twenty-four line dialogue between Willye and Perigot (in which, unevenly matched, Willye is privileged over Perigot because he is given a quatrain to each of Perigot's couplets) is a variant of

"Januarye's" six-line stanza (Spenser 135); the roundelay (clearly modelled after the rounds of answering couplets found in *Eclogue III* and *Idyll V*) demonstrates Spenser's attempt to "overgoe" the technical skills of his pastoral predecessors as he divides each couplet evenly into single-line stichomythic exchanges between his competitors; and finally, Colin's lay--an intricately styled verse pattern called the sestina--serves as an example of Spenser's poetic craftsmanship and his conscious preparation to move on to the next stage of the Virgilian career-pattern.

"November"

As Virgil in *Eclogue V* has Mopsus sing a lament for the death of Daphnis, correspondingly Spenser in "November" has Colin improvise a pastoral elegy in honour of Dido. In "June" Colin scorned the Muses' power (recall where he says to Hobbinoll: "Of Muses Hobbinol, I conne no skill: For they bene daughters of the highest Jove,/And holden scorne of homely shepheards quill," 65-7) and chose rather to play "pyping lowe in shade of lowly grove" in order to please only himself "all be it ill" (71 and 72). However, the elegy in "November," as Lee Piepho notes, would seem to mark the moment when Colin finally breaks out of the isolating self-absorbed passion that has

characterized him throughout The Shepheardes Calender (Piepho 1985, 579).[4]

Just as "August" provides a glimpse of Spenser's craftsmanship through Cuddie's recitation of Colin's sestina, so does "November" advertise the poet's increasingly refined ability *via* Colin's improvised but sophisticated lament. More specifically, as the Yale editors observe, while the lament consists of a difficult ten-line stanza with four distinct line lengths, even the dialogue which precedes Colin's praise and subsequent apotheosis of Dido is written in eight-line units rhyming *ababbcbc* after Clément Marot (Spenser 185).[5] Surprisingly enough, E.K. makes no mention of the fact that the emblem of "November"--*la mort ny mord*--was indebted to Marot's Oeuvres of 1539 which were published under that very motto (Patterson 118).[6]

The pattern of the pastoral dirge as used particularly by Theocritus, Virgil, Marot and Spenser, "had special relevance for the Christian mourner who must somehow learn to reconcile the immediate emotional urgency of loss

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[4]Juxtaposed with the elegy in "November" nevertheless is Colin's love plaint to Rosalinde in "December" which returns him to his previously self-absorbed world of *love longynge*.

[5]As E.K. notes in the *Argument*, Spenser models this eclogue after Marot's Eclogue de Mme Loyse de Savoye (1531), but in so doing "farre passing/his reache" since Marot uses linked quatrains while Spenser adopts an eight-line stanza ("November" *Argument* 5-6).

[6]To strengthen her argument for imitation of the pastoral poet's role, Annabel Patterson draws attention to the etymological *nexus* of Marot and "Maro"--one of Virgil's names.

with belief in a life everlasting" (Cain in Spenser 185). Marot's status as an early supporter of the Reformation virtually guaranteed him Spenser's admiration. It was, moreover, the *nexus* made by Marot between Protestantism and his reinterpretations of Virgil that made him for Spenser a challenging and provocative model, one that affected the whole emotional tone of the Calender giving it its melancholy and wintry aspect (Patterson 107). Opening as it does with an invocation to "Melpomene thou mournefulst Muse of nyne," Colin's lament for Dido reveals as a public consolation the vision of a heavenly Elysium to compensate for what he presently regards as the "trustlesse state of earthly things" ("November" 53 and 153).

Mantuan's Influence

"Julye"

Not only does Virgil's presence greatly inform The Shepheardes Calender, but so does Mantuan's especially in the ecclesiastical eclogues "Julye," "September," and "October." Relying primarily on the upland-lowland motif of Mantuan's eighth eclogue "*Religio*," "Julye," like "Februarie," also depends on the medieval *conflictus* or debate between polar opposites. In "*Religio*," Mantuan's Candidus explains that "the gods and blessed patriarchs chose quiet dwellings in the high mountains" (Mantuan VIII. 50-1).

Correspondingly, in "Julye," Morrell informs Thomalin that these "holy hylles" stand "sacred unto saints.../and of them hen theyr name" including St. Michael's "mount" and Saint Brigid's "bowre" ("Julye" 38, 39-40, 41 and 43). Thomalin, however, advocates an earth-bound humility to be found on the lowlands as evidenced in his remarks that "To Kerke the narre, from God more farre," and that "he that strives to touch the starres,/oft stombles at a strawe" (97 and 99-100). He objects to the idleness and lordly living of the bishops who do not cater to the welfare of their parishioners but rather corruptly appoint and maintain an unlearned clergy:

> The corne is theyrs, let other thresh
> their hands they may not file.
> They han great stores, and thriftye stockes,
> great freendes and feeble foes:
> What neede hem caren for their flocks? (191-5).

Appropriate for Spenser's recycling of Mantuan in "Julye" is his "adoption of the 'fourteener' (which George Turberville had used for his translation of Mantuan in 1567) as the verse form for the eclogue which the Elizabethans also employed as the common measure of metrical psalm versions" (Cain in Spenser 120). The verse form therefore had distinctly Protestant connotations at the time that Spenser was writing the Calender. Unlike Mantuan's eighth eclogue which engages in a general discussion whereby it satirizes Roman clerical corruptions, Spenser's "Julye" concentrates its satire through the allegory of the eagle and the shellfish on specific

individuals.

"September"

"September," the most satirical of the Calender's ecclesiastical eclogues, borrows heavily from Mantuan's *Eclogue IX: "Falco"* wherein the disillusioned Faustulus reveals the true corrupt nature of the Curia at Rome. To the comparatively innocent Candidus, Faustulus explains that

> Rome is among men what the owl is among birds. She sits on a tree trunk and, as if she were the queen of birds, summons the multitude from afar with her haughty commands. Ignorant of her deception, the crowd assembles....And while their nimble lightness bears from here and there on to the trees' twig growth, a string ensnares the feet of some, twigs smeared with birdlime hold fast others, and all become spoils to be roasted on willow spits (Mantuan IX. 120-7).

It is not surprising that Spenser in "September" renews his vituperation of various corrupt ecclesiastical practices such as traffic in Church livings, the system of fines, the unfair oppression of the lower orders by the higher and the pride and pomp of the ecclesiasts. Diggon's satire, however, is aimed not only at the corruption of the clergy but also at the rapacity of the courtiers who preyed upon the lands of the Church. "September" provides us with the most direct confrontation of the Arcadian pastoral ethic (Hobbinoll's position) with the Mantuanesque austere and wintry ethic (Diggon's position), and in so doing this eclogue (perhaps more than any other in the Calender) suggests to us the dual limitation and strength of these two contending forms of conventional pastoral wisdom (Cullen 68).

"October"

"October," the last of the satirical eclogues in The Shepheardes Calender, recycles Mantuan's *Eclogue V* in which Candidus (a needy poet) appeals to Silvanus (a stingy connoisseur of poetry) for financial help, for, as he explains, "When I sing, I grow thirsty, yet no man extends me a cup in my thirst" (Mantuan V. 21). Instead of monetary aid, what Candidus gets from Silvanus is a lecture on the poet's place in the social order. Silvanus insists that Candidus's lot is "genius, speech, the lyre, and the art of song," not wealth, and that God "divides all things among everyone, since He can see the future better than we. Remain content with your lot, then, without seeking ours" (43 and 44-6). As E.K. indicates in the argument to "October," Cuddie, like Candidus, "complayneth of the contempte of Poetrie, and the causes thereof" ("October" *Argument*). Cuddie complains to Piers that he has "pyped erst so long with payne/That all [his] Oten reedes bene rent and wore" to which Piers stoically responds, "the prayse is better, then the price,/The glory eke much greater than the gayne" ("October" 7-8 and 19-20). Furthermore, when Cuddie laments that poetry lacks reward, for "words bene wynd, and wasten soone in vayne," Piers encourages him to "lyft up thy selfe out of the lowly dust" and sing of higher, more noble issues such as "bloody Mars,...wars... giusts" and "fayre Elisa" (36, 38, 39 and 45). Taking Piers's advice to heart, Cuddie also remembers how Virgil, the "Romish Tityrus,"

abandoned "his Oaten reede" of pastoral and "did sing of warres and deadly drede/So as the Heavens did quake his verse to here" in his epic (55, 56, 59-60).[7]

Imitation of the *Calender* in *A Suit of Nettles*

While the overall scheme of A Suit of Nettles deliberately mirrors The Shepheardes Calender, the degree to which the eclogues correspond is uneven. Just as Spenser's "E.K." provides glosses to help the reader decipher authorial intent, so does Reaney provide a prefatory explanation of "several matters" "at the risk of insulting everyone's intelligence" (perhaps a knock at E.K.'s scholarly, yet at times too pedantic efforts to aid the reader of Spenser's eclogues!) (Reaney xix). However, rather than providing a "generall argument" or a dedicatory epistle (presumably Reaney does not rely on the beneficence of a patron to publish his pastoral), Reaney offers an "Invocation to the Muse of Satire: whom he hopes will

> Speak...to this broken pen
> And from its blots and dribbling letter-strings
> Unloose upon our farm & barnyard--medicine (Reaney *Invocation* 14-16).

[7]As Tom Cain, the editor of the Calender in the Yale edition, indicates, Spenser likely presents the Virgilian model in "October" because the "Romish Tityrus" was born in October (Spenser 168).

This invocation indicates that Reaney's use of the eclogue form is primarily for satirical purposes. And, as a reading of A Suit of Nettles reveals, the purposes of satire are served by a well-defined romantic or pastoral myth as when in "January" the lovelorn Branwell dons a suit of nettles to constantly remind him of his painful condition (Lee 53). Reaney's innovation may be seen clearly in his depiction of the Muse herself who is a grotesque amalgam of those aspects of a farm which suggest violent yet purposeful penetration. Her physical attributes are "a series of metaphorical identities establishing her as a mythical being"(Lee 59): her hands are "hawthorn branches in the winter," her teeth the "cold March rain that bites the soft snow," her torso made of "a million hooked unhooking things," her legs "stainless steel, knives & scythes bunched together," and her "feet with harrows, and with discs for shoes" (Reaney *Invocation* 3, 4, 11, 12 and 13).

Like Spenser's eclogues, Reaney's are both lyric and satiric; they follow the successive months of the year and, although they deal with the expected themes of love, praise, song, life and death, they also monitor the health of Church and State. And, although knowledge of The Shepheardes Calender adds an extra dimension to a reading of A Suit of Nettles (since Reaney's pastoral is a deliberate attempt to recreate in a rural Ontario environment the vision of Spenser's poem), it does not depend on a knowledge of the Calender for its accessibility. Nevertheless, just as Spenser's "Januarye"

has Aquarius the water-bearer as its zodiacal sign, Reaney's opening eclogue correspondingly focuses attention on the wintry pond and the question of whether or not "Old Brown's crowbar [will] break the ice.../To give new life" by providing the farm animals with drinking water ("January" 26-7).

"January"

Branwell in the "January" eclogue of A Suit of Nettles, like Colin (his Spenserian counterpart), is disappointed in love. In fact, the first experience awaiting Branwell as he plunges into the cycle of the year is to be "crossed in love" which is apparently the reason for his wearing his suit of nettles "till [his] death" ("January" 16). Frye suggests aptly that Branwell's suit symbolizes life in the world of *eros* or natural love (Frye 1959, 346). Wearing his "green tatters," Branwell suffers as an embodiment of natural or profane love all its "stimulation and discomfort" (Woodman 38). Paradoxically, his suffering is the catalyst of "More love poems, paradoxes, happy unions, lies" ("January" 40). Because of his lovelorn state, Branwell seeks philosophical guidance from Mopsus, "a thoroughgoing misanthropist and misogynist," who in didactic speech sets before Branwell caricatures of major views of love (Lee 61).[8] Mopsus despises the kind of physical union he has just overheard taking place in the loft which is "expelled in warm coughs, shrieks, words, cries,

[8]Mopsus caricatures the major views of love in the Western world: the romantic idealization of Eros, the Calvinistic loathing of sexuality, and the Platonic ideal of rational love (Lee 61).

alarums"--a base love undesirable because it "has chosen Sewer for his mate" ("January" 66 and 69). It is certain that the love which Mopsus will ultimately advocate for Branwell will make no use of "this stake and heart-of-vampire sexual eye of ooze" (90).[9]

Mopsus encourages the melancholic Branwell to abandon his quest for profane love in which he claims to "love her soul and not [his own] selfish pleasure" and to adopt in its place the brotherly Platonic form of love whereby he may "be certain of the soul's affection" and thus transcend all sensuality and "foul mad disorder" (84, 86 and 87). Mopsus moreover advocates forsaking both Elijah and Jezebel and encourages Branwell to adopt a view of the world in which "all is bland correct and rational" (54). Although Branwell agrees that Mopsus's "favourite land is better," he nevertheless rejects his plea for loyalty to "all that is unphysical" because that promised world is all "too round and too continent" for him (100, 57 and 102). Branwell rejects these abstractions in order to stay in a world in which he can live through the cycles of human and natural life, for he wants

> ...offspring summerson autumnman wintersage
> And tricklerrain thawwind panetap upleaf windrage
> Plow and seed and hoe, green, sucklepig, yellowripe,
> sicklestraw and all such glamourie (103-6).

It is moreover appropriate that Branwell desire "offspring... wintersage *et al*"

[9]Frye lauded this sexual image as "a breath-taking flash of wit" (Frye 1959, 348).

in order that we be able to follow his progress throughout the seasonal cycle.[10]

"February"

Reaney's "February" eclogue also relies on Spenser's "Januarye" because it borrows the town/country motif which is not only presented in the woodcut but also is juxtaposed by "a shepheardes boy" Colin's unfortunate love for Rosalinde:"a countrie lasse" from the "neighbour towne" ("January" *Argument* and 50). Just as Rosalinde is socially unattainable for Colin since she hails from the higher echelons of a "neighbour towne," so is Dorcas, "a pet goose," an amor out of reach for the barnyard-bound Branwell (Reaney "February" 16). By privileging "Dorcas Goose" who spends "some/Time with a

[10]"Offspring....and all such glamourie" is an archetypal design reminiscent of those commonplace accounts of the ages of man of which Jacques's in As You Like It is the most familiar:

> All the world's a stage.
> And all the men and women merely players;
> They have their exits and their entrances,
> And one man in his time plays many parts,
> His acts being seven ages. At first, the infant,
> Mewling and puking in the nurse's arms.
> ....
> Last scene of all,
> That ends this strange eventful history,
> Is second childishness and mere oblivion,
> Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything
>
> (II. vii. 139-66).

broken leg up at the house," Reaney clearly establishes a social hierarchy even in such a "cramped stupid goosehouse world" (17-18 and "December" 28). Reminiscent of Pope's Belinda performing her toilette in "The Rape of the Lock," Dorcas, back in the gooseshed, sits "In the best corner...with her glass/Primping & being admired by all geese *en masse*" (19-20). Distinguished in appearance from the other geese by a "button & string" that she wears "so prettily around [her] neck," Dorcas fashions herself as the chosen one to inform the others about life up at the farmhouse (21 and 22). As aspiring country gentlemen during the Renaissance were lured by the social promotion, excitement and intrigue promised at court, likewise Dorcas falls victim to the spell of the farmhouse and consequently her sojourn there remains hyperbolically engraved in her mind as "that dear gold time" when her mistress bade her to play on their piano "softer than a dove" (56 and 57).

However, although Dorcas recalls a prelapserian view of the farmhouse, she also notices that "It's a guilty house, my girls; tho' we kill/Grass blades, they kill scores of green elms" (66-7). Here Reaney encourages us to view human civilization and its counterpart, the uncharacteristically civilized gooseworld, simultaneously. Further explicit association between humans and geese is realized later in Dorcas's diatribe through which she claims (in a tone reminiscent of T.S. Eliot's reference to the life cycle as "birth, copulation and death") that the people are much

> Like us: brick upon brick--they are new born,
> They grow up, earn a living, learn prudence,
> Depress a bed, beget a blockhead; mourn--
> For the next brick seals them down, down, down, down
> (82-5).

Apparently not content with the barrage of implicit allusions to the importance of the farmhouse, Reaney makes explicit the prominence with which it functions in a rural community; it is the "knot and crown" of "forty-three large fields:" the *alpha* and the *omega*; the *omphalos* ("February" 87).[11]

Having completed her diatribe on the farmhouse and ready to welcome her court of beaus, Dorcas commands her suitors to "step forward...and be seen" (93). Ludicrously smitten and "long tortured by [Dorcas's] melting shifty vows," Branwell nevertheless pays elaborate homage to his fickle *femme fatale* through "A jewsharp serenade, a song I've made/ And a sparkling pretty rose diamond ring" (97 and 102-3).[12] The entire sequence is a parody of courtly love conventions. Branwell's song, for example, is a blazon of Dorcas in which he lauds her "eyes, voice, beak, legs, mind and feathers white" (108) and represents himself as incapable of expressing her

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[11]Known as an oracular centre, the *omphalos* (the name of the sacred Greek conical stone at Delphi) was referred to by James Joyce as the "strand entwining cable of all flesh" (Dr. Brian John, lecture. McMaster University. January 16, 1990).

[12]Ironically the "pretty rose... ring"--offered by Branwell and rejected by Dorcas--foreshadows the rings of "December" which Betty uses to mark off the geese who will evade the Christmas slaughter.

worth: "Oh white angel in bethlehems of grime/Teach my slow wits to understand your worth" (111-12).

Branwell's appeal to Dorcas is also apparently an exercise in bathetic art for when her "swift beak dives down for frog offspring,/Oh resting in his bathos hut of muddy grime/How sweet to be a frog that's nothing worth/Lifted to the sublime up up by you" (124-7). And, it is a display of the poet's technical skill because Branwell's song is primarily written in the very difficult form of a sestina.[13] The contrast between the elevated style used by Branwell and the commonplace goose romance described runs through the sestina and comes to its climax in Dorcas's rejection of Branwell--"Well, thank you very much but I am wed!/Here, take your ring" (145-6)--and her subsequent laying of "a large white egg" fathered by George: "A chop-the-harp and fish-with-the-strings sort of oaf" (148 and 150). Here, the "esthetic, idealistic Branwell...meets his antithetical self in the muscular, virile and completely non-intellectual George" (Lee 67). Not surprisingly--albeit uncharacteristically of pastoral--when Branwell learns of Dorcas's clandestine marriage to George and George learns of Branwell's undying affection for Dorcas, there is a scuffle and the February eclogue of A Suit of Nettles ends with a physical and violent goose fight.

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[13]Reaney's choice of a sestina for Branwell here is likely appropriated from Colin's lay of the same form in "August" in which Colin sings "a doolefull verse/Of Rosalend" ("August" 140-1).

"August"

While Reaney's "February" appropriates Colin's sestina in Spenser's "August," his August eclogue makes use of the singing-match convention found in the same eclogue. However, unlike the Spenserian eclogue in which one judge, Cuddie, decides that each of the competitors "have gayned," in Reaney's "August" there are several judges who determine the outcome: Erato, Melpomene, Urania, Terpsichore and a famous critic-goose called Scrutumnus ("August" 131).[14] Blot, one of the followers of Scrutumnus, sings all three songs and encourages his audience to "establish a preference among the three/But, evaluate judiciously" (33-4).

Erato, the muse of love poetry, prefers the first song about a pair of lover-pigs who grunt and snort "in the sties of Venus/The fairest pair e'er transformed.../For Circe's circus" (50-2); Melpomene, the muse of tragedy, prefers the second in which the lover is shunned by the beloved whom he discovers has "taken flight/Enamoured of my rival's golden bags" (68-9); and Urania, the muse of astronomy and heavenly inspiration, prefers the third song wherein a "Rubicund cherub" whose " wings waft/Stars planets clouds

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[14]In "To the Reader," Reaney suggests that "Scrutumnus stands for *Scrutiny*, the famous critical quarterly edited by Dr. F.R. Leavis which ceased to be published some years ago" (Reaney xix). For an in depth discussion of Reaney's treatment (which according to Leavis's disciple W.J. Keith is **mistreatment**) of F.R. Leavis see Keith's article "James Reaney 'Scrutumnus' and the Critics: An Individual Response," Canadian Poetry, 6: 25-34.

kingdoms past" ignites the lover's "cordial soul" (71, 71-2 and 73). Blot recalls also Scrutumnus's appraisal of the three songs which the critic-goose ranks in the very order in which they were performed and scorns especially the third song which--in a linguistic parody of the piece--he finds obscure, "a farrago/Of bad English and worse Latin lingo,/No real emotion, no language of the people,/Immoral in its basic avoidance of simplicity/Pompous overblown fantastically" (97-101).

Terpsichore, the muse of dance and lyric poetry, objects to the proceedings of the singing-match because she recognizes that these three caricatures of lyric poetry illustrate that "each has a different purpose/And therefore a different word choice" (104-5). Consequently, when Scrutumnus's disciples respond to Terpsichore's pronouncement they do so in a streak of violence through an attempt to mutilate her with implements including a "pruning hook & sword cane" (112). Fortunately, as Raymond points out, "noone can kill a Muse/unless their own to kill they choose" (124-5).

"December"

As the opening eclogues of The Shepheardes Calender and A Suit of Nettles share the common theme of unrequited love, their complementary final eclogues are each concerned with the similar theme of mutability. The pastoral worlds constructed by Spenser and Reaney are cyclic ones endlessly begetting

and endlessly dying and are governed by a principle of recurrence. At the end of the year in A Suit of Nettles is Christmas for which the geese are ruthlessly sacrificed: "this approaching debacle hangs over the entire poem and gives it a larger human dimension" (Frye 1959, 346). Spenser's "December," for example, recalls the theme of Colin's unrequited love as introduced by his complaint in "Januarye." However, in "December," Colin's "playnt" is not despairing; rather the wheel comes full circle and the Calender finishes in a state of acceptance which is strangely akin to contentment. Colin's acceptance of loss, that "delight is layd abedde, and pleasure past," is the only affirmation that saddened and weathered age can provide (137). Moreover, only through such acceptance can the pastoral ideal survive the realities of temporal decay (Shore 100).

In "December," Colin comes to terms with his fatal love wound of "Januarye" when he asks himself, "why livest thou stil, and yet hast deathes wound?/Why dyest thou stil, and yet alive art found?" (95-6). Each question alone is a hyperbolic expression of the love pain he has suffered, but together both questions confirm Spenser's interest in the pattern of contradiction itself--the ambiguity of feeling that love engenders by denying life and simultaneously sustaining it (a paradox with which A Suit of Nettles is also concerned) (Hoffman 51). In "December," Colin realizes that time has been one cause of his despair; love, the other. And, now he accepts the loss of his

youthful follies "nowe ...gathered as too ripe," and casts them out "as rotten and unsoote" (117 and 118). Yet more significantly, Colin accepts the loss of his "fayre Rosalind": "the loser Lasse" he resolves "to please nomore" (119). Unable to find in pastoral the satisfaction he seeks, Colin hangs up the lovely but discredited pastoral pipe and leaves the pastoral world bidding "adieu" to "delightes," "Little Lambes," "woodes," "good Hobbinoll" and finally Rosalinde "whose love [he] bought so deare" (151, 153, 154, 155 and 152).

Unlike Colin, Branwell is unable to grasp the "interpretation of the divine pattern of resurrection in the natural pattern of renewal" (Woodman 41). However, Effie--who has been the main embodiment of ideal pastoral values in the midst of satire--is aware of the inadequacy of "this cramped stupid goosehouse world" (itself reminiscent of the limitations of pastoral in The Shepheardes Calender) and accepts death as the "green pathway to the fields of life" ("December" 28 and 29).[15] Furthermore, since her vision of life is mythical and sacramental, Effie is able with the aid of her imagination "to transcend the limits of Eros and to enter the domain of *agape*" or sacred love which is "far far far away" from "that...crazed prison/Of despair" (Woodman 38 and "December" 38 and 39-40).

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[15]This description seems to echo the following passage in "November" of the Calender:

> No daunger there the shepherd can astert:
> Fayre fieldes and pleasant layes there bene,
> The fieldes ay fresh, the grasse ay greene (187-9).

Branwell on the other hand is committed to the finite cyclic world of nature because, unlike Effie, he "can't see a path that leads between one's/Head & one's body" (42-3). When Effie offers Branwell the hieroglyph of the ring as an image of completion now to be transcended ("Here Branwell, listen to the ring/You think might save your life. What does it sound like?"), he does not understand and what he hears instead is merely "the merry-go-round at the fair/Or the ferris wheel far far far away" (35-6 and 37-8). Not only does Branwell misunderstand the hieroglyph, but he also cannot reject either the life within the ring or the continuous resolution of opposites. By the end of A Suit of Nettles, as Branwell faces the axe with Effie, the dead weight of nature has long obscured its "glamourie" promised in "January" ("January" 106). And furthermore, Branwell still envies those geese ("I can't help it, I'm afraid, I want the ring") ("December" 41) who--marked with a pink ring--are, to use Spenser's phrase, "sent into the chaungefull world againe" (Wilson 161). Nevertheless, in a typically Spenserian fashion, the theme of love hovers above both men and geese at the end of the eclogue. For, while Peter and Ann lie "drowning in the waterflames of love" in the hayloft, old Keziah clambers "up into her nest to begin laying" and we are left with hope from "all the possible eggs inside her" from which the next year's goslings will emerge (55, 58 and 63).

CHAPTER TWO: Social Engagement

While the previous chapter examined the extent to which each of The Shepheardes Calender and A Suit of Nettles imitates its pastoral predecessors, this chapter focuses on the degree of social engagement in each poem. And, as we shall discover, whereas in the late 1570s Spenser was clearly commenting on or even satirizing specific contemporary events and people, Reaney seems to be concerned with using satire to point to general flaws he observes in twentieth-century Canadian culture.

Social Engagement in *The Shepheardes Calender*

In The Shepheardes Calender, by examining the heritage of the English poet, Spenser assesses the "aims and resources, the limitations and dangers of the poetic vocation" The poem is a vehicle for

> the highest personal aspirations and public significance a poet can claim: a vatic role, sanctioned by the artistic and ethical idealism of Renaissance Humanism but frustrated by the constraints of a social order controlled by powers for whom poetry is, at worst, morally corrupting and politically subversive; at best, a useful instrument of policy or an innocuous diversion (Montrose 1979, 35).

Nevertheless, the publication of the Calender in 1579 demonstrated the capacity of the vernacular to produce a poetry "well grounded, finely framed, and strongly trussed up together" (Spenser *Epistle* 125-7). In addition, the Calender's power of influence in the English literary tradition is attested by

the vigorous growth of an Elizabethan pastoral tradition in its wake (compiled in such texts as England's Helicon, 1600); by its immediate and continued popularity during the 1580s and 1590s; and by the elevation of Colin by other poets to the status of *genius loci* in their pastoral worlds (Montrose 35).

Pastoral is persistently associated with new poets, and the well known Virgilian progression places it at the beginning of a poet's career. In the Epistle to the Calender, E.K. speculates on Immeritô's [1] motives for writing eclogues:

> doubting perhaps his habilitie, which he little needed, or mynding to furnish our tongue with this kinde, wherein it faulteth, or following the example of the best and most auncient Poetes, which devised this kind of wryting, being both so base for the matter and homely for the manner, at the first to trye theyr habilities: and as young birdes, that be newly crept out of the nest, by little first prove theyr tender wyngs, before they make a greater flyght....So finally flyeth this our new Poete, as a bird, whose principals be scarce growen out, but yet as that in time shall be hable to keepe wing with the best (*Epistle* 150-67).

Poetic progenitors from Theocritus through Chaucer shaped a literary tradition within which the new poet--here, Spenser-- must find a place through creative imitation. In The Shepheardes Calender, Spenser confers the classical name Tityrus on both Chaucer (called accordingly "*Tityrus*" in "Februarie," 92) and

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[1]"Immeritô" or "he who is unworthy" is the persona of the poet who has authored The Shepheardes Calender: presumably Spenser, although nowhere in the poem is Spenser identified as its author.

Virgil (referred to as "the Romish *Tityrus*" in "October," 55) as a means of affirming that England possesses a literature equal to that produced by ancient and modern continental authors. Furthermore, by acknowledging that pastoral is the lowest *genre* in the neoclassical hierarchy of kinds, E.K. implicitly lodges a claim that Spenser rivals Virgil as a composer of eclogues and in the probability that he will ultimately become England's epic poet (King 384).

As both Colin's master "who taught [him] homely,...to make" as well as the ancient model for British vernacular poetry, the English "Tityrus" embodies the traits of the rustic truth-teller ("June" 82). Thenot, for example, declares that it was "*Tityrus* in my youth,/keeping his sheepe on the hils of Kent" from whom he learned "a tale of truth" ("Februarie" 92-3 and 91). Through the persona of Colin, Spenser fashions himself as the next "English Tityrus" and in so doing lays claim to the Calender as a significant pastoral of state throughout which the allegory relates primarily to individuals who lived in the world's eye.

In "The generall argument of the whole booke," E.K. divides the Calender's eclogues into "three formes or ranckes": plaintive, recreative, and moral (*Argument* 29). It is to the third and largest group of these poems which "for the most part be mixed with some Satyrical bitternesse" that we now turn

to examine Spenser in his role as poet of the state (33).[2] Each of "Februarie," "Aprill," "Maye," "Julye," and "September" contains comments on ecclesiastical and political conditions which existed during the first half of Elizabeth I's reign (1558-79) and describe under an obscure allegory transactions associated with the policy pursued by Elizabeth and her chief adviser Lord Burghley (Higginson 1). Although three of the eclogues previously mentioned are almost wholly concerned with matters relating to the Church, "Februarie" and its fable of the Oak and the Briar under obscure allegory refer to an event of a political as well as an ecclesiastical nature.

"Februarie": Identifying the Oak and the Briar

Through the fable in "Februarie," James Higginson claims that Spenser draws attention to the execution of the Duke of Norfolk--an event which he refers to as "the most important event of the decade" of the 1570s (Higginson 151). Connected as it was with the two vital questions of the day--religion and succession to the throne--the execution of Norfolk was an event which stirred England to its depths.[3] The feeling prevailed that Burghley was responsible for the Duke's death and such a report was circulated against him

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[2]The eclogues that E.K. categorizes as "moral" are "Februarie," "Maye," "Julye," "September" and "October."

[3]When Thomas Howard, the Duke of Norfolk, entertained the idea of marriage to Mary Queen of Scots, he was convicted of high treason and beheaded June 2nd, 1572 (Lewis 173).

even as late as the time when The Shepheardes Calender appeared in 1579.

It is jealousy that arouses the anger of the Briar ("the spitefull brere"--presumably Burghley, "Februarie," 147), and it is a matter of fact that Spenser attributed Burghley's apparent hatred of the nobility to the same motive (Higginson 64). The reference to the "stormes" that beat the "bared boughes" of the Oak and to "his honor decayed"--hardly appropriate for a tree--may be easily applied to the change in the fortunes of Norfolk who, as the head of the ancient family of Howard, had been the first peer of the realm: "the primrose of all thy land" ("Februarie" 112, 114 and 166).[4] Moreover, the reasons which Thenot advances for the delay in cutting down the Oak and the reasons why "The Axes edge did oft turne againe,/As halfe unwilling to cutte the graine" resolve into unwillingness and fear "to wrong holy eld...for it had been an auncient tree" (203-4 and 206-7): Elizabeth I clearly objected to public executions and in Norfolk's case the particular causes which urged her to

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[4]Whatever or whoever the Oak stands for, it was brought to decay "often crost with priestes crewe,/And often halowed with holy water dewe" or undermined by such "popishe" practices ("Februarie" 209-10). In other words, a *rapport* exists between the Oak and Catholicism. Thus, it is possible that Spenser's veiled allusion here is to the Norfolk marriage proposal to the undoubtedly Catholic Mary Queen of Scots. Paul McLane agrees with Higginson that whatever the Oak represents was undermined and brought to decay by Catholic practices. However, he identifies Leicester as the Oak instead of Norfolk, for in late 1579 Leicester's position at court "when viewed through Protestant eyes horrified at the apparent success of Alençon and the pro-Catholic group at court" was clearly affected by his position on the French marriage (McLane 67).

"forbeare" (206) arose from his position (Higginson 68).[5]

As for the identity of the person allegorized as the Briar--whose flowers are "dyed in Lilly white, and Cremsin redde: Colours meete to clothe a mayden Queene" ("Februarie" 130 and 132)--the Briar's own speech and conduct would seem to be fashioned as an attack upon some courtier, statesman or favourite of Elizabeth's (like Burghley) (Higginson 48).[6] Not only are the Briar's flowers "meete" for a "mayden Queene," they are also "the honor of [the husbandman's] Coronall" ("Februarie" 132 and 178). For Elizabeth to be held up in comparison with a husbandman seems degrading and a wreath of flowers to honour a mere farmer seems equally inappropriate. Higginson offers a facile solution: Elizabeth and the husbandman are the same person (Higginson 50).[7] He goes on to note that had Spenser represented Elizabeth

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[5]Note that Higginson's is only one of several plausible interpretations of the fable of the Oak and the Briar in "Februarie." A solution has yet to be offered about which there is critical consensus.

[6]The colour of the Briar's flowers--red and white-- likely gesture to Elizabeth as heir to the Tudor union of the red and white roses of Lancaster and York (Spenser 44).

[7]McLane concurs with Higginson's proposal and to support the argument for Elizabeth as husbandman cites the passage in which the husbandman is addressed by the Briar--who calls himself a "suppliant" (151) and "poore Vassall" (153)--as "my liege Lord" (150) and "my soveraigne, Lord of creatures all" (163). Such terms, insists McLane, would only be used in reference to the Queen. In addition, the term "husbandman" or husband was often used to represent Elizabeth in the literature of the period for she was considered to be "the husband of the common weale, married to the Realme, and the same by ceremony of Ring as solemnly signified, as any other marriage" (McLane 63).

as a woman, the satire--which was probably sufficiently clear already--would have been pointed (51). Evidently, Spenser wished to leave a viable escape route by which he could disavow any dangerous intention if challenged. Due to the peculiar appropriateness of the events relating the Duke's fall to the contents of the fable--many details of which become clear in the light of an allegorical interpretation--Higginson expressed hope that his theory would not be "entirely useless to other laborers in the vineyard of Spenser's poetry" (71). To the contrary, his labours have been quite useful.

Other interpretations of the fable in "Februarie" have been offered by Paul McLane and Ronald Bond. Acknowledging that his identifications are "not capable of absolute proof," and that solutions to the problem of historical allegory in Spenser's poetry "remain in the realm of probability," McLane nevertheless correlates specific individuals with poetic personae in The Shepheardes Calender. And, the fable of the Oak and the Briar--in which he fashions the Earl of Leicester as the Oak and the Earl of Oxford as the Briar--is by no means exempt from McLane's inquisitive mind and labouring pen.

McLane examines in great detail Leicester's *nexus* with the Oak. He notes Leicester's fall from the Queen's favour in 1579 which had been precipitated by her discovery of his marriage to the Countess of Essex (McLane 64) since, like the Oak, Leicester had "His honor decayed" ("Februarie" 114). In addition, the oak was a personal symbol of Leicester because the Latin word

for oak, *robur*, resembled *Robert*, Leicester's first name (McLane 65). McLane extends his comparison by suggesting that there are personal touches pertaining to the Queen's formerly favoured courtier in Spenser's depiction of the Oak. Like the Oak, Leicester presumably was of

> ...bodie bigge and mightely pight,
> Throughly rooted, and of wonderous hight:
> Whilome had bene the King of the field,
> And mochell mast to the husband did yielde (106-9).

McLane is equally enthusiastic about his analysis of the figure of the Briar as the Earl of Oxford who, between March and December 1579, became Elizabeth's favourite, said only what pleased her and was overwhelmingly in favor of the French marriage (McLane 67).[8] Claiming that the fable is "filled with significant touches that exceed fabular verisimilitude" (McLane 68), McLane points to the description of the "bragging brere" (115) which "was embellisht with blossomes fayre" (118) and endowed with a "Sinamon smell" (136) as details that are "palpable hits" in regard to the Earl of Oxford. Allegedly, Oxford was not only "without doubt the best-known lying braggart at Court" during the late 1570s but also the "most prominent example at Court of the perfumed dandy" (McLane 68 and 70).

Unlike McLane, who points to specific individuals in his analysis of

[8]McLane suggests further that since Oxford was often in the company of Simier (Alençon's chief negotiator in the marriage deal) it was Oxford who likely informed Simier of Leicester's marriage--precisely the information that precipitated Leicester's fall from the Queen's favor.

the fable in "Februarie," Bond is interested rather in general circumstances concerning life at Court. Bond posits that the fable of the Oak and the Briar implies actual problems confronting the Tudor Court such as the overreaching courtiers who are represented by the "spitefull brere" (147), a perpetrator of rumour:

> With painted words tho gan this proude weede,
> (As most usen Ambitious folke:)
> His coloured crime with craft to cloke (160-2).[9]

Yet Bond also suggests that allegorical details in "Februarie" point to the court as "an environment hospitable to the antipathies it expresses" (Bond 59). He cites the following passage from the fable as exemplary because of how it describes the Briar's purpose:

> Seest, how fresh my flowers bene spredde,
> Dyed in Lilly white, and Cremsin redde,
> With Leaves engrained in lusty greene,
> Colours meete to clothe a mayden Queene (129-32).

Furthermore, rather than focusing on identifying specific Elizabethan figures who could be represented by the fable of the Oak and the Briar, Bond insists that "Februarie" furnishes the queen with a reminder to "be vigilant lest envious slander blight her policy or subvert her most devoted counsellors" (Bond 60).

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[9]Overzealous and ambitious courtiers flocked to court during Elizabeth's reign. To this effect, Burghley commented that "As fishees are gotten with baytes, so ar offices caught with sekyng" (Bond 58).

"Aprill": The French Marriage Question

In 1579, the political occasion of the projected marriage of Queen Elizabeth with Francis, Duke of Alençon--younger brother of the King of France and heir[10] to the French throne--not only produced bitter divisions in Elizabeth's Council (i.e. among Burghley, Sussex and Leicester) but also promoted hysteria in her Protestant subjects (McLane 13). To her subjects, this French marriage proposal seemed "the metaphorical rejection of the English people by the Queen in favor of a foreign prince" (Dixon 135). So, when in "Aprill" Colin laments the unfaithfulness of his love who "hath bredde hys smart" (27), the pejorative tone reflects "a condemnation of Rosalind as the pastoral persona of Elizabeth, a sovereign about to betray her nation and its Protestant cause by delivering herself into the grip of a papist French wolf" (Dixon 135). Since this marriage scheme was so unpopular in England, Cain suggests that Colin's "Aprill" lay with its "assertions of rustic Englishness" serves as "a national epithalamium....against the queen's possible marriage to the French prince"--which, in the late 1570s appeared all too probable (Spenser 69).

"Maye": Clerical Abuse

Clerical abuse, all too common at the time that Spenser was writing

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[10]Francis of Valois, Duke of Alençon, became Monsieur of France--nearest collateral heir to the throne--in 1573 (McLane 13).

The Sheapheardes Calender, lay open to the bitter taunts of the Puritans and was sadly acknowledged by bishops and statesmen--even by some of the very men who were the worst offenders. In "Maye," Spenser indulges in a lengthy satire on specific abuses in the Church of England in which he touches upon the irreligion of the lower clergy, the corruption of the patrons, the spoil of Church property made by ecclesiasts for the benefit of their families, the political ambition of the higher dignitaries and the opportunism by which they "passen their time....in lustihede and wanton meryment" ("Maye" 41-2), and the departure from the pattern of the Apostolic Church (Higginson 151). Since Spenser lived in a community where objections to Elizabeth I's ecclesiastical policy were liberally and violently uttered by all sides, he had material which fitted naturally into the vehicle of pastoral poetry--especially the motifs of the *pastor bonus* and the *pastor malus*.

In "Maye" we find a *conflictus* debate between the desires of youth and the requirements of age. Piers assumes the Mantuanesque imperative of duty and responsibility, a withdrawal from the temptation of nature through which clergy must prepare for the day when "great *Pan* account of shepeherdes shall aske" ("Maye" 54). Piers proceeds to the heart of the matter by striking at the owners of the sheep--the patrons who sell the livings to the highest bidder:

But they bene hyred for little pay

> Of other, that caren as little as they,
> What fallen the flocke, so they han the fleece,
> And get all the gayne, paying but a peece (47-50).

This type of corruption was prevalent in the Church, and the chief offenders were often the men highest in power.

Since "Algrind" has come to be widely accepted as an anagram for the Archbishop of Canterbury, Edward Grindal, we see that Piers is fashioned as spokesman for the clerical ideals of the silenced Grindal: "But shepheards (as Algrind used to say),/Mought not live ylike, as men of the laye" ("Maye" 75-6).[11] Piers's ideal is that of primitive Christianity when shepherds had "none inheritaunce,/Ne of land, nor fee in sufferaunce:/But what might arise of the bare sheepe...which they did keepe" (105-8). However, it is precisely the *otia* of the pagan golden age that undermine Piers's Mantuanesque golden age of austerity and duty:

> But tract of time, and long prosperitie:
> That nource of vice, this of insolencie,
> Lulled the shepheards in such securitie,
> That not content with loyall obeysaunce
> ....
> Tho gan shepheards swaines to looke a loft,
> And leave to live hard, and learne to ligge soft
> ("Maye" 117-25).

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[11]Grindal was "suspended from exercise of his office from 1577 to 1582 by the queen's order" (Cain in Spenser 90). By making Piers the mouthpiece for Grindal's clerical ideals, Spenser comes dangerously close to criticizing Elizabeth's action.

"Julye": Identifying the Eagle and the Shell-fish

Like the other "moral" eclogues, "Julye" is organized between two pastoral perspectives, the more flexible represented by Morrell, the more austere represented by Thomalin. The confrontation here is between Morrell's "overweening and corrupt ambition" typical of the *pastor malus* and "Thomalin's true pastoral humility" exemplary of the *pastor bonus* (Cullen 50). And, while the abuses of the Church are catalogued in "Julye" as in "Maye,"--for example, members of the Curia at Rome "han great stores, and thriftye stockes/great freendes and feeble foes:/What neede hem caren for their flockes?/theyr boyes can looke to those" ("Julye" 193-6)--the "generall discussion of the perils of high office" is suddenly made specific at the end of the eclogue through the allegory of the eagle and the shell-fish (Cain in Spenser 120).

The allegory of the eagle and the shell-fish has been elucidated by Herford as follows: "Elizabeth (the she-eagle) desiring to crush the Puritans (the shell-fish), sought to make Grindal, the newly-appointed archbishop, the instrument of the blow. But Grindal, not being 'chalk,' declined to be used thus, whereupon the blow intended for the Puritans spent itself upon him" (Higginson 111).[12] Grindal's refusal to execute Queen Elizabeth's order to

[12]On 8 May 1576 Elizabeth I issued an order to every bishop in England charging each one to put down the "prophesyings" within his own diocese. The document would suggest that the queen and her advisers looked upon these gatherings as Puritan devices that could disturb the peace of the Church (Higginson 29).

suppress the prophesyings (gatherings of zealous clergy for Bible study) led to his disgrace. Thomalin's tale unreservedly articulates the yearnings of Protestant progressives of the Grindal era (1575-1577) for a ministry characterized by poverty, humility, simplicity and a devotion to pastoral care (King 394). More specifically, Thomalin describes Grindal "As meeke...as meeke mought be,/ simple, as simple sheepe,/Humble, and like in eche degree/the flocke, which he did keepe" ("Julye" 129-32). Yet, although the satire in "Julye" clearly bestows praise upon Archbishop Grindal and is directed against Bishop Aylmer in the shepherd Morrell, Spenser exercises great care in not criticizing the queen over her handling of the incident, for he attributes Algrind's destruction to "hap," "myshap," and "chaunce" ("Julye" 229 and gloss 213).

"September": Church Corruption

"September" offers a "variation of the biblical *topoi* of wolves in sheep's clothing and the lost sheep" (King 396). The character of Diggon Davie combines the latter image with that of the returned prodigal who "in the hope of more gayne, drove his sheepe into a farre countrye" only to be disillusioned by the "loose living of Popishe prelates" he found there ("September" *Argument*). The "farre countrye" is evidently a thinly veiled allusion to London--the centre of ecclesiastical authority in England. And, although Rome is the city designated as the source of church corruption in Mantuan's *Eclogue VIII* (from which Spenser borrows heavily here), it is likely that Spenser also had

the metropolis of his own country in mind as the seat of religious corruption (Higginson 113).

Diggon enumerates four specific abuses which he subsequently assails at greater length: the traffic in Church livings and licenses of those who "setten to sale their shops of shame,/And maken a Mart of theyr good name" (36-7); the system of taking unjust fines whereby "shepheards there robben one another,/And layen baytes to beguile her brother" (38-9); the unfair general oppression of the lower clergy by the bishops who will "buy...sheepe out of the cote,/Or they will carven the shepheards throte" (40-1); and the pride and arrogance of the ecclesiasts, for "the shepheards swayne you cannot wel ken,/But it be by his pryde, from other men" (42-3).[13] Diggon's reference later to "ravenous Wolves" (148) is also directed at corrupt clergy, probably with special application to those who are truly Catholic at heart--for, in the controversial language of the time, "wolf" was used by each religious party to denote its adversaries (Higginson 126).

"November": Elizabeth as Dido

In "November" since "sadde winters wrathe and season chill,/Accorde not with [his] Muses meriment" (33-4), Colin decides to "sing of sorrowe and

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[13]The first charge seems to include both lay and ecclesiastical patrons of benefices, but the peculiar allusion to individuals who "setten to sale their shops of shame" ("September" 36), Higginson suggests, intimates the corruption of the Archbishop of Canterbury's courts (Higginson 114).

deathes dreeriment" (36) as he laments the death of Dido. The case for Dido as Queen Elizabeth originally posited by Mary Parmenter--who suggested that "November" portrays the figurative death of Elizabeth, who in 1579 was "dead" to the Leicester-Sidney circle due to her projected policy of marrying Alençon--is supported and examined at length by Paul McLane (McLane 47). McLane reveals specific reference to the potential alienation of Elizabeth by her Council in a set of letters written by Mendoza (the Spanish ambassador in London) to his king in Fall 1579 (McLane 50). In a letter dated October 16, 1579, for example, Mendoza wrote that all of the Queen's Council--except Burghley and Sussex--strongly opposed the French marriage because they feared "for the security of her person, the tranquility of her realm, and the preservation of the crown" (McLane 50).

Social Awareness in *A Suit of Nettles*

Unlike Spenser, who apparently got a friend ("E.K.") to edit The Shepheardes Calender and provide an introduction as well as annotations, Reaney presumably did his own editing of A Suit of Nettles, but invites commentary "because he has so much of the quality that is opposite of pedantry--intellectual exuberance" (Frye 1959, 347).[14] Yet, paradoxically, Frye

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[14] In the Dedicatory Epistle, E.K. explains that he has added to the text of the Calender, "a certain Glosse or scholion for thexposition of old wordes and harder phrases: which maner of glosing and commenting, well I wote, will

also suggests that A Suit of Nettles will seem to many readers to have "only too apt a title, to be bristly, forbidding, and irresponsibly inwrapped"; or in the words of Scrutumnus in the August eclogue:

> No real emotion, no language of the people,
> Immoral in its basic avoidance of simplicity,
> Pompous overblown fantastically... (99-101).

Far less engaged with contemporary social concerns than Spenser's Calender, Reaney's pastoral is instead primarily introspective. It seems, more specifically, to be written for the amusement of a select cotérie of Frye disciples at the University of Toronto during the late 1950s.[15] Published the same year that his doctoral dissertation was completed under the direction of Frye, A Suit of Nettles clearly demonstrates how influenced Reaney was by Frye's way of thinking about literature, including Frye's fascination with literature as myth[16] and the fertility cycle of the seasons.[17]

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seeme straunge and rare in our tongue" (*Epistle* 178-81).

[15] A Suit of Nettles is dedicated to a member of this select group of academics who admired Frye, Richard Stingle, who completed doctoral work at the same time that Reaney did. It comes as no surprise then that Professor Stingle later would praise the work of his close friend in conjunction with Frye's in an article called "'all the old levels': Reaney and Frye," Essays on Canadian Writing, 24 (1982).

[16]One of Frye's central concepts is that of poetry "as a kind of forgery of myth." And, in effect, as A.C. Hamilton observes, Frye shifts the usual critical perspective:"a literary work imitates myth, not nature; or more exactly: its content may imitate nature but its structure imitates myth" (Hamilton 1990, 64).

"May": Satirizing Fanaticism

Reaney aptly appropriates the zodiacal sign from Spenser's corresponding eclogue--Gemini, the Twins--and uses it as a motif in "May" whereby Fanny tells Effie a story about "twins who completely outfox a pair of female contraceptive experts" (Lee 75). Fanny has recently heard that "These two ladies want to save all the hill country women/From all that labour and child-labouring" by showing these fecund mothers of "Forty-two or fifty-two goslings" how to "stop conceiving & bearing children" ("May" 27-8, 24 and 33). These two "smooth ladies" open up their appropriately "big black boxes" and offer an array of sterilizing gadgets including : a "piece of straw, this frazzled bit of string" and an "old button from a castrati's overcoat" (43, 34, 35 and 36). Although in his prefatory notes in "To the Reader," Reaney suggests that the May eclogue "arises from an incident reported in *Life* concerning some fanatics in the populous Kentucky mountains" (Reaney xx), it seems equally plausible that he is satirizing the "sense of lively birth" associated with the large families of French Canadian Roman Catholics ("May" 98).[18] And, as Alvin Lee

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[17] Completed in 1958, Reaney's Ph.D. thesis was titled "The Influence of Spenser on Yeats." The same year Reaney won the Governor General's Award for the best volume of poetry for A Suit of Nettles (Lee 14).

[18] Here, Reaney's satire not only extends beyond the barnyard, but his Upper Canadian "broken pen" also addresses an issue primarily associated with Lower Canada and attempts "from its blots and dribbling letter-strings" to offer a quasi-medicinal solution *via* the extremist contraceptive efforts of "two strange geese" (Invocation 14, 15 and "May" 21).

observes, the satire points at the "underlying self-indulgence, even the perversion (as well as the Canadian Protestant's anti-Catholic prejudice), which frequently underlies strong championing of small families" (Lee 75):

> You could then buy yourself a kill-yourself-if-you-touch-it
> And a watch-everybody-squeeze-up-from-hell-while-you-sit;
> An electric jelly-fish warmer than a husband to go to bed with you
> And a pass-like-a-vulture-shadow and get your sons to do
> Two-backed tricks in the back and flatten 5,000,000 frogs too ("May" 44-8).

The "two biddies" meet with opposition from the presumably Catholic majority who espouse the traditional arguments of the Church--they "like having more, once joined" since "Children are our life, our bread and our clothing" and "come toppling shouting out of us to prove we're not dead" (Besides, "Can God not damn you for hating being?") (58, 49, 54, 56 and 57).

"After a year of very little success," the proselytizing spinsters meet their nemesis in "two handsome yet/Sort of grim rakish sly curly young" virile brothers (59 and 61-2).[19] Boasting of their ability to "outwit any fertility," the women ironically are irresistibly attracted to and tempted by the wooings of both beguiling brothers and their fecund "mossy roofed & gabled with many windows/Set between leafy thick appletree rows" home (69, 72-3). After a "ceaseless mad tattooing/Of caresses," the allegedly sterile spinsters accept the

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[19] Functioning in a way similar to "Punch's stick" which beats "fertility into a sterile land," the two brothers decide to test their "fertile power" on the birth-control fanatics who had "kicked/[their] family's sense of lively birth in the teeth" ("Invocation" 1, 2 and "May" 97 and 97-8).

brothers' marriage proposals and subsequently begin to take elaborate contraceptive measures for their bridal night ("May" 76-7). Reaney writes "with fine excess" (Lee 76) about their special pre-nuptial preparations:

> They tied the brothers up in sheets of tight
> Glass, beaten gold, cork, rubber, netting, stoppers, sand;
> They themselves damned their wombs with a pretty skillful hand
> And lay back waiting for the sensation
> Of an interesting lively copulation,
> Without any of the disgusting after effects necessary for population
> (79-84).

Despite their excessive precaution, both women are shortly pregnant--"seeded down by those strange men dark & wild" (88). Having made their wives "billow saw waddle gag groan beneath/The ripeness of a Nile in bringing forth" children, the brothers then ironically transform them into "strong & sturdy machinery" to serve a utilitarian function at seed and harvest time--"So usefully did end the lives of those insistent life devourers" (99-100, 105 and 109).[20]

"July": Educational Exploitation

In "July" Reaney satirizes the intellectual death that is a result of "so-called progressive theories of education which depend for their appeal on a fundamental inertia in the minds of the intellectually lazy" as well as the creation of a permissive atmosphere in which what the child decides

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[20]Marie Ponsot lauds "May" with "its birth-control ladies loose in philoprogenitive Quebec" as indeed "a very funny idea" (Ponsot 306).

determines everything (Lee 77).[21] Lee insists that, with such a theory, even the laziest and most ignorant adult can be a teacher--here, Anser (ironically a Latin, and therefore academic, name meaning simply "goose") is the schoolmaster of the gosling school. In a potentially receptive but unresponsive gesture, Anser's first word is appropriately "Hohum" (1). His so-called academic dogma is full of malapropriated clichés including "you should not beak the child" (13), "Let them be happy" (18), "how useless so far as the actual living of life is concerned" (57), and his liberated statement *par excellence*--"the self must be free" (62).

Juxtaposed with Anser's *laissez-faire* educational policy is Valancy's argument for the superiority of a more traditional kind of schooling. Unlike Anser, Valancy's former teacher, "Old Strictus," harboured a disciplined school in which he occasionally resorted to physical punishment--"a strong thrumming dig of his old yellow beak" (10)--to keep the formative goslings in line. Valancy remembers nevertheless that most importantly Old Strictus taught "the most wonderful list of things" (29)--a "reviving curriculum" (41) Anser vehemently scorns as "that maze of obscurity" (58). His cynical and defeatist response is, however, all too appropriate in our post-modern world in which Anser's attitude is applicable "since our heads are going to be chopped off anyhow"

[21]Two such schools that boast these "progressive theories" in Ontario are the Montessori and the Waldorf schools which teach the student about what already interests him or about which he demonstrates "natural" ability.

(59).

"September": Homage to Frye

"September," which is in the main the "Mome Fair" sequence, is perhaps the most complicated and challenging of the eclogues in A Suit of Nettles. It is in "Mome Fair," for example, that Reaney demonstrates Frye's influence.[22] At "Mome Fair" Reaney offers his readers a scenic railway ride and dantesque funhouse of Canadian history, a ferris wheel of folk rites , a merry-go-round of philosophic horses and a sideshow of archetypes. According to Northrop Frye in Fables of Identity, "In the solar cycle of the day, the seasonal cycle of the year, and the organic cycle of human life, there is a single pattern of significance, out of which myth constructs a central narrative around a figure who is partly the sun, partly vegetative fertility and partly a god or archetypal human being" (Frye 1963, 15).[23] Certainly this is the matrix upon which Reaney builds the narrative structure of the "September" eclogue

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[22]"Mome" is appropriately a Spenserian word for "bumpkin," and it is also an anglicization of the Greek *Momus*--the personification or god of ridicule (Lee 81). In his Apologie for Poetrie, Sidney speaks contemptuously of people of an "earth-creeping" mind which "cannot lift itself up to look to the sky of poetry" because of a "certain rustical disdain"--a mind he claims "will become such a mome as to be a Momus of poetry" (Lee 81). Each meaning is relevant in Reaney's "September."

[23]A.C. Hamilton suggests that in the circle Frye found the ideal metaphor because not only does its circumference trace a movement that ends where it began but its centre is the "focus of radii to each part of it, drawing all its parts into a complete, harmonious, and self-contained form which posits unity" (Hamilton 1990, 40).

in which the dominant and unifying symbol is the circle--itself embodied in the merry-go-round and the ferris wheel. Alvin Lee notes that life itself in A Suit of Nettles is closely identified with the sun (Lee 106). More specifically, one of the last images in "September" involves the impregnation of the moon by her solar husband:"Sun with its sperm belt spangles against cog moon" (276) while "fat horses at farm fetch the wheel round & round" (277).

Richard Stingle suggests that cycles are used by Reaney for meaning and narrative as in "The Merry-Go-Round" which he describes as a "Viconian spiral returning almost, but not quite, to the same spot" (Stingle 42):"But, my goodness, I believe it's the horse we started out with, only, since we saw it last it may have changed a bit you see" ("September" 183-4). The prose style of this passage appropriately imitates the heckling of a midway barker who invites bystanding "loafkneaders and genitalmen" to watch as he describes in down-to-earth terms the "jumping up and down beasts as they sail by" (119-20). The horses are the philosophers from Parmenides to Heidegger "all pursuing a brass ring labelled TRUTH and it *is* TRUTH" (117-18). Reaney selects the central idea of each of the major thinkers he represents and describes each as a horse "whose appearance in each case points to the underlying [philosophic] concepts" (Lee 93). The two most striking depictions are Aristotle and Hobbes. For, as Lee observes, it is not Aristotle the metaphysician who assumes the form of "a rather stocky Clydesdale with three saddles, three heads and three

buttocks" (133-4), but rather the author of the Nichomachean Ethics who celebrated the Greek notion of the golden mean where "one buttock is too hairy, the middle one is just right and the left hand one has no hair at all" (Lee 94). By creating "a brutish nasty and short small fat merrylegs of a pit pony speckled all over with the pitchings of flies," Reaney refers to the most famous ideas of Hobbes as outlined in the Leviathan (Lee 97).[24]

Another cycle in "September" is suggested by "The Ferris Wheel"--the attraction that follows the merry-go-round preferred by Mopsus since it seems "bland correct and rational" ("January" 54). However, as a cycle "of ritual, of rhythm, of warm action" (Stingle 43), it is understandable that "*George & Dorcas particularly liked the ferris wheel*" ("September" *Argument*), since they are the geese who are most committed to continuing the ritual of fertility (recall that in "February" Dorcas lays "a large white egg" (148)--"George's child" (149)). The baskets moving on the ferris wheel reveal, as Reaney's footnote to Frazer's The Golden Bough indicates, "the stages of development of vegetation myths through a series of rituals meant to ensure continued fertility" (Stingle 43). The first basket, for example, presents a group of "wildly excited louts [who] chase wild man dressed up in a skin of thick

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[24]In the Leviathan Hobbes argues that man, by nature, is a selfish, individualistically-oriented animal who is constantly at war with all other men. Furthermore, according to Hobbes, in the state of nature--before any political organization develops--men are equal in their self-seeking and exist in a life which he termed "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short" (Lee 98).

green painted leaves" (191-2). Such an image occurs in The Golden Bough and includes the leaf and moss-clad lad who appears as "the representative of the spirit of vegetation called Green George" (Lee 101). There is then an obvious *nexus* between Frazer's figure and Reaney's creation of the very virile George--"a chop-the-harp and fish-with-the-strings sort of oaf" ("February" 150). For, just as the test set for "green George" was to "slip unnoticed out of his leafy envelope...and substitute an effigy which, instead of him, was thrown into the water at the climax of the fertility ritual" (Lee 101), Reaney's George similarly, at the right moment, craftily manages to substitute Branwell for the slaughter in December because he insists that he is "the buck/That'll keep the race alive" ("December" 23-4).

As the previous discussion of "September" seems to indicate, Reaney's interest in engaging his audience with social concerns diminishes. Increasingly we begin to become aware of the degree to which A Suit of Nettles and the issues it primarily addresses are limited to the highly academic audience of his fellow graduate students who, like Reaney himself, were either exposed to or sympathetic with Frye's teaching. Yet, paradoxically, this pastoral---although obviously written for the intellectual calisthenics of a select cotérie at the University of Toronto--is nevertheless replete with detailed evidence that indicates a "down-to-earth," "hands-on" experience of rural Ontario life.

In contrast to the restricted and presumably enlightened audience for which A Suit of Nettles was written, the audience for which Spenser wrote The Shepheardes Calender extended far beyond Elizabethan court circles. Acccordingly, the issues which Spenser addresses are far-reaching and represent the concerns of a people whose political and ecclesiastical security was, at best, uncertain at the time of publication in 1579. Moreover, since Spenser was engaged with presenting issues that potentially threatened the peaceful continuance of Church and State under Elizabeth I, his Shepheardes Calender is far less interested than Reaney's A Suit of Nettles in the actual replication of rural life. Unlike Theocritus and Virgil, for instance--whose Idylls and Eclogues offer a fresh description of landscape and a genuine sympathetic *nexus* between the poet and the shepherds' life he evokes--Spenser, in The Shepheardes Calender, demonstrates little sense of the detail of actual rural life. Paradoxically, in spite of the limited academic audience for which Reaney's poem was primarily intended, A Suit of Nettles bristles with evidence of Reaney's upbringing on a farm in rural Ontario.

CHAPTER THREE: TECHNICAL PROWESS

Both Spenser and Reaney exercise versatility in their command of different verse forms from the alliterative verse (used by Spenser in "Aprill" and Reaney in "September") to the favourite Elizabethan stanza of a quatrain and a couplet rhyming *ababcc* (found in "Januarye" and "December" of The Shepheardes Calender and in "June" in A Suit of Nettles), or to the highly sophisticated sestina through which Spenser flaunts his technical prowess in "August" and Reaney advertises his poetic craftsmanship in "February." It seems to me that in terms of their knowledge of rhetoric and through their demonstration of technical skill in each of The Shepheardes Calender and A Suit of Nettles--despite a gap of almost four hundred years--the Renaissance poet Spenser and his twentieth-century counterpart Reaney are competitively matched in their respective roles as *poetae.*

The Shepheardes Calender

As John King recently noted, The Shepheardes Calender is a "virtuoso display of metrical and stylistic sophistication" (King 398) by Spenser, who follows a precedent in donning pastoral disguise to claim the title of England's "new Poete" (*Epistle* 11). Both "Januarye" and "December," the opening and closing eclogues, appropriately use the above- mentioned popular

Elizabethan stanza form rhyming *ababcc* as well as similar rhetorical devices including *cronographia*--"Januarye" finds Colin "When Winters wastful spight was almost spent" (2); in "December" likewise "Winter is come...And after Winter commeth timely death" (149-50)--*apostrophe* to "soveraigne Pan" ("December" 7), "thou shepheards God" ("Januarye" 17); and, both *chiasmus* and *polyptoton* in "With mourning pyne I, you with pyning mourne" ("Januarye" 48) and in "December's" "Why livest thou stil, and yet hast thy deathes wound?/ Why dyest thou stil, and yet alive art founde?" to name a few (95-6).

Aside from the magnificently structured "Aprill"--appropriately modelled after Virgil's "famous fourth" and discussed later in this chapter in great detail--the most demanding verse forms are located significantly in the eclogues which focus on Colin and more specifically, the role of the poet.[1]

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[1]Spenser's command of a wide variety of verse forms is evident also in the eclogues omitted from the discussion in this chapter. "Februarie" offers eight to ten syllable lines rhymed in couplets through which Cain suggests Spenser perhaps "meant to recall the old four-stress alliterative system (as in Piers Plowman)" in order to "insinuate an old-fashioned rusticity" (Spenser 38); "March" borrows the tail-rhyme stanza or *rime couée*--"one in which two lines, usually in tetrameter, are followed by a short line, usually in trimeter with two successive short lines rhyming *aabccb*" (Holman 385)--from Chaucer; "Julye" uses the internally rhymed fourteener used by Turberville and thus appropriate for Spenser's recycling of Mantuan: "Is not thilke same a goteheard **prowde**,/that sittes on yonder **bancke**,/Whose straying heard them selfe doth **shrowde**/emong the bushes **rancke**? (1-4); and "October" demonstrates

"June," as the middle eclogue of The Shepheardes Calender, provides Spenser with an apt opportunity to remind his readers not only that Colin is halfway through the calender year but also that their "new Poete" (Spenser himself) is progressing timely through the pastoral genre *en route* to epic--the next stage in the prescribed Virgilian career-pattern. How appropriate it is here that Colin reflects on his personal growth (and, presumably, by extension his poetic maturation as well) and acknowledges that his "ryper age" (36) has taught him to wipe away "those weary wanton toyes" (48) in which he engaged in his efforts to woo Rosalind. The intricate eight-line stanza employed by Spenser in "June" with its two mirror-image quatrains rhyming *ababbaba* also anticipates "the most daring feature of The Faerie Queene stanza with its four *b*-rhymes"--that is, "the difficulty in English of finding quadruple rhymes for every stanza" of the eclogue as well as for The Faerie Queene which was already in the process of composition (Spenser 108). It is interesting to note that paradoxically in "June" it is Hobbinoll's apotheosis of Colin--through which he represents the shepherd's "silver sound" (61) as "outgo[ing]" (64) the art of the Muses--which facilitates Colin's guise of humility throughout his elaborate lay.

Like "June," "August" exhibits Spenser's deliberate concern for artifice in an eclogue focused on Colin's poetic ability. This eclogue offers three

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Spenser's facility with blank verse.

distinct verse patterns: a framing dialogue between Willye and Perigot which is "a variant of *Januarye's* six-line stanza" rhyming *ababcc* (Spenser 135); a stichomythic exchange between Perigot and Willye in the form of a roundelay which offers up a feast of rhetorical figures including *polyptoton* (holly, hollidaye), and *anaphora* ("The while my flocke did feede thereby,/the while the shepheard selfe did spill" (59-60)); and Colin's intricately crafted sestina that is delivered from memory by Cuddie.[2] Noting the line endings of the lay, Perigot is mesmerized by "ech turning of thy verse" (191) and apparently not moved to empathize with Colin for his anguished spirit in this "doolefull verse/of Rosalend" (140-1). The sestina is representative not only of Colin's "skill in making, and of his power to recreate the spirit of his audience" (Montrose 1979, 43) but also, according to Cain, "Spenser's project of self-promotion" (Spenser 136).

Whereas in "June" Colin had scorned the Muses' power--choosing rather to play in order to please **only** himself--in "November," the sophisticated and, better yet, **improvised** elegiac lament for Dido would seem to mark the moment when he finally breaks out of the isolating self-absorbed passion that has characterized him throughout The Shepheardes Calender (Piepho 579). The lament appropriately opens with an invocation to "*Melpomene* thou

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[2]Like Meliboeus in Virgil's *Eclogue VII* who quotes from memory the songs of Corydon and Thyrsis, Cuddie has memorized Colin's lay which he laudably recites.

mournefulst Muse of nyne" as Colin prepares to reveal as a "public consolation the vision of a heavenly Elysium" (579) to compensate for what he now regards as the "trustlesse state of earthly things, and slipper hope/Of mortal men" ("November" 153-4).[3] Again, as in "June" and "August," in "November" both the "difficult ten-line stanza with four distinct line lengths" used in Colin's lament for Dido as well as the framing dialogue which "proceeds in eight-line units rhyming *ababbcbc*" are designed to advertise Spenser's poetic achievement (Spenser 185).

A Suit of Nettles

In an early review of A Suit of Nettles, Northrop Frye praises Reaney's skill in exploring so many verse forms and metrical techniques:

> I will say not only that I have never read a book of Canadian poetry with so little "dissociation of sensibility" in it, where there was less separating of emotion and intellect, of the directly visualized and erudite (Frye 1971, 90).[4]

The first three eclogues feature a ten-line stanza with four rhymes and end

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[3]When Colin refers to "Elisian fieldes so free" (179), surely we are to recognize the etymological connection of the adjective "Elysian" with "Elisa"--queen of the shepheards--in his "Aprill" lay and thus Queen Elizabeth herself to whom he ingratiates himself throughout the entire Calender.

[4]Richard Stingle comments that Reaney laboured to acquire the professional skill--for which he was lauded by Frye in The Bush Garden--in his early days of teaching in Winnipeg when he set metrical problems for himself (Stingle 35).

with an *Alexandrine* such as "And life and whether they and all and life should cease" ("January" 20).[5] Yet, both "February" and "March" offer additional verse forms: the first eclogue appropriates the intricately wrought sestina used by Colin in his "heavy laye" (149) of "August" as Branwell recites a blazon of Dorcas--his "white angel in bethlehems of grime" (111); the second compliments the ten-line stanza of the framing dialogue with the octosyllabic rhyming couplets of Effie's recitation of the fable "about the doorknob and the door which argues for having some sort of handle to your life whether you believe it or not" ("March" *Argument*).

"August" also demonstrates that Reaney enjoyed experimenting with metrical variation from eclogue to eclogue. How appropriate it is that in his gloss of "Scrutumnus," Reaney by implication praise poetry that tries to be like " a great marble palace of exquisite beauty" (a simile amplified by one's association of it with Coleridge's "stately pleasure-dome" in "Kubla Khan") ("August" *Gloss* 36). Several verse forms are presented in "August." The eclogue is framed by rhyming couplets, and offers three songs--the first, a variation of the rhyme scheme associated with a Shakespearean sonnet (*abab cdcd efef gg*), since it lacks a terminating couplet; and, the second, a slight

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[5]Reaney's use of the *Alexandrine* is entirely appropriate because perhaps the most conspicuous instance of its use in English is by Spenser, who in his Faerie Queene stanza, after eight pentameter lines, employed a hexameter line--that is, an *Alexandrine*--in the ninth (Holman 10).

departure from the Spenserian stanza because, although it includes the prescribed four *b*-rhymes, the stanza does not finish with an *Alexandrine*, but rather with a cacophony of clapping.[6]

Master of His "Famous Fourth": Spenser and "*Aprill*"

One of the central animating forces behind pastoral is the longing for the golden age--an age symbolized and brought forth by a messianic figure whose presence brings a resolving harmony to the conflict and disorder of the real world (Cullen 112). In "Aprill," the fourth eclogue of the Calender, Spenser appropriately relies on the most celebrated of Virgil's *Eclogues*--known as the "famous fourth" or "messianic eclogue" --in which a golden-age messiah reconciles conflicts, ends wars and brings about the return of peace. Elisa of "Aprill" then, like the conventional golden-age messiah, is a figure of peace. (As ruler, Elizabeth I united the dissident factions of York and Lancaster)[7] And,

[6]Other verse forms with which Reaney toys include a variety of poulter's measure with strong rhymes set against weak ones in "May"; dialogue prose in "July"; four-beat alliterative verse (of the drunken preacher's sermon) and catalogue prose in "September"; and the perfectly balanced triple tercet, single quatrain combination of each bird's speech in "November."

[7]Not only is pastoral dedicated to members of a nonpastoral world (i.e. court), it also has as one of its prime functions the praise of that world (Cullen 4). Court pastoral has been associated with the genre since its evolution with Theocritus's *encomium* to Ptolemy in *Idyll XVII*. It is interesting to note that Elizabeth as queen regnant used pastoral forms as instruments of policy. For example, in her speech to Parliament in 1576, in response to the constant urging that she should marry, she wrote: "If I were a milkmaid with a pail on

as Patrick Cullen notes further, "fayre *Elisa*, Queene of shepheardes" ("Aprill" 34) is crowned fittingly by "*Chloris*, that is the chiefest Nymph of al" (122) with "a Coronall...of Olive braunches" (123) since "Olives bene for peace" (124).[8]

In the argument preceding "Aprill," we are provided with information regarding its forthcoming theme--that is that the eclogue is "purposely intended to the honor and prayse of our most gracious sovereigne, Queene Elizabeth" ("Aprill" *Argument*). This is true to an extent since Colin's lay (which spatially assumes approximately seventy-five percent of the entire eclogue) is an intricate metrical and rhetorical form designed to laud Elizabeth. However, for the first nine stanzas (alliterative-verse quatrains), Hobbinoll addresses his concerns about Colin who, in *love longynge* and "plongd in payne, his tressed locks dooth teare" (12). The actual praise of the queen appears in the inserted ode "of *Colins* owne making" (154) that, "according to the pastoral machinery of the poem, Hobbinoll rehearses" (Cain 1968, 45). Although Colin cannot control the world in which "fayre *Rosalind* hath bredde hys smart" (27), he can, as Cain suggests, invoke Elisa's fame and praise and then see that praise develop in a world that only he controls (Cain 58). Colin's "laye" (33) about "fayre *Elisa*" (34) is a carefully wrought and highly stylized panegyric in

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my arm, whereby my private person might be little set by, I would not forsake that poor state to match with the greatest monarch" (Montrose 1980, 156).

[8]Another of Spenser's transformations of the golden-age motif in "Aprill" is the conflation on Elisa with Virgo, embodiment of justice (Cullen 116).

the form of an ode--on which each of the thirteen stanzas that makes up the "laye" is attentively structured.[9] Moreover, Colin's song--because it is sung by Hobbinoll--is demonstrative of the immortalizing power of poetry.

The extent to which Colin's praise of Elisa reflects her perfection is based partially on the success of Spenser's ability to reconcile the two conflicting sets of evaluative terms--the rustic and the royal (Hoffman 45). The counterpoint of opposites evident in the juxtaposition of a highly artificial ode delivered by a lowly shepherd serves to heighten the significance of Spenser's choice of a pastoral world as the amphitheatre in which to present high praise to Queen Elizabeth. Louis Montrose suggests further, for example, that the "Aprill" eclogue illuminates "the dialectic by which poetic power helps to create and sustain the political power to which it is subservient" (Goldberg 525). Montrose explains that the "otiose love-talk of the shepherd" (here, Colin), masks the "busy negotiation of the courtier" (Spenser as England's aspiring

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[9]As "a single, unified strain of exalted lyrical verse," the **ode** is usually directed to a single purpose and deals with one theme--in "Aprill" clearly "to blaze" (43) the "worthy praise" (44) of Elisa (Holman 306). Spenser appropriates the conventional form of the Pindaric ode which is characterized by a three-strophe division: the strophe and antistrophe alike in form (in "Aprill" the strophe is a quatrain with alternating lines of iambic pentameter and iambic dimeter, and the antistrophe, a quatrain of two successive lines of iambic pentameter followed by two of iambic dimeter), the epode different from the other two--in this case a single line of iambic tetrameter rhyming with the first two lines of the antistrophe.

new poet) (Montrose 1980, 154).[10] More specifically, the shepherd is a courtly poet presenting his courtship in pastoral forms. Royal pastoral such as Colin's lay was developed, moreover, into "a remarkably flexible cultural instrument for the meditation of power relations between Queen and subjects" (166).

Since Spenser places the encomium of Elizabeth I in the fourth eclogue of The Shepheardes Calender, he clearly appears to be overtly inviting comparison with Virgil's "messianic eclogue" and its celebration of an unborn child and a new age of peace--subsequently interpreted as a prophecy for the Advent of Christ. "Aprill" furthermore re-creates the myth of Pan and Syrinx in the context of a royal encomium which is advanced as an English and Protestant fulfilment of Virgil's *Eclogue IV* (Montrose 1979, 40).[11] Colin, in effect, "metamorphoses an Ovidian aetiological myth into a Tudor genealogical myth" (Montrose 1980, 166) that suits Spenser's implied comparison in which Elizabeth is "*Syrinx* daughter without spotte,/Which *Pan* the shepheards God of her begot" (50-1).

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[10]In Elizabethan pastoral, the relationship between courtier-poet and Queen is idealized as a love that has been purified of physical desire and its erotic energy is transformed into art (the poem as a literary and cultural artifact) and service. More significantly, however, is the fact that the rhetoric of royal encomium provides "an allowable occasion for the cultivation of love poetry, and a purified medium for the pursuit of socio-economic advancement" (Montrose 1979, 40).

[11]In the original Ovidian myth, desire for sexual union was frustrated, then sublimated into a union of Pan's breath with the reeds into which Syrinx had been changed (Montrose 1979, 41).

In his gloss, E.K. explains that Pan is meant to stand for both "the most famous and victorious King, her highnesse Father, late of worthy memorye K. Henry the eyght," and "Christ himselfe, who is the verye Pan and god of Sheepheardes" ("Aprill" *Gloss* 50).[12] References alluding to the immaculate conception of a blessed virgin--"that blessed wight:/The flowre of Virgins" (47-8) and a "daughter without spotte" (50)--in the genealogy cleverly counter "Catholic insinuations of Elizabeth's bastardy with an insinuation of her divinity" (Montrose 1980, 167).

The genealogical myth is repeated from a different perspective in the seventh stanza of Colin's lay (in which Colin includes himself within the frame of the image that he is creating)--the numerical centre of the encomium (Montrose 1979, 41):

> *Pan* may be proud, that ever he begot
>   such a Bellibone,
> And *Syrinx* rejoyse, that ever was her lot
>   to bear such an one.
> Soone as my younglings cryen for the dam,
> To her will I offer a milkwhite Lamb:
>   Shee is my goddesse plaine,
>   And I her shepherds swayne,

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[12]If we follow the logic of the myth as outlined concisely by E.K. in his gloss, we see that Elisa is also the personification of pastoral poetry, more particularly "song" (Cullen 114). For, as the offspring of Pan and Syrinx, Elisa is technically the music Pan creates by blowing through his panpipe.

Albee forswonck and forswatt I am (91-9).[13]

Montrose argues that the myth, in its poignant recurrence, ushers in a pastoral image of the poet's status in the actual Elizabethan social order; "it suggests subservience of poetic to political power, and the poet's economic dependency on the patronage system manipulated by the Queen and her regime" (Montrose 1979, 42).

Commentators since E.K. have pointed to examples of Spenser's elocutional skill in The Shepheardes Calender, but only incidentally. Cain, for example, in "The Strategy of Praise in Spenser's 'Aprill'" provides a thorough rhetorical analysis of the eclogue based upon the encomiastic structure of Aphthonius's Progymnasmata.[14] Progymnasmata was a textbook in elementary rhetoric (from which Spenser was likely taught at the Merchant Taylors School) that contained strict prescriptions for fourteen themes of increasing difficulty (Cain 1968,46). It is Aphthonius's eighth theme--*laus*--which "sets forth a scheme for encomium that prescribes the traditional topics

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[13]Cain suggests that Colin, by reverting into his shepherd's speech--"Albee forswonck and forswatt I am"--produces an effect of immensely heightening the encomium he has just concluded (Cain 1968, 57).

[14]H.D. Rix's Rhetoric in Spenser's Poetry provides a general treatment of the subject and cites examples from the Calender as pointed out by E.K. Michael Dixon's article "Rhetorical Patterns and Methods of Advocacy in Spenser's The Shepheardes Calender" provides a specific examination of "Februarie," "Julye," and "October" and Maren-Sofie Rostvig's "The Shepheardes Calender--A Structural Analysis" also offers a general structural overview.

for the invention of **praise**" that Spenser appropriates in "Aprill" (46).[15] When in the *Argument* of "Aprill" Colin's "laudable exercises whereby he taketh occasion, for proofe of his more excellencie and skill in poetrie" are referred to, Spenser implies the Aphthonian rhetorical origin of the forthcoming ode ("Aprill" *Argument*). Presumably, the aspiring poet's "laudable exercises" are not only praiseworthy but also "an exercise in the invention, disposition, and elocution of the school-theme *laus*" (Cain 46).

Adhering to the prescribed Aphthonian pattern for *laus*, Spenser uses all of the topics--with the exception of *educatio*: "traditionally weakest in the series" (Cain 47)--as a thematic and structural frame for Colin's lay in "Aprill."[16] Colin's appeal to "daynte Nymphs" (37) and muses ("Virgins, that on *Parnasse* dwell" (41)) to help him "to blaze" (43) Elisa's "worthy praise,/Which in her sexe doth all excell" (44-5) is not only highly conventional in a poem with classical forbears, but also entirely *à propos* as an introduction

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[15]The Aphthonian pattern for *laus* begins with a preface emphasizing the exceptional excellence of the subject (*proemium pro qualitate rei*) and is followed by background information (*genus*) about race (*gens*), native land (*patria*). ancestors (*maiores*) and parents (*patres*). The next topic deals with upbringing (*educatio*) and is followed by the major topic of praise--deeds (*res gestae*)--subdivided into *animi bona* virtues, such as prudence), *corporis bona* (physical excellences, such as strength or beauty), and *fortunae bona* (gifts of fortune, such as wealth or office. The fifth topic, *comparatio*, is one in which the subject is elevated by favourable comparison and the final topic an epilogue in the form of a prayer or good wish (*votum*) (Cain 46).

[16]The Aphthonian *topoi* for *laus* used by Spenser in "Aprill" are *proemium pro qualitate rei, genus, res gestae, comparatio* and *votum*.

pro qualitate rei (Cain 47).[17] For, as Cain explains, the shepherd-poet's appeal to the muses serves as a declaration of authorial inadequacy before his subject--"fayre *Elisa*, Queene of shepheardes all" (34)--whereby the dignity of that subject is automatically elevated (Cain 47). As early as the strophe of the second stanza, we find a description of "fayre *Elisa*" which definitely connotes (and, denotes for that matter) a *nexus* with conventional representations of the Blessed Virgin Mary for she is "that blessed wight:/The flowre of Virgins" (47-8). And the subsequent exploration of her parentage (*patres*) serves only to strengthen this connection between the Blessed Virgin and Elisa since "without spotte" (50)--an epithet traditionally associated with Mary's immaculate conception--here refers to "*Elisa*, Queene of shepheardes" (34).[18] The two figures are, in effect, conflated.

The myth of Pan and Syrinx through which Spenser claims Elisa as their offspring begotten "Of heavenly race" (53) and "without spotte" (50) has already been examined earlier in this chapter in sufficient detail. However, it is useful nevertheless to recall that although E.K. in his gloss comments on the

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[17]Reaney appropriates Spenser's conventional introductory appeal to the muses in A Suit of Nettles with his prefatory "Invocation to the Muse of Satire."

[18]With his description of Elisa as "that blessed wight:/The flowre of Virgins" (47-8), Spenser seems to be following the daring Renaissance "convention of the literary Eliza-cult whereby qualities traditionally associated with the Virgin were transferred to Elizabeth" (Cain 49).

idealization of Henry VIII as Pan, he avoids the question of Anne Boleyn as Syrinx (Cain 50).[19] Instead, Spenser manages to circumvent questions of taste with the result that his exploration of *patres* is "more symbolic and suggestive than genealogical" (Cain 50). In addition, throughout the second stanza, Spenser continues to attribute qualities of the Blessed Virgin such as "No mortall blemishe" (54) to Elisa, thereby making her birth a variety of Immaculate Conception and thus sustaining by extension the cult-ideal of Elizabeth as Virgin Queen (Cain 50).

Moving on appropriately to the third and central Aphthonian topic of praise--*res gestae* or deeds--in the third stanza of the lay, Spenser focuses on the physical beauty (*corporis bona*) of Elisa, an emphasis considered entirely conventional when the subject of encomium was a lady (Cain 51). Increasingly, we begin to realize that Elisa is no ordinary lady. For example, rather than examining Elisa's physical attributes with an eye for human detail, Spenser fashions her in emblematic terms that relate to trappings associated with majesty. She is "Yclad in scarlot.../And Ermines white" (57-8) and wears "Upon her head a Cremosin coronet" (59). In the following passage, Elisa

[19]It also must be noted that in Ovid, Pan and Syrinx are childless (unlike Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn) and that the attempted rape is foiled by the metamorphosis of Syrinx into reeds (Cain 50). Pan's desire for Syrinx is then sublimated and re-channelled through his creative powers as he fashions a set of pipes out of the reeds into which Syrinx had been transformed. Therefore, in effect, Elisa as the so-called "daughter without spotte" (50) of Pan and Syrinx is the song (or poem) that their union creates.

becomes the "central flower which the other flowers serve to embellish" (Cain 51):

> ....a Cremosin coronet,
> With Damaske roses and Daffadillies set:
>   Bayleaves betweene,
>   And Primroses greene
> Embellish the sweete Violet (59-63).

Res Gestae continues in the fourth stanza, but the poet's eye and pen shift from symbolic praise of *corporis bona*--such as her cheeks that "depeincten lively chere" (70) in which "the Redde rose medled" fittingly with the "White yfere" (69)[20]--to a focus on *animi bona* with descriptions of Elisa's "**angelick** face" (64) and a series of phrases in which Spenser adroitly uses *anaphora* and *isocolon* to draw attention to her virtues that include "heavenly haveour, her princely grace" (66), "Her modest eye" (71) and "Her Majestie" (72).

With the introduction of the sun-king metaphor in stanza four--for Elisa's face is "Like *Phoebe* fayre"--Spenser issues in the fourth *topos* for *laus*, that is *comparatio*, through which Elisa is hyperbolically elevated by literally outshining the sun. When in stanza five Phoebus, the sun, "thrust out his golden hedde,/upon her to gaze" (73-4), he withdraws, when amazed, he realizes "how broade her beames did spredde" (75). This *comparatio in maius* by which Elisa is shown to outshine the sun also intimates a feminine touch

[20]A terribly appropriate image if one recalls that Elizabeth I, as daughter to Henry VIII, embodies the union of "the two principall houses of Lancaster and of Yorke" as E.K. notes in his gloss. ("Aprill" *Glosse* 64).

she possesses. For, clearly "her [eye]beames" (75) suggest both the "Neoplatonic and Petrarchan tradition glorifying the effect of a lady's glance" (Cain 53).[21]

The final topic of the prescribed Aphthonian pattern for praise is the *votum* (Cain 46). It occurs in the seventh and middle stanza of Colin's encomium after which praise leads to a panegyric in the etymological sense.[22] The first part of the stanza serves as an epilogue because it "looks backward to the encomiastic disposition of topics just completed" (Cain 1968, 54):

> *Pan* may be proud, that ever he begot
> Such a Bellibone,
> And *Syrinx* reioyse, that euer was her lot
> to beare such an one (91-4).

This quatrain recalls that in his "fanciful treatment of *genus*" (Cain 54), Colin, as *poeta*, has demonstrated the art of praise (exercised by Spenser as he adhered to the traditional prescribed Aphthonian rhetorical pattern for *laus*). The second quatrain reveals Colin's good wish for Elisa since "Soone as [his] younglings cryen for the dam" (95), he will offer her "a milkwhite Lamb" (96). And, here we also view the dynamics of the complementary relationship between Spenser and Elizabeth I at work (and play) for "Shee is [his] goddesse

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[21]Recall Shakespeare's parody of this Petrarchan conceit in his anti-blazon of the lady in Sonnet 130 which begins "My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun."

[22]The **panegyris**, or gathering of all together to celebrate the subject of praise, actually happens as figures arrive and crown Elisa in the second half of Colin's lay (Cain 1978, 15).

plaine" (97), and he "her shepherds swayne" (98).

Reaney's "*April*"

Whereas Spenser's "Aprill" contains an intricately structured encomium of Elisa, Reaney's "April" --although it appropriates the encomium-- presents a very different response to Virgil's "famous fourth" by which the poet offers praise and exhibits his technical prowess through an unresolved bardic contest in honour of Spring. And, while "Aprill" includes a long lyric in praise of Elisa, the fair queen of all shepherds, "April" *via* Raymond celebrates the earth as a great black goddess and *via* Valancy as a sleeping beauty called awake by the panegyric in her honour (Lee 72).[23]

Northrop Frye suggests that "when we find sharp barking accents....mouthfuls of consonants, the splattering rumble of long words and the bite and grip of heavily stressed monosyllables" (Frye 1957, xiii), we are most likely reading a poet influenced by music. Even at a glance, Reaney's "April" indicates that Reaney, acccording to Frye's definition, is very much a poet influenced by music. The "sharp barking accents" of "cry cry," "caw caw," "bark bark" and the abundantly consonantal and alliterative "black begum of a thousand dugs" (21) are certainly exemplary of the influence to which Frye

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[23]Since April is Venus's month, it is appropriate that Reaney has each of Raymond and Valancy represent in their songs different aspects of Venus.

refers.

Vowel sounds are equally important to a poet with regard to achieving a musical effect. Reaney demonstrates diversity in this area by contrasting phonetically harsh sounds such as [i] and [aI]--repeated in the opening line of Raymond's song: "I speak I speak"--with softer languid sounds such as [ɛ, I, o,ʌ,ə] found in "When the sun killed him for her" (13) that seem to portend a calming effect.

Since it is desirable in a piece of music to return to the so-called tonic chord at the end of the piece, it is appropriate that in the final stanza of Raymond's song Reaney returns to specific reference to the "Great goddess" (30): "the arable earth" (9) which the Raymond praises. Additionally, Reaney uses *epanalepsis* in lines 30 and 32--"From you have come" to frame and thus embrace the offspring--"Killdeer crow geese ditch leaf plowman" (31) in "endless laughing weeping round" (33).

Written in paired tercets rhyming *aabccb*--a variation of the popular Elizabethan stanza form rhyming *ababcc* used by Spenser in his opening and closing eclogues--Raymond's song celebrates Spring as the richly fertile "Black sow goddess huge with birth" (10), and "Black begum of a thousand dugs" (121). Repetition of devices of sound such as assonance, consonance and alliteration help to draw attention to the underestimated amount of procreative power inherently possessed by Raymond's "Mother Ground" (29). Notice, for

example, each of the devices mentioned above in "Cry cry killdeers in her fields" (11), or as the paired animals emerge at a new creation "fresh out of Noah's ark" (16) heralding their arrivals with "caw caw whir whir bark bark" (15). It appears that, throughout Raymond's song, the archetypal myth of mother Earth is joined to Reaney's knowledge of the emergence of the present Ontario landscape at the time of the last glacial recession--surely it is this to which Reaney points when Raymond sings that the "Black ogress ate her glacier lover/When the sun killed him for her" (12-13). Reaney also gestures to Ontario's civilized roots when its Indian past is associated with the timeless migrations and continuing life of the wildgoose (as opposed to the domesticated barnyard goose who will meet his timely end in "December" when the axe is used to sever "dreading heart/From dreading mind," 6-7):

> Wild geese come in arrowheads
> Shot from birds dead long ago
> Buried in your negro snow (17-19).

While Raymond speaks of the "arable earth" as "Black sow goddess huge with birth" (9), Valancy raises the sow to a higher order in which her limbs "*are the rivers of Eden*" (34) and her body "*a bethlehem*" (54). Valancy's praise of Spring is more sophisticated than Raymond's and it demonstrates an obvious *nexus* structurally with Colin's lyric because the stanzaic pattern in which she expresses herself--if you excuse the italicized "test" line at the beginning of each stanza--is an echo, not a replication of the intricate nine-line

ode used by Spenser in "Aprill."[24] Valancy's encomium of Spring personified consists of a skilful combination of long and short lines of rhymes (as in "arise," 35 and "skies," 37) and assonance (such as "lost daughter," 36 and "water," 38). In addition, the italicized epigraph preceding each stanza provides its basic metaphor. For example, in the second stanza, since Spring's face "*unlocks the bear from his den*" (44), the world "come[s] into the arms of the sun" (45), and the "sulky earth" (46), bear-like, lay "all winter" (47) but now brings "forth/From river up boxdrain underground Fish" (48-50).

Like several sixteenth-century sonneteers, Valancy uses a blazon to praise the beauty of her lady (Spring) by enumerating her parts. For example, her "*limbs are the rivers of Eden*" (34), her "*body is a bethlehem*" (54), and her "*mind is a nest of all young things, all children*" (64). Since Valancy is a playful allusion to Canadian mythopoeic poet Isabella Valancy Crawford, it is appropriate that she praises spring as a a part of a dying and renewing cycle. Her hymn to the earth is, in effect, Reaney's poetic tribute to what he understands and admires in Crawford's poetry--that is, her "tendency to see the Canadian landscape as half-human, as potentially under human

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[24]In addition to the structural similarity between Valancy's ode and Hobbinoll's recitation of Colin's ode in "Aprill," whereas Colin in his encomium of Elisa uses classical allusions mixed with English landscape images, Valancy in A Suit of Nettles uses biblical images adapted to the Ontario landscape reviving in the Spring.

imaginative control" (Lee 74).[25] As the winter of unbelief is pushed away in Reaney's "April," "Fanatic doves, believing wrens and orioles" (59) herald in "with arched cries of Love's triumphals" (63) the forms of "*all young things, all children*" (64).[26]

Like Raymond's song which focuses on the primal urges of "Mother Ground" (29) and lauds the fertile "Black begum of a thousand dugs" (21), Valancy's hymn--which seems to read like an incantation--similarly praises simple earthly qualities which we are presumably meant to attribute to glacial recession. One need only turn to the melifluous sounds of such descriptions as "the swallows [who] stream through the skies,/Down dipping water" (37-8) and of "Their cousins the swifts" (40) who are "gliding from darkness to sun-cusp" (43) to recognize Reaney's affinity for natural representation. With such an earthbound focus in "April," Reaney consciously departs from the precedent set by Spenser--and Virgil before him--in his fourth eclogue which offers a predominantly courtly and somewhat contrived focus in praise of a golden-age messiah who serves as a figure of peace. And, while Reaney does allude to Spenser's "Aprill"--in so far as he provides an encomium correspondingly in his

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[25]In "The Canadian Poet's Predicament" Reaney wrote that "Crawford's rich prospect of Time's dying and renewing cycle...strikes one as being a beautiful core for something" (Wilson 161).

[26]Eli Mandel, in an early review of A Suit Of Nettles, commented that in "April" Reaney "shows Canadian poets what they might have done with the nature poetry had they seen the light earlier" (Mandel 263).

fourth eclogue of A Suit of Nettles--he privileges instead a subject which he represents as unique to his personal understanding of the emergence of the Ontario landscape, a landscape populated by "faithful finds: Fanatic doves, believing wrens and orioles/ Devoted redwinged blackbirds with their calls....of Love's triumphals" (58-63).

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