

Introduction

Spenser's Afterlife from Shakespeare to Milton: *The Faerie Queene* as Intertextual Environment

The afterlives of Spenser's literary creations in works by his early readers from Shakespeare to Milton attest to the wide variety of ways in which this community of readers and writers responded to *The Faerie Queene*. Many early modern readers situated bits and pieces of his works in commonplace books as a means for ethical or moral instruction.¹ Numerous readers during this period looked for analogies between *The Faerie Queene* and political, religious, and cultural figures and events, past or present.² Others treated Spenser's works as literary games, puzzles, or riddles and attempted to unlock their secret code.³ Some parodied Spenser's *Faerie Queene* or fashioned parodies in response to what they interpreted as delightfully comic aspects of Spenser's satirical poems.⁴ Many of Spenser's early readers, a number of whom were writers of satire, responded to figures and episodes throughout *The Faerie Queene* as if they are biting satire.⁵ Their appropriation of Spenser's

1 For examples of early modern readers' taste for moral instruction in *The Faerie Queene* see Burke, "Ann Bowyer's Commonplace Book"; Slotkin, *Sinister Aesthetics*, 69; and Fleck, "Early Modern Marginalia in Spenser's *Faerie Queene* at the Folger," 167. Mathias Prideaux praises the "morall" romance *The Faerie Queene* for its "Poeticall Ethicks": "An Easy and Compendious Introduction for Reading all sorts of Histories" (1648) as cited in Heffner, "Spenser's Allusions in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century. Part Two," 224.

2 See Slights, *Managing Readers*, 79, and Tricoli, "Philip, Earl of Pembroke, and the Analogical Way of Reading Political Tragedy," 336.

3 On reading parodies as puzzle-solving see Taylor, *The Politics of Parody*, 27, and Di Matteo, "Spenser's Venus-Virgo," 37–38. Smith argues that E. K.'s "commentary figures as a parody of a certain kind of overly zealous reader" in "On Reading *The Shepheardes Calender*," 182.

4 See Coldham-Fuzzell, *Comic Spenser*, 2, on *The Faerie Queene* as satirical comedy. Betts notes Spenser's satire of "the upstart Braggadochio" in Book II in "The Pornographic Blazon, 1588–1603," 161.

5 My definition of satire is in keeping with that of Jones, who says that "satire is distinctive for its overt engagement [...] with its historical context" and "criticizes the contemporary world": "Satire," 1255. For discussions of satire in the sixteenth century see Burrow, "Roman Satire in the Sixteenth Century," 243–60, and Jones, *Satire in the Elizabethan Era: An Activistic Art*.

Braggadocchio as a satirical figure for a base yet proud social climber is a case in point. Rather than glancing chronologically backward at the genealogy of specific figures like Braggadocchio in *The Faerie Queene*, I look forward in time by examining the afterlives of Spenser's literary creations. Shakespeare, Gabriel Harvey, Thomas Nashe, Ben Jonson, Andrew Marvell, and Milton appropriated Spenser's long and shorter poems to create comedy, parody, and satire. Their works had a far-reaching impact on how subsequent writers read Spenser. In *Spenser's Afterlife from Shakespeare to Milton: 'The Faerie Queene' as Intertextual Environment* I combine humanist, pedagogical emphases on close and careful reading of ancient, medieval, and early modern texts with posthumanist tenets of vital materialism and the power of things.⁶ *The Faerie Queene* functions as a powerful, nonhuman agent that transforms how readers and writers respond to their environments. This poem and its afterlives move readers from 1590–1660 to perceive flaws in political and religious figureheads and institutions to envision better ones.

The Material Environment of *The Faerie Queene*

In *Spenser's Afterlife from Shakespeare to Milton* I explore how the material environments of printing houses, playhouses, and country houses shape how Spenser's *Faerie Queene* was remembered and by whom in late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England. Printing houses and the printers who worked there were widely influential upon the reception history of Spenser's works. These venues exert considerable agency over the afterlives of Spenser's literary creations because material features on a printed page impress how readers respond to a text. The new, editorial practice of numbering stanzas in the 1609 folio of *The Faerie Queene* printed by William Ponsonby gives the impression that Spenser's early readers did not necessarily read this work from beginning to end.⁷ Antique language, rustic dialect, spelling, typeface, font, and other paratextual features further inform what Spenser's readers noticed on the printed page and how they interpreted his poetry. The sheer size of printed copies of *The Faerie Queene*, which were expensive and heavy to lift, also shaped how these readers remembered, imagined, and glorified

6 For an overview of posthumanism in relation to ecocriticism, animal studies, and actor-network theory see Sanchez, "Posthumanist Spenser?," 22–25, and Raber, *Shakespeare and Posthumanist Theory*, 1–25. Campana and Maisano connect the "close reading" of Renaissance humanists with "discourses of twenty-first century critical posthumanism" in *Renaissance Posthumanism*, 2 and 11.

7 Wilkinson, *Edmund Spenser and the Eighteenth-Century Book*, 13.

Spenser and his long poem.⁸ Book size mattered for early modern readers.⁹ For example, Francis Bridgewater organized the printed list of her catalog of 241 books by size and most likely shelved them by this criterion.¹⁰

From 1590–1660 Spenser's epic romance was a vital text and intertext for readers and writers in urban theaters and for those residing in country estates. In Elizabethan and Jacobean playhouses, his early readers encountered recreations of the horse thief Braggadocchio in performances of dramatic works by Shakespeare and Jonson. Afterlives of Spenser's braggadocious windbag include Falstaff in Shakespeare's *Henriad* and Sir Epicure Mammon in Jonson's *The Alchemist*. In a cultural context in which early readers were accustomed to listening to works read aloud, hearing *The Faerie Queene* aurally in social circles at court and elsewhere accentuated its performative dimension.¹¹ *The Faerie Queene* was also a treasured book in Sir Thomas Fairfax's library at the country house where Marvell worked as a tutor for his daughter Maria shortly before he wrote *Upon Appleton House*. All six of the early writers whose direct or indirect responses to Spenser I examine in detail had either read *The Faerie Queene*, which was in circulation in manuscript or printed form before 1590, or were widely familiar with works by those who had owned a copy of it or had read it closely. I focus on how Shakespeare, Thomas Nashe, Gabriel Harvey, Ben Jonson, Andrew Marvell, and Milton responded to *The Faerie Queene* and how intertextual dialogues between their key voices and many others were widely influential on the reception history of Spenser's long poem. My broad use of the term "intertext" spans influence, imitation, parody, allusion, and appropriation. Such intertextual connections can be thematic, linguistic, historical, or cultural. Though some intertextual relationships are intentional, others are unintentional.¹²

Rhetorical figures and topoi in *The Faerie Queene* affected how early readers annotated their copies of this poem and informed their physical and mental experiences of proceeding through this intertextual environment. Marginalia on individual pages of a manuscript or printed book record

8 The 1590 *The Faerie Queene* "was the largest work of English poetry ever seen through the press by a living author": Zurcher, "Printing *The Faerie Queene* in 1590," 115.

9 John Dee, for example, stored 1,400 books in his library "according to size": Sherman, *John Dee*, 32.

10 Hackel, *Reading Material in Early Modern England*, 14.

11 On the early modern social habit of listening to performances of literary works read aloud see Hackel, *Reading Material in Early Modern England*, 10, and Clegg, *Shakespeare's Reading Audiences*, 10.

12 See Anderson, *Reading the Allegorical Intertext*, 1–4. Anderson says that "while authorial agency and linguistic free play are opposing binaries in the abstract, in practice they coexist interestingly, elusively, and indefinitely" (2).

readers' impressions of Spenser's work. The term "impression" can refer to a printed copy of a manuscript, the imprinting of coins on liquified metal, and the inscribing of memories on the mind.¹³ Similes among other rhetorical figures made a big impression on many annotators of early modern works, including *The Faerie Queene*.¹⁴ Spenser's epic similes are not merely rhetorical ornaments recorded in commonplace books. Rather, these similes are powerful things that reveal web-like entanglements between human, animal, insect, and vegetative life.¹⁵ Walking in the woods provides a useful analogy for the phenomenological experience of reading the ecological poem *The Faerie Queene*. Like the foot of a printing press inscribing marks on the page, the human foot makes impressions on the ground.¹⁶ Walking on foot offers an embodied form of knowledge about a particular place and about space and time more generally. Pedestrians experience their environs firsthand. A walker is immersed in a landscape with other living entities and objects in a dynamic scene that appeals to the eyes, ears, touch, taste, and smell. Likewise, readers attend to rhetorical topoi that impress their bodily senses, cognitive understanding, and affections as they move forward or backward on the pages of a manuscript or book.

Close and careful reading is often a fundamentally dynamic experience of language. Redcrosse Knight and Una's sensory experience of walking on horse and foot through the Wandering Wood in the opening episode of Book I of *The Faerie Queene* is similar to the phenomenological process of reading Spenser's long poem. From a theoretical perspective about place relevant to early modern as well as modern people, James J. Gibson says that "animals and people do in fact see the environment through locomotion, not just in pauses between movements."¹⁷ For Michel de Certeau reading is a kinetic process akin to venturing into another person's private property. Such property violations occur in the Mammon episode in Book II of *The Faerie Queene* in which this gold thief and hoarder exploits the land and

13 In "Imprints," 63–80, de Grazia provides a wide array of definitions of the term "impression."

14 See Rosenfeld, "Braggadochio and the Schoolroom Simile," 441, and Fowler, "Oxford and London Marginalia to 'The Faerie Queene,'" 417.

15 On a "pervasive network of agentic forces" among "persons, animals, and topographies" in *The Faerie Queene* see Barrett, "Allegraphy and 'The Faerie Queene's' Significantly Unsignifying Ecology," 4. For how "human and nonhuman bodies inter-animate" in Book IV of *The Faerie Queene* see Swarbrick, "The Life Aquatic," 229. Swarbrick provides an important critique of entanglement in ecocriticism by arguing that nonhuman matter, like language, is depicted through loss and disconnection in *The Environmental Unconscious: Ecological Poetics from Spenser to Milton*.

16 Gordon notes that "the word *footprint* itself is a coinage that emerges with the rise of the printing press": "The Renaissance Footprint," 482.

17 Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*, xiv.

his underground workers. In *The Practice of Everyday Life* de Certeau says, “readers are travellers; they move across lands belonging to someone else, like nomads poaching their way across fields they did not write, despoiling the wealth of Egypt to enjoy it themselves.”¹⁸ Likewise, early modern writers commonly drew analogies between reading and the environmental misuse of mining for gold in the New World.¹⁹

Kinetic movement through a physical environment, rural or urban, is analogous to how Spenser, Jonson, and Marvell represent early modern habits of reading.²⁰ In *The Faerie Queene* and subsequent works inspired by it characters often proceed on horse or foot through woodlands, gardens, city streets, or country house estates. In Book II of *The Faerie Queene*, for example, Guyon walks without his horse through the Cave of Mammon, a hellish setting that recalls the Garden of Hesperides, while he debates the perils of Mammonism. Jonson, one of Spenser’s most astute early readers, refers to Spenser in his commonplace book *Timber, or Discoveries*. His long walk from London to Edinburgh, Scotland left an impression on this prose work. Jonson leaves his figurative footprint—a printing press coinage—in his copy of the 1617 Folio of *The Faerie Queene and Complaints* by adorning stanzas with marginalia of flowers denoting passages he intended to memorize.²¹ The word *anthology* is derived from the Greek *anthos*, meaning “flower.”²² Like bees, early readers such as Jonson make honey from the flowers they gather in collections of rhetorical commonplaces.²³ In the commonplace book *England’s Parnassus* (1600), Spenser was cited more than Shakespeare, illustrating the impact of *The Faerie Queene* on the intertextual environment from 1590–1660. As Sasha Roberts says, “while Spenser is the most heavily represented author in the volume Shakespeare does not lag far behind.”²⁴ Marvell the poet frequently alludes to *The Faerie Queene* in *Upon Appleton House* in which the speaker meditates philosophically while he walks through this country estate. He appropriates dynamic figures and episodes throughout *The Faerie Queene* for indirect satire of his employer

18 de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 174, as cited by Catherine Nicholson in *Reading and Not Reading ‘The Faerie Queene’*, 111.

19 Slights, *Ben Jonson and the Art of Secrecy*, 112–113.

20 On “the movement of horses” as an analogy for “the movement of poetry” see Wilcox-Mahon, “Coursers and Courses in *The Faerie Queene*,” 238.

21 Riddell and Stewart, *Jonson’s Spenser*, 88.

22 Kane, “Spenserian Ecology,” 479.

23 See Mayer, *Shakespeare’s Early Readers*, 150, and Rhodes, *Shakespeare and the Origins of English*, 155–56.

24 Roberts, *Reading Shakespeare’s Poems in Early Modern England*, 93.

Sir Thomas Fairfax's retirement from military service in 1650 during the English Civil War. Spenser's *Faerie Queene* moved numerous early modern writers of comedy, parody, and satire to take political action through the guise of poetry, prose, and drama.

The Faerie Queene mattered vitally as a seedbed for the intertextual environment that Spenser's early readers experienced through 1660, as illustrated by the staggering number of late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century appropriations of his long poem. The Spenserian figures Braggadocchio, Mammon, and the Fairy Queen, plus the episodes of the Wandering Wood, the Castle of Alma, the House of Busirane, the Bower of Bliss, and the Garden of Adonis appear in many comedies, parodies, and satires from 1590 to 1660. Margaret A. Rose defines parody, which M. M. Bakhtin conceives as a dialogic form, as "the comic refashioning of preformed linguistic or artistic material."²⁵ *The Faerie Queene* inspired comic imitations as well as impersonations. Because memory is notoriously unreliable, I explore comic, parodic, and satirical aspects of figures and episodes in *The Faerie Queene* that Spenser's early readers remembered and other ones they forgot.²⁶

For Gabriel Harvey and the satirist Nashe, two of Spenser's earliest readers, Braggadocchio's horse thievery functions as a symbolic gesture for the lower ranks encroaching upon the aristocratic privileges of the upper ranks and is particularly memorable. Spenser's association of Braggadocchio with the proud peacock and the early modern cultural anxiety about social mobility fueled early readers' continued fascination with this figure.²⁷ Unlike Harvey and Nashe, the upstart crow Shakespeare disregards that Braggadocchio is a peasant and vagabond in *The Faerie Queene*. Instead, he appropriates Spenser's lowly braggart to satirize the aristocrats Richard III and Falstaff. The ecological and zoological figuration that Spenser uses to portray the windbag Braggadocchio and the miner baron Mammon—ranging from a bird aloft in the air to the soot produced from burning coal—made vivid impressions on early modern readers. In numerous appropriations of *The Faerie Queene* animals, insects, vegetative life, landscapes, and the four elements of earth, air, fire, and water appear prominently. Like *The Faerie Queene*, which functions as a powerful thing that impacts numerous early modern readers and audiences, nonhuman creatures and objects, which bring figures such as Braggadocchio and his later reincarnations to life,

25 Rose, *Parody*, 52, 126–27.

26 On intertextuality and the selectivity of memory and forgetting see Staines, "Charles's Grandmother," 160, and Lynn, *Memory and Intertextuality in Renaissance Literature*, 1.

27 See Boehrer, "Renaissance Classicism and Roman Sexuality," 380.

sustain Spenser's literary afterlife and its lasting impact on the material environment—political, social, and religious.

The Faerie Queene as Satire

Many of Spenser's early readers from 1590–1660 interpreted *The Faerie Queene* as satire and appropriated it in their satirical works to critique and possibly reform what they viewed as societal ills. In keeping with a satyr, satire is a hybrid form, generically speaking.²⁸ Satire is a Roman lyric mode shaped by numerous classical, ancient, and rhetorical models. Though Spenser is widely known for indirect satire in *Mother Hubberds Tale* in *The Complaints* and *The Shepheardes Calender*, satirical features of *The Faerie Queene* have not received the critical attention they deserve.²⁹ Aesopian beast satire is a key feature of animal figuration not only in *Mother Hubberds Tale* but also in *The Faerie Queene*.³⁰ As Sean Henry points out, early modern writers frequently “set political commentary and criticism in animal terms in order to ... satirize.”³¹ In addition, “Spenser's animals become riddles with many possible answers,” resulting in indirect and ambiguous satirical referents.³² Building on Rachel Hile's important study *Spenserian Satire: A*

28 In “Satire,” 1256, Jones says that “the word itself is derived from the Latin *satura*, meaning a “mixture.” In “Complaint and Satire,” 150, Kerwin adds that Aesop's beast fables reveal connections between figures of animals and satire.

29 On Spenser and satire see Hile, *Spenserian Satire*; Waters, *Duessa as Theological Satire* on the Roman Catholic Mass; Borris, “Diuellish Ceremonies” and “Open Secrets”; Ryzhik, “Complaint and Satire in Spenser and Donne” and “Spenser and Donne Go Fishing,” 432. Hadfield “identifies the relation between Spenser and 1590s satire as a neglected area of study”: *Edmund Spenser*, 113. DiPasquale illustrates how Spenser's *Faerie Queene* informs Donne's satire: “Anti-Court Satire, Religious Polemic, and the Many Faces of Antichrist,” 266. Brown contends that “Donne's *Satires* are more thoroughly Spenserian than is often thought” and that “satire is an important, often neglected facet of Spenser's works”: “Caring to Turn Back: Overhearing Spenser in Donne,” 13. Focusing on *Mother Hubberds Tale*, he describes both Spenser and Donne as “satirists” and illustrates how Spenser's terminology in this shorter poem “anticipates the Juvenalian aggression characteristic of 1590s satire” (21).

30 On Aesop's fables as satire in Renaissance culture see Lerer, *Children's Literature*, 35. For Spenser reading Aesop see Henry, “Strange Similes,” 28–30. In *The Shepheardes Calender* E. K. mentions Aesop's fables in his commentary on the “Februarie” eclogue: *The Yale Edition of the Shorter Poems of Edmund Spenser*, 52. Patterson discusses Spenser's use of Aesop's fables in *The Shepheardes Calender* and to criticize the monarchy in *The Complaints*: see *Fables of Power*, 52, 60, 66, 75. On Aesopian satire in *Mother Hubberds Tale* see “Aesopian Prosopopoeia,” 242, and Shinn, “Spenser's ‘Apish Crue,’” 117–18.

31 Henry, “Strange Similes,” 85.

32 Henry, “Strange Similes,” 193.

Tradition of Indirection, which largely focuses on Spenser's shorter poems in *The Complaints*, I call attention to the satirical dimension of *The Faerie Queene*. However, I question Hile's assertion that "Spenser's epic did not influence satirical poetry of the time period as clearly and as significantly as did others of his works."³³ The reception history of Spenser's works from 1590–1660 further challenges William A. Oram's observation that "the un-Virgilian satiric edge of the *Complaints* volume ... contrasts strikingly with *The Faerie Queene*."³⁴ On the contrary, Spenser highly impressed Nashe, a well-recognized satirical voice of the 1590s and one of Spenser's first readers who appropriated figures and episodes from *The Faerie Queene* and *Complaints* in *Pierce Penillesses his Supplication to the Divell*.³⁵ Nashe and Jonson's satirical appropriations of *The Faerie Queene* further transformed how subsequent readers interpreted Spenser's works.

Early modern recreators of Braggadocchio responded not only to *The Faerie Queene* but also to what this satirical figure and his reputation became in the imaginations of late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century writers, readers, and audiences. Of course Spenser's Braggadocchio was not the first satirical figure to denote a bragging, socially ambitious, or puffed-up person. The poet, however, invented a memorable name, voice, and figure that appealed widely to early readers from Shakespeare to Milton. Numerous writers in late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England appropriated this figure for a variety of ideological purposes. I use the term "appropriation" to refer to the movement of a writer's words to a new context.³⁶ Spenser's highly portable figure continued to resonate with readers and writers as satirical or as inspiration for satire through 1660. The portability and translatability of Spenser's Braggadocchio beyond the poet's immediate historical context point to the gap between authorial intention and readerly application: personae, character types, and idiosyncratic versions of them can be widely applied to new contexts and take on different and sometimes

33 Hile, *Spenserian Satire*, 64.

34 Oram, "Spenser's Audiences, 1589–91," 523.

35 See Wallace, "Reading the 1590 *Faerie Queene* with Thomas Nashe," 41. Borris notes similarities between Spenser's satire of Puritans and that of Nashe and Marston: "Diuellish Ceremonies," 203. Black argues that Harvey and probably Raleigh read a pre-publication *Faerie Queene* before it was published in 1590. He contends that Thomas Watson, the writer of a 1588 Sonnet, was "the first person to praise *The Faerie Queene* in print": "Pan is Hee," 127. Hadfield remarks that "reference to a well-known work does not always mean that the author had read the book in question": "Robert Parsons / Richard Verstegen and the Calling-in of *Mother Hubberds Tale*," 299.

36 Lanier argues that "by simply changing the context in which Shakespeare's words appear—without changing the words themselves—we radically alter their meaning": *Shakespeare and Modern Popular Culture*, 5.

opposing ideological significations. Appropriations of Spenser's Braggadocchio include responses of individual readers to *The Faerie Queene* that have been written down and aural impressions of this figure that were recreated in manuscripts, printed matter, or spectacular performances. I argue that a compelling number of these ideologically various reimaginings of Braggadocchio illustrate how numerous early readers and writers from 1590–1660 appropriated *The Faerie Queene* as comedy, parody, and satire.

Writers of satire from 1590–1660 reapplied Spenser's Braggadocchio to new contexts, resulting in their creation of works widely divergent from *The Faerie Queene*. Memorable figures like Braggadocchio are continually moving and changing in the imaginations of writers, readers, and audiences. In keeping with the methodology of Samuel Fallon, who argues that persona like Spenser's Colin Clout and Nashe's Pierce Penilesse take on a life of their own beyond the author's intent, I apply actor-network theory, which posthumanist Bruno Latour helped articulate, to Spenser's *Faerie Queene* in general and Braggadocchio in particular to argue that both function as powerful, nonhuman actants in networks of early readers, writers, and audiences responding to Spenser. According to Latour and actor-network theory, action is distributed among and brought about by subjects as well as objects.³⁷ As Fallon argues, things like “personae are in this sense examples of the nonhuman agency that lies at the heart of Bruno Latour's revisionist sociology.”³⁸ Readers, audiences, and writers exhibit agency and autonomy to remember, reimagine, and reinvent Spenser's figures in new and unexpected ways. Spenser's particular use of the highly memorable figure Braggadocchio in *The Faerie Queene* does not limit the flexibility, adaptability, and translatability of this figure across space and time in subsequent works by other writers. As Rita Felski says, “This busy afterlife of the literary artifact refutes our efforts to box it into a moment of origin, to lock it up in a temporal container.”³⁹

Reception History and Posthumanist Approaches to *The Faerie Queene*

In *Spenser's Afterlife from Shakespeare to Milton: 'The Faerie Queene' as Intertextual Environment* I examine Spenser's long and shorter works from

37 Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 46.

38 Fallon, *Paper Monsters*, 15.

39 Felski, “Context Stinks!,” 580.

the approaches of reception history and posthumanist tenets of vital materialism and networks of powerful things. A reception history approach deals in part with how communities of readers make use of, respond to, interpret, or create meaning out of a literary work. This approach emphasizes that readers play an active role in bringing a text to life. As American fiction writer Ursula K. Le Guin says, “the unread story is not a story; it is little black marks on wood pulp. The reader, reading it, makes it live: a live thing, a story.”⁴⁰ Readers animate the narratives they read and engage in dialogues with the intertextual voices they encounter there. Reader-response theorist Wolfgang Iser argues, for example, that readers experience living texts and become entangled with them. As a result, readers gain the impression that texts are “vital” and exhibit “lifelikeness.”⁴¹ Georges Poulet, also a reader-response critic, emphasizes that through the “act of reading,” a work of literature involves readers in “a network of words” and manifests “agency” and human-like animation.⁴² Interestingly, reception theory terminology and concepts—texts as living things, actants, and vital matter and of networks of texts that entangle readers—recur in posthumanism.

Interpretations of *The Faerie Queene* change dramatically over time in the eyes of readers, almost all of whom experience the poem in different ways and from unique vantage points. The study of how Shakespeare, Jonson, Marvell, Milton, and many others appropriated Spenser’s works provides insights into how they interpreted them. The phrases “text-to-text reception” and “intertextuality” can include the reception history approach of analyzing texts that appropriate features of prior ones.⁴³ Of course we can never know the definitive meaning of episodes in *The Faerie Queene*, classify without a doubt the genre or mode of his long poem, or be sure how Spenser’s early readers interpreted his long poem.⁴⁴ However, appropriations of *The Faerie Queene* by communities of readers and writers in intertextual dialogue reveal features of Spenser’s long poem that struck a resounding cord for audiences from 1590–1660.⁴⁵ Furthermore, close and careful reading of Spenserian

40 Le Guin, “Where Do You Get Your Ideas From?,” 198.

41 Iser, “The Reading Process,” 64.

42 Poulet, “Phenomenology of Reading,” 58–59, 61.

43 Willis, *Reception*, 36.

44 As Evans says, “the goal of reception history is not to recover the original meaning of a text or to establish an authoritative reading ... but rather involves examining the readings that have been attached to a given text or object and saying something salient about the social role of that text or object”: *Reception History, Tradition and Biblical Interpretation*, 2–3.

45 Jauss remarks that “the historicity of literature as well as its communicative character presupposes a dialogical and at once processlike relationship between work, audience, and new work”: *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, 19.

appropriations during the early modern period alters how modern readers today perceive his works.⁴⁶ In fact, the analysis of these appropriative texts can generate a virtually new *Faerie Queene* for audiences to enjoy. Innovative interpreters of Spenser's poems exert agency to question past interpretations of them and to influence future ones as well.⁴⁷ As a result, the reception history of *The Faerie Queene* remains in flux over time and space.

Two of the more recent examinations of Spenser in terms of reception history are Catherine Nicholson's *Reading and Not Reading 'The Faerie Queene': Spenser and the Making of Literary Criticism* and Hazel Wilkinson's *Edmund Spenser and the Eighteenth-Century Book*. Among the wealth of insights Nicholson offers about early readers and their reception of *The Faerie Queene* is her remark that "there are as many ways of reading as there are readers."⁴⁸ Sir Thomas Hoby, a close and careful reader of Spenser, annotated the margins of his 1590 edition of *The Faerie Queene*, revealing that he attended in particular to Braggadocchio, his theft of Guyon's horse Brigadore, and figuration like epic similes.⁴⁹ Unlike Nicholson, who examines Jonson's annotations of the 1617 edition of *The Faerie Queene* to argue convincingly that he "seems to have read Spenser specifically for his style," I illustrate that Jonson read and responded to *The Faerie Queene*, not just in 1617 or afterwards, but in his plays, poems, and prose works performed and published from 1599–1640.⁵⁰

By contrast to Hazel Wilkinson, who explores Spenser's reception history in the eighteenth century in *Edmund Spenser and the Eighteenth-Century Book*, I focus on the afterlives of figures and episodes in *The Faerie Queene* from 1590–1660. Wilkinson says, "the eighteenth-century afterlives of Chaucer, Shakespeare, Jonson, and Milton have all been explored to greater or lesser extents. The case of Spenser is different, and worthy of investigation."⁵¹ Whereas she deals with the eighteenth-century afterlives of Spenser, I discuss his late-sixteenth and early to mid-seventeenth-century afterlives. My use of the term "afterlives" refers not only to the reception history of *The Faerie Queene* after Spenser died in 1599 but also to the vital materiality of the poem as an aesthetic object in circulation among readers when it was

46 See Bal, *Remembering 'Rembrandt'*, 19. In *Reception* Willis glosses Bal's argument about reception history as "we can learn something about ancient texts by seeing what past readers found in them" (49).

47 Parris, *Reception Theory and Biblical Hermeneutics*, 50.

48 Nicholson, *Reading and Not Reading 'The Faerie Queene'*, 126.

49 Nicholson, *Reading and Not Reading 'The Faerie Queene'*, 128, 132.

50 Nicholson, *Reading and Not Reading 'The Faerie Queene'*, 126–28.

51 Wilkinson, *Edmund Spenser and the Eighteenth-Century Book*, 8.

first printed in 1590 while Spenser was still living. Early readers such as Thomas Nashe and Gabriel Harvey began shaping Spenser's afterlives in their satirical pamphlets almost a decade before his death and in response to his publication of Books I-III of *The Faerie Queene* in 1590 and *Mother Hubberds Tale* in *The Complaints* in 1591.⁵²

My examination of the afterlives of Spenser's literary creations from 1590–1660 is one of the first studies to combine the reception history of *The Faerie Queene* with ecocriticism, animal studies, and posthumanism. Ecocriticism and the related trend of new materialism are growing fields of study for nineteenth-century and contemporary literature and culture but comparatively less so in terms of premodern cultures.⁵³ Jane Bennett in her leading contribution to vital materialism coins the phrase "*Thing-Power*," which she defines as "the curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle."⁵⁴ She contends that human and nonhuman creatures and things exhibit "kinship" through their materiality and exist in horizontal rather than vertical relationships.⁵⁵ Reception theorists in general and reception historians in particular tend to emphasize that readers exhibit agency through their power to interpret and bring texts to life. The dynamic process of reading is thereby active, creative, and generative.⁵⁶ The joining of reception history with posthumanist approaches of vital materialism and actor-network theory, however, illuminates that

52 See Chaghafi, *English Literary Afterlives*, 60. Because Chaghafi focuses on the afterlives of dead authors in print, she argues that Spenser's "literary afterlife in the wake of his death" is largely missing (135). By contrast, I use the term "afterlife" to refer to the reception history of the nonhuman object *The Faerie Queene* among Spenser's early readers, including Harvey, Nashe, Shakespeare, Jonson, Marvell, and Milton. For other reception histories of the afterlives of texts see Kingsley, *The Afterlife of Shakespeare's Sonnets*, 4, and Lupton, *Afterlives of the Saints*, xvii. In the "Introduction" to *Ben Jonson and Posterity*, 6, Butler and Rickard consider "Jonson's afterlife" in relation to legacies of "Milton, Donne, and Marlowe" but omit the afterlife of Spenser's creations (6).

53 See Hennig, Lethbridge, and Schulte, eds., *Ecocriticism and Old Norse Studies*, 13. In their introductory chapter, "Combining Ecocriticism and Old Norse Studies: Opportunities and Challenges," 11–36, Hennig, Lethbridge, and Schulte discuss some of the most influential critical works on ecocriticism since the 1990s: Jonathan Bates's *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* (1991); Lawrence Buell's *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (1995); *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996) edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm; and Timothy Morton's *Ecology without Nature* (2009). Key voices in the field of vital materialism are Jane Bennett in *Vibrant Matter* (2010) and Stacy Alaimo in *Bodily Natures* (2010).

54 Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 6.

55 Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 112, 51.

56 Willis, *Reception*, 23, 66.

readers as agents are enmeshed in networks of nonhuman creatures and things that wield agency as well. Literary works consisting of characters, rhetorical figures like similes, and words with weight are all composed of vital matter.⁵⁷ Posthumanist Timothy Morton argues, for instance, that “a poem is not a representation but a nonhuman agent.”⁵⁸

Spenser’s long and shorter poems are powerful things with agency that transform how readers perceive and respond to their environments. Words consisting of matter and literary figures like Braggadocchio are situated not only in books but also in the historical and cultural contexts of writers and readers. Although the early modern period is often associated with humanism, the posthumanist perspective that vital matter includes all kinds of animals and vegetative life was predominant throughout pre-modern culture.⁵⁹ My study demonstrates that the humanist emphasis on close and careful reading of myriad classical, medieval, and early modern texts is entangled with posthumanist networks of human and nonhuman creatures and things. Reception history includes narrative accounts of lively interchanges between readers, audiences, and the works they create and reanimate through reading and writing. These intertextual dialogues emerge through the dynamic interplay of human and nonhuman actants situated in a mutable and perilously fragile world.

The Faerie Queene is interlaced with ecological and zoological references, from speaking trees to anthropomorphic beasts.⁶⁰ Spenser’s early readers were particularly attentive to these environmental features of the poem. The sheer number of nonhuman creatures, animals, insects, and plants in *The Faerie Queene* makes the odds of readers annotating such passages relatively high. By contrast to Shakespeare’s plays and poems, Spenser’s works are underrepresented in the field of animal studies.⁶¹ In “Spenser’s Inhumanity” published in *Spenser Studies* in 2015 Joseph Campana asks why “has Edmund

57 See, for example, Anderson, *Words That Matter*.

58 Morton, “An Object-Oriented Defense of Poetry,” 215. In “Going Outside,” 348, Eisendrath says that “it is frustrating that posthumanists tend to omit formally complex art objects from their discussions of talking things.”

59 See, for instance, Campana and Maisano, “Introduction: Renaissance Posthumanism,” 1–36.

60 Those who approach Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* from the perspectives of ecocriticism include Kane, “Spenserian Ecology”; Paster, “Becoming the Landscape”; Gregerson, “Spenser’s Georgic”; Siewers, “Spenser’s Green World”; Eklund, “Spenser’s Moral Economy as Political Ecology”; Ramien, “Silvan Matters”; Mentz, “Seep”; Badcoe on “ecotones” in *Edmund Spenser and the Romance of Space*, 6–7, 21, 208, 230, 242, 269, 277; and Badcoe, “Cascading Hazards.”

61 Key voices in the fields of animal studies, Shakespeare, and early modern culture are Fudge, *Perceiving Animals* and *Brutal Reasoning*; Boehrer, *Shakespeare Among the Animals* and *Animal Characters*; Shannon, *The Accommodated Animal*; Raber, *Animal Bodies, Renaissance Culture*;

Spenser not been a primary interlocutor in recent conversations about creaturely life in the Renaissance?" and notes that "no book-length studies of Spenser's animals seem to exist."⁶² Nevertheless, a wide array of critics have discussed Spenser's animal figuration in *The Faerie Queene*.⁶³ Sean Henry says that in *The Faerie Queene* "animals are not merely imaginative conveniences but instead are complex, culturally coded signifiers."⁶⁴ Unlike *Edmund Spenser and Animal Life*, a collection of essays edited by Rachel Stenner and Abigail Shinn and published in 2024, *Spenser's Afterlife from Shakespeare to Milton* deals with the satirical import of animal figuration in literary appropriations of Spenser's *Faerie Queene* from 1590–1660.

Appropriations of the Vital Matter of *The Faerie Queene*, 1590–1660

In chapter 1 "The Phenomenology of Reading, Ecological Awareness, and Making of Satire in *The Faerie Queene*" I explore how the forward and backward movement and stillness of Spenserian figures in Faeryland often mirror how readers make their way through the labyrinthine *Faerie Queene*. The poem itself provides multiple examples of kinetic and affective ways of reading and responding to a textual environment. In the Legend of Holiness Redcrosse Knight serves as a figure for an inexperienced reader who nonetheless makes progress by actively engaging with the text. Redcrosse faces immobility, however, in the coils of Error. This monster and her numerous offspring are analogous in some respects to the proliferation of erroneous texts that entrap unaware readers. The episodes of Despair in Book I of *The Faerie Queene* and Mammon in Book II demonstrate the limitations of reading texts literally and excerpting words and phrases out of context. Spenser, by contrast, affirms the humanist, pedagogical value of reading texts closely, carefully, and with sensitivity to context.

The Faerie Queene illustrates that the phenomenological process of learning to read a book, landscape, or architectural site through the intellect,

Cuneo, ed., *Animals and Early Modern Identity*; and McHugh et al., *The Palgrave Handbook of Animals and Literature*.

62 Campana, "Spenser's Inhumanity," 277.

63 See Cosman, "Spenser's Ark of Animals"; Marotti, "Animal Symbolism in *The Faerie Queene*"; Scanlon, "Spenser's Camel"; Watson, "Emblem and Experience"; Purdon, "Spenser's Camel Again"; Watson, "Forreine and Monstruous Beasts"; Williams, "Phantastes's Flies"; Loewenstein, "Gryll's Hoggish Mind"; Bellamy, "Spenser's 'Open'"; Henry, "'Strange Similes,' 'Hot and Bothered,' and 'Getting Spenser's Goat'"; and Barrett, "Cetaceous Sin and Dragon Death."

64 Henry, "'Strange Similes,'" iii.

senses, and affections is often experiential, dynamic, and grounded in close attention to ecological matter. Redcrosse, Guyon, and Britomart make their way through physical environments that include horses, dogs, birds, reptiles, insects, trees, plants, gold, and coal. In a proto-ecological manner in the Cave of Mammon the poet critiques the environmental degradation of pollution caused by mining, the burning of coal, and the printing of books. While touring the Castle of Alma with Arthur in Book II, Guyon finds a delightful, lengthy book about his faeryland ancestry but does not finish it. Some of Spenser's early readers responded similarly to the monumental *The Faerie Queene* by reading it piecemeal. In Book III Britomart reacts with the affection of wonder to the ambiguous signs she reads in the House of Busirane. Yet she continues to move forward to rescue imprisoned Amoret but remains unimpressed by Busirane's anti-feminist poetry.⁶⁵ Likewise, many early modern readers similarly responded to *The Faerie Queene* with amazement and bafflement. In the eyes of Spenser and his humanist contemporaries such as Sidney in *The Defense of Poesy* movement and affect are key features of pedagogical instruction.

Spenser's earliest readers Gabriel Harvey and Thomas Nashe appropriated the highly memorable name and figure of horse thief Braggadocchio in satirical contexts. In keeping with how Harvey read Livy, he most likely read Spenser morally and pragmatically with an eye toward the application of *The Faerie Queene* to Elizabethan politics.⁶⁶ His marginalia in a copy of the satirical jestbook *Till Eulenspiegel*, which he and Spenser shared, illustrates that they both enjoyed comic satire and the dialogic form of parody.⁶⁷ Harvey's use of a prodigious book wheel to navigate between large folios by multiple writers suggests that he annotated *The Faerie Queene* in close proximity to networks of texts by numerous other writers and read Spenser dialogically with many other works in mind.⁶⁸ Like Spenser in the episode of the Wandering Wood, Nashe expresses anxiety about the

65 I build upon Michael West's contention that "Artegall and Britomart" represent "two different kinds of extreme readers" by challenging his notion that "Artegall is instructed but not delighted; Britomart is delighted but not instructed": "Wonder, Artifacts, and the Human in *The Faerie Queene*," 385–86.

66 See Jardine and Grafton, "Studies for Action," 48, and *John Dee*, 65.

67 Hamilton, ed., *The Faerie Queene*, 181.

68 In "Studies for Action," 48, Jardine and Grafton argue that the book wheel "belongs to Harvey's cultural moment, in which collation and parallel citation were an essential, constructive part of a particular kind of reading." In *John Dee*, 71, Sherman says that "by reading with all other authorities in mind, and by entering them into the margins, the scholar provided a network of, and map to, an overgrowing body of knowledge." See also Moore Smith, *Gabriel Harvey's Marginalia* and Stern, *Gabriel Harvey*.

monstrous printing press and its Error-like vomit. In their notorious battle of quills Harvey and Nashe refer repeatedly to Braggadocchio, a base and vainglorious windbag who steals the aristocrat Guyon's horse. Nashe in *Pierce Penilesse his Supplication to the Divell* depicts stingy literary patrons, their lack of financial support for poets, and the London print industry as analogous to Mammon, who hoards gold, and his infernal, sooty lair defiled by environmental pollution. Harvey and Nashe use Braggadocchio to satirize socially mobile individuals and Mammon to satirize the decline of generous, aristocratic patrons in the face of the rising market economy of the printing press. *The Faerie Queene* in general and Braggadocchio in particular function as powerful things that move readers such as Nashe and Harvey to reimagine their literary and political environs through the making of satire.

In chapter 2 “Shakespeare’s Memories of Spenser’s Creations in the Elizabethan Playhouse: Animals, Places, and Powerful Things” I explore how Shakespeare appropriates figures and episodes in *The Faerie Queene* for comic, parodic, and satirical ends in *Richard III*, *1 Henry IV*, and *The Merchant of Venice*. Shakespeare’s recreation of animals, plants, and things found in *The Faerie Queene* in the space of the Elizabethan theater reveals that he attends carefully to the ecological and zoological features of Spenser’s poem. He uses words, phrases, and concepts he borrows from Spenser to satirize the monarchy, aristocrats, religious figures and institutions, and institutional racism in early modern England. Shakespeare appropriates Spenser’s common horse thief Braggadocchio to critique the braggadocious aristocrats Richard III, Hotspur, and Owen Glendower. Falstaff, a boastful thief and coward connected intertextually to Spenser’s Braggadocchio, satirizes the aristocrat and Puritan martyr Sir John Oldcastle. In keeping with Spenser’s Mammon episode, Shakespeare demonstrates the limitations and potential dangers of reading texts literally in *The Merchant of Venice*. As a result, he follows in the footsteps of Spenser by satirizing the manipulation of rhetoric by some early modern priests and preachers. Intertextual connections between Spenser and Shakespeare highlight the agency of the nonhuman object *The Faerie Queene* to move writers, readers, and audiences to perceive flaws in their political, religious, and racially-biased surroundings.

In chapter 3 “Jonson’s Spenser and the Political Act of Satire in Elizabethan, Jacobean, and Caroline England” I examine how Jonson continues Spenser’s humanist project of instructing audiences how to analyze texts such as *The Faerie Queene* closely and carefully. For Jonson reading is far from escapist

entertainment but a way of responding actively to the world.⁶⁹ Jonson, who read Spenser as inspiration for comedy, parody, and satire, appropriates his predecessor's long and shorter works in his plays, masques, poetry, and prose from 1599–1640. Spenser's works shape the style, figurative language, and satirical punch of Jonson's Elizabethan and Jacobean comedies. In *The Alchemist* Jonson appropriates Spenser's Gloriana, the Faerie Queene; the Wandering Wood in Book I; and Braggadocchio, Mammon, and the Castle of Alma in Book II of *The Faerie Queene* for revisionist, satirical ends. In his city comedy Jonson borrows these figures and episodes from *The Faerie Queene* to satirize the aristocracy, greed for wealth, hedonism, environmental pollution, social mobility, and the misuse of language. Jonson, who was an active reader and annotator of Spenser's long and shorter works, recreates stylistic and narrative features of them in conservative support of James I for his investing of money in the production of royal masques as entertainment. In *Timber, or Discoveries*, a prose collection of commonplaces inspired by Jonson's walk from London to Edinburgh, Scotland, and published posthumously in 1640, the act of walking serves as an analogy for Jonson's phenomenological experience of reading Spenser's ecologically rich works. He appropriates them over the course of his lifetime for his ideologically malleable purposes of political satire, revisionary or conservative. *The Faerie Queene* moved Jonson and a wide network of late-sixteenth- to mid-seventeenth writers to support the monarchy. Nevertheless, Spenser's indirect satirical voice inspired these same writers and many others to critique political and religious institutions as well.

Marvell, Sir Thomas Fairfax, and Milton illustrate the political malleability of *The Faerie Queene* among mid-seventeenth-century English readers and writers, most of whom had experienced the execution of Charles I and the rise of republicanism. In chapter 4, "Spenser's *Faerie Queene* in Republican and Royalist Networks: Marvell, Sir Thomas Fairfax, and Milton" I discuss how Marvell alludes to Spenser's long and shorter works in a context-sensitive fashion for veiled republican purposes. In *Upon Appleton House* he appropriates Spenser's *Faerie Queene* as a means for indirect satire of his patron Sir Thomas Fairfax for retiring to Nun Appleton from his post as Parliamentarian commander-on-chief in 1650 during the English Civil War. As a reader and writer, Marvell was attentive to the powerful network of organic and non-organic things throughout *The Faerie Queene* and imitates Spenser's satirical voice for his own aims of political and religious critique. In his Royalist 1660 "Coronation" poem for Charles II

69 Evans, *Habits of Mind*, 27.

Fairfax in turn uses the named horse Brigadore in Spenser's Braggadocchio episodes in Books II and V of *The Faerie Queene* to mock the rise and fall of the social climbing Parliamentarian Sir Oliver Cromwell. In *Areopagitica* anti-Royalist Milton advocates for freedom of the press by appropriating Spenser's episode of Guyon's travels through the Cave of Mammon on foot once Braggadocchio steals his horse in Book II of *The Faerie Queene*. He borrows the comic windbag Braggadocchio, the giant aristocrat Orgoglio, and the populist Giant with the Scales to satirize tyranny and intemperate crowds in *Paradise Lost* and the aristocracy sporting fine mounts in *Samson Agonistes*. The vital act of reading *The Faerie Queene* closely and carefully, as Shakespeare, Jonson, Marvell, and Milton did, resulted in transformations of the cultural imaginary for conservative, moderate, and radical ends in a complex, intertextual environment of Elizabethan, Jacobean, and Caroline writers from 1590–1660.

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