

is a device with which Dylan Thomas, for one, experimented. I readily accept, then, Smith's proposal for describing the end sounds of a *laisse* in the *Chanson*. In fact, I can find no fault with any of his suggestions—internal assonance in early rhymed poetry (Chrétien de Troyes, e.g.) or the term “subassonance” for Heine’s “brust” and “glut,” although the two *u*’s may be as close as the *a*’s of “Rollant” and “remaigne.”

While Smith’s letter introduces me to a scholar I should like to meet and hear more from, the second criticism, partly because of its tone perhaps, has helped me little. It does point to two slips that eluded me in the many versions and proofreadings of the article. Early forms of the essay did not omit the first *h* in OE “fæththe” nor did they insist on nine similar vowels in three lines of the *Faerie Queene* when there are eight. For those slips I can only beg indulgence. And it is quite true that in Shakespeare’s line “Ere we will eat our meal in fear, and sleep,” I blundered in marking four vowels (or diphthongs) since “eat,” at least, surely had [ɛ]. With the critic’s permission, we can substitute any one of many other examples from the same poet, among them Oberon’s two lines from *MND* (iv.i.88–89): “Come, my queen, take hands with me. / And rock the ground whereon these sleepers be.”

As for the other suggestions, comments, questions in the second letter, I shall take time to respond to only a few. First, my IPA symbols nowhere employed the colon to show length, as in [ɛ] versus [ɛ:], since the quantity of a vowel does not keep it from echoing with the same nearby vowel, as in “boat” [o] and “roll” [o:]. Second, in *Sir Gawain* and in Thomson I italicized the *r* following the vowel because the history of post-vocalic *r* teaches us, I think, that it performs wonders with the vowel it accompanies. No one perhaps can say exactly how the Pearl Poet pronounced his six *o*’s that are followed by *r*, even though we may agree that he almost surely pronounced them all approximately the same way, some perhaps longer than others. That point, I thought, could be made by italicizing the *r* also. And since the *o* of “honde” and “stronge” in the second line is not followed by *r*, I neglected it on purpose, even as I agree, of course, that they provide an example of assonance. I cannot be sure, however, that those two *o*’s have the same quality as the six, which, if one wishes, almost surely vary in length. I can agree that the *o* of the *or*’s might have been open [ɔ] even as I suggest that the *r* may not—as today with many speakers—have been pronounced at all. Could “boar” have been [bɔə]? Could “before” have been [blfɔə]? And I can agree also that before the second Lucretius quotation the statement should better read, “. . . assonance of [o] and [ɔ].” Third, my “failure” to note the echo of Spenser’s “fayre” and “fairest” was calculated since

that echo involves a kind of word repetition popular in the Elizabethan period: one has enough good examples of assonance to discuss without calling on word repetitions and rhymes. Fourth, the vowel (or diphthong?) of Shakespeare’s “east” was surely something like [ɛ]—one can add the colon if one wishes—since it rhymes with “detest,” “rest,” and “West,” just as “beast” and “feast” had [ɛ] of whatever length; but can one be sure that “seals” had the same phoneme since *ea* was at the time pronounced in so many different ways and was undergoing such change? Kökeritz spends more time on this vowel (these vowels?) than he does on any other in Shakespeare, pp. 194–209, esp. p. 201. Shakespeare perhaps used [i], or a diphthong close to it, in many *ea* words—*leaving-greeving*; *please-disease-knees*; *speak-cheek*; *teach-beseech*, etc. Fifth, perhaps I should have avoided controversy by omitting “sibyllic splendor,” but it is not just my Southern friends who often make no noticeable distinction between [I] and [ɛ] in *en* words; for example, in “It makes no sense” the last word, as many authorities (Kenyon and Knott, e.g.) agree, is—and not just with vulgar speakers—often pronounced [sɪns]. Finally, nowhere did I say, or imply, that ME poetry was, on the whole, more appealing to the ear than OE poetry.

What much of all this may point to is (1) that a great deal of work may yet be done with assonance, say by specialists better equipped than I, Smith being one; and (2) if that work is done, it will be difficult and controversial work: vowels of the past are troublesome, even more troublesome perhaps than those of today. But meanwhile if one wishes to find fault with fools who rush in, he can perhaps do even better with an article I wrote on Chaucer’s assonance for *JEGP* of October 1972. A great many scholars and poets have written to me privately, one of the best pointing out another fault in the *PMLA* essay, my neglect of the nineteenth-century poets, another calculated, as well as lamentable, neglect.

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“Spenser’s Wanton Maidens”

To the Editor:

In her essay about “Spenser’s Wanton Maidens” (*PMLA*, 88, 1973, 62–68), Arlene Okerlund places Spenser in the position of an accomplished pornographer, himself unmoved by the subject of his “art,” who deliberately arouses us in order, subsequently, to show us up as a pack of libidinous wolves. According to Okerlund, “the reader” is easily seduced by Spenser’s wanton maidens. Then, properly chagrined at his own preference for the “intemperate life” (p. 67), the reader is forced into “an embarrassing confronta-

tion with his . . . basic concupiscence" (p. 68). But if all we gain from reading Spenser's poem is a recognition of our "intemperate desires" (p. 64), why should we waste time with it? Given our modern understanding of biology and psychology, we hardly need turn to the *Faerie Queene* in order to recognize our perfectly normal "susceptibility to lust" (p. 66).

I think that Okerlund oversimplifies Spenser's poem and our responses to it. For surely, even as he reminds us that the slavishly sensual life is beastly (Grille forever remains a pig), Spenser also reminds us that the narrowly "temperate" man may himself become a self-righteous prig. Obviously, in the Renaissance, too many drinks from Circe's cup of self-indulgence could turn men into beasts, just as they can today. But then as now, certain forms of self-denial could turn men into stone:

[The *Archstoicke Seneca*] in no wyse will a wyseman should haue any manner affection in hym. But when hee taketh that away . . . hee dooth naught else than fourme a stone Image of a man without feeling, or any manner inclination perteyning to a man in deede. (Erasmus, *Praise of Follie*, trans. Thomas Chaloner, 1577, E 2')

Spenser himself was surely capable of seeing that certain forms of "rigour pittillesse" may be as dehumanizing as some forms of slothful sensuality. Certainly he makes it clear that a puritanical insistence on temperance-in-all-things is essentially at enmity with those forms of beauty, art, and sensuality that necessarily involve "a fine excess":

But all those pleasant bowres and Pallace brave,
Guyon broke downe, with rigour pittillesse;
Ne ought their goodly workmanship might save
Them from the tempest of his wrathfulnesse
(II.xii.83)

Beauty, poetry, and sensuality may lead us into dangerous excesses; but puritanical assaults on them may lead to equally deplorable excesses—one thinks of Savonarola.

Of course Guyon is Spenser's hero, not his villain; and Medina and the Palmer should be allowed to score their series of unanswerably valid moral points. But Spenser himself has blessed Acrasia's bower with the equally unanswerable arguments of beauty and truth to human experience. For regardless of what "ought to be" true, Spenser is primarily concerned with what really is true. Okerlund concludes that "although the wanton maidens are indeed 'desirous,' they *ought not to be*," and the "irony lies in the fact that this type of life *ought not to be* lovely . . . to mankind" (p. 67—emphasis mine). Nevertheless (as Okerlund admits), those maidens remain "desirous." And it is in his magnificent descriptions of Acrasia's bower that Spenser himself achieves the union of

imagination with nature that (in Constable's words) is "the whole object and difficulty" of art:

Upon a bed of Roses she was layd,
As faint through heat, or dight to pleasant sin,
And was arayd, or rather disarayd,
All in a vele of silke and silver thin,
That hid no whit her alabaster skin,
But rather shewd more white, if more might bee
.
And her faire eyes sweet smyling in delight,
Moystened their fierie beames, with which she thrild
Fraile harts, yet quenched not; like starry light
Which sparkling on the silent waves, does seeme
more bright.

(II.xii.77, 78)

"Oh, rare for Antony!" said Agrippa when Enobarbus described Cleopatra's appearance on the river Cydnus. And "How rare for Verdant!" is our natural response to Spenser's description of Acrasia and her bower. Certainly one wonders whether Verdant himself would consider Guyon's "counsell sage" a fair substitute for Acrasia. The situations of Grille and Verdant bring to mind the Englishman in *Out of Africa* who was described in La Belle Otéro's memoirs as a young man who had squandered his fortune on her, but who had received "full value" for it. To the obvious question, "And did you have full value?" the old man, after pausing for a moment, answered, "Yes." "Yes I had."

Dorothy Parker's "Partial Comfort" provides yet another gloss on Spenser's confrontation between the mutually exclusive alternatives afforded us by the primrose path of passion and the straight and narrow via media:

Whose love is given over well
Shall gaze on Helen's face in Hell;
Whilst they whose love is thin and wise
May view John Knox in Paradise.

Writing about the Bower of Bliss, Spenser sets some powerful esthetic and sensual values against equally powerful moral values, and thus creates a deadlock. "Safe upon the solid rock the ugly houses stand: / Come and see my shining palace built upon the sand," wrote Edna St. Vincent Millay; and Okerlund admits that "after we have yawned our way through the stanzas in which we meet Diet and Concoction and Digestion" we would choose "to spend our vacations in the Bower of Bliss" (p. 63). She concludes, however, that if Acrasia's Bower causes the allegory of Medina to pale into dullness, "the reader's response to the poetry" reveals his failure to achieve "the temperate life" (p. 68). Surely one might preferably conclude that "the reader's response" reflects Spenser's accurate presentation of the advantages and disadvantages involved in leading the temperate life, just as it re-

flects Spenser's powerful presentation of the advantages and disadvantages involved in leading the sensual life.

Thus, there is no need for us to swallow a dose of instruction about our "basic concupiscence" that we may neither need nor want to swallow. Guyon, Acrasia, Medina and those "wanton maidens" are more than "teaching devices" that point "a finger of accusation" at readers who succumb to "carnal lust" (p. 65). They point toward Circe and toward Savonarola; they point in the direction of Shakespeare's wanton but glorious Cleopatra and in the direction of the virtuous but dull Octavia; they point toward Comus and toward Milton's Lady; they point upward in the direction of idealism, and they point downward in the direction of biology; they point outward in the direction of poetry, music, and magic, and they point straight ahead in the direction of ordinary experience. We shall never be done discussing them.

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Mrs. Okerlund replies:

Professor Hawkins and I differ not so much in our response to Spenser's poetry (and not at all in our love of the Bower of Bliss) as we do in our views about the implications of that response. If anything, she confirms my interpretation of what we mortals prefer: Hell with Helen rather than Heaven with John Knox. She would guard, however, against rejecting earthly and esthetic pleasures at the risk of becoming "stone-like" self-righteous prigs. At issue is the definition of temperance. And I suspect that a definition Hawkins and I would find congenial in 1973 might differ significantly from Spenser's in 1589. To redefine Spenser's concept of temperance would be to summarize the entirety of Book II and to repeat many of the points of my original article. Suffice it here to say that the positive ideal Spenser approves finds Medina, Alma, and Guyon to be the representatives, *not* Mordant, Verdant, Acrasia, and Grille.

To argue that such a view is wrong and that Dorothy Parker, Edna St. Vincent Millay, *ad infinitum* are right is beside the point and has nothing at all to do with our reading of the *Faerie Queene*. If the Devil is our hero, we need to distinguish between our own ideals and those of Milton, Spenser, or whomever. We, like Faustus, may proclaim, "And this be Hell, I'll willingly be damned," but we may not, thereby, ignore the ending of the play. Though Shakespeare's Cleopatra is indeed magnificent, we must not overlook the fact that such magnificence caused Antony a few problems. Of course we can declare our preference for Cleopatra, Acrasia, art, nature, excess or anything

else, but other than to point out a set of values that differ from the poet's or a change in historical attitudes, our own preferences are quite irrelevant. Certainly Hawkins is correct in stating that Spenser achieves a magnificent "union of imagination with nature" in the Bower of Bliss. That may be her ideal and it may be mine. But Spenser would surely have found a higher ideal to be a magnificent union of imagination with spirit. We can proclaim "How rare for Verdant" only if we ignore Mordant, Amavia, and that blood-stained orphan created by their self-indulgences. Against such a vision Dorothy Parker and Edna St. Vincent Millay become rather unconvincing advocates.

Further, Hawkins is inconsistent in claiming that Guyon is the hero of Book II and then rejecting his final act in destroying the Bower. We cannot have it both ways. If she finds such actions leading to the excesses of Savonarola, therein lies the difference between her definition of temperance and Spenser's. She and I may find the destruction of such beauty to be rather unfortunate, but in Spenser's view it is essential in bringing Acrasia to terms. The Palmer, after all, does have the last word in "The Legend of Temperance."

If I were to rewrite this article today, I would place even more emphasis on the differences between Guyon and the reader in Canto XII. Until the Bower, we have counted ourselves equal to the hero knight in waging the battle against intemperance. Indeed, in the early cantos we even feel a bit superior when we see Guyon transgressing against the virtue with his rash attack against Red Cross Knight and his foolish pity for Furor and Occasion. That is why the Bower is such a shock to our conception of our own spiritual achievement, for our reactions to the wanton maidens clearly point out our earthly roots while they emphasize Guyon's heavenly ones. To invoke Savonarola when we feel ourselves responding to the maidens' appeal is merely a beautiful exercise in rationalization.

A final comment about Hawkins' first objection: "If all we gain from reading Spenser's poem is a recognition of our 'intemperate desires,' why should we waste time with it?" My apologies if I intimated that such knowledge is "all" we gain from Canto XII. I never intended a seven-page article to be a comprehensive discussion of the Bower of Bliss and its created images. No one could agree more emphatically than I with Hawkins' final sentence: "We shall never be done discussing them." But I do believe that an experienced knowledge of our intemperate desires is one achievement of this episode. And I am not nearly so contemptuous of that "instruction" as my colleague from Vassar: self-knowledge is not necessarily a bad thing. Moreover, I am somewhat less sanguine than she that "our modern understanding of biology and psy-