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BETWEEN COURTESY AND CONSTANCY:
THE FAERIE QUEENE, BOOKS 6 AND 7

BY ALEX DAVIS

Toward the end of book 6 of Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, Calidore, the knight of courtesy, finds himself in a community of shepherds. There he falls in love with the beautiful Pastorella and begins to think about abandoning his quest for the Blatant Beast. In conversation with Pastorella's father, the aged Meliboe, Calidore denounces "Lordship and ambition," praises the rural lifestyle, and wishes that "th'heavens so much had graced mee, / As graunt me liue in like condition."¹ Meliboe is unimpressed by these wistful yearnings for a simpler existence. "Fittest is," he declares, "that all contented rest / With that they hold" (6.9.29.8–9):

It is the mynd, that maketh good or ill,
That maketh wretch or happie, rich or poore:
For some, that hath abundance at his will,
Hath not enough, but wants in greatest store;
And other, that hath little, askes no more,
But in that little is both rich and wise.
For wisdom is most riches; fooles therefore
They are, which fortunes doe by vowes deuize,
Sith each vnto himself his life may fortunize.
(6.9.30.1–9)

Fortune cannot touch the wise. Who seeks to alter his circumstances? Only a fool. Meliboe speaks generally, but the implication is stingingly personal.

Meliboe praises the "minds vnmoued quiet" (6.9.22.7). Later, Pastorella is said to display a "constant mynd" in adversity (6.11.5.2). This essay argues that Meliboe might be understood as a representative of the principle of constancy, and that his debate with Calidore might therefore offer an inset model of the relationship between book 6 of *The Faerie Queene* and book 7 as a projected "LEGEND OF *Constancie*" (7.6.title). That seventh book is lost or unwritten, barring the fragmentary *Two Cantos of Mutabilitie* printed in 1609, whose relation to the rest of the poem is uncertain. In what follows, I exploit the presence of Meliboe in book 6 and the associations of constancy in

late sixteenth-century England to argue for a buried logic in Spenser's move from courtesy towards a completed seventh book of constancy. In this passage between virtue and virtue, Meliboe performs a key structural function. He opens to view deficiencies inherent in the courteous disposition, as with his rebuke to the wavering Calidore. At the same time, he stands as a profoundly compromised exemplar of the virtue to come. Meliboe, I argue, represents constancy in its Stoic or Neostoic mode, which Spenser subjects to probing scrutiny. The dialogue of book 6, canto 9 homes in upon the articulation of the Stoic worldview through a language of property with which it is logically incompatible. Meliboe affects stern indifference to external circumstances, "rich or poore." Yet his role in the dialogue is that of a celebrant of the satisfactions of rural life, in comparison to those offered by the court. The suggestion is that Meliboe's insistence upon the unassailable autonomy of the constant mind is not to be taken at face value. Throughout this episode, Stoic subjectivity is presented as a psychic structure of striking rigidity, shot through with barely-concealed anxieties concerning dispossession and loss.

Spenser's poem thus moves towards a projected book 7 by staging a collapse of values. Neither constancy nor courtesy emerges from the encounter between Calidore and Meliboe unscathed. This double logic of negation goes some way towards explaining why the project of *The Mutabilitie Cantos* should be (as Linda Gregerson has recently emphasized) to set constancy into motion and to come to a reckoning with its apparent opposite, Mutabilitie, rather than simply rejecting her.² Picking up on the discourse of property and possession first highlighted in the pastoral dialogue, *The Mutabilitie Cantos* understand constancy as, at root, a question of inheritance, framed within a structure of returns to earlier forms of existence. The *Cantos* sift their past in search of the transformative formulation buried in the poem's history that can dismantle false forms of constancy and unlock a form of the virtue capable of accommodating temporality and change.

As Judith H. Anderson has shown, Meliboe's speech is a tissue of commonplaces, maxims so widely circulated in medieval and early modern culture as to have become virtually anonymous.³ Yet the 1590s were a period when many of these thoughts had acquired a new, contemporary urgency and were being marketed as a recognizable body of doctrine. Meliboe speaks in the accents of late sixteenth-century

Neostoicism. Throughout this period, a host of publications reprinted Stoic writers such as Seneca, commented on their writing, and offered their own reworkings of Stoic thought in the light of Christian theology and contemporary political circumstances. Meliboe's fundamental conceptual opposition between the self and a hostile external environment is characteristic of this body of work, as is the notion that the constant mind might, through inner discipline, render itself indifferent to worldly strife. Seneca's second epistle comments (in Thomas Lodge's translation) that "the desire of transporting thy selfe from one place vnto another . . . is but the tossing of a sicke minde." "In my iudgement," it continues, "the chiefest testimonie of a well composed minde, is to be able to consist and dwell with her selfe."⁴ Meliboe's first thought quoted above follows Seneca's *De vita beata* particularly closely. "We cal him a blessed man," Seneca writes, "who esteemeth nothing eyther good or euil, except a mind eyther good or euill." The wise man "contenteth himself which hee possesseth, neyther desireth any more than hee hath at home."⁵

The period during which Spenser composed and revised *The Faerie Queene* was one in which these thoughts came to seem of vital relevance to English readers. Justus Lipsius's treatise *De constantia* was printed in London in 1586, only two years after its first publication in Leiden. It was reprinted in 1592 and translated into English by John Stradling in 1594 under the title *Two bookes of constancie*; the translation was quickly reissued in 1595 and again in 1596. Lipsius's letters were printed in London in 1586, 1590, and 1593. His *Politicorum* was printed in 1590, and translated in 1594. In 1596, Thomas Nashe mocked Richard Harvey's desire to be celebrated as "another" (not, note, "an") "English Lipsius": a sure sign of Neostoicism's modishness.⁶ Other publications from this period testify to English interest in Stoic and Neostoic thought. Guillaume du Vair's study of *The moral philosophie of the Stoicks* was translated in 1598, and his 1589 treatise *De la constance et consolation* in 1622 was translated as *A Buckler Against Adversitie* and subtitled *A Treatise of Constancie*. Spenser himself has minor biographical connections to two key figures in this English Neostoic moment. He wrote a dedicatory sonnet to the courtesy book *Nennio*, translated by William Jones, who Englished Lipsius's *Politicorum*.⁷ Meanwhile, John Stradling, the translator of the *De constantia*, composed a Latin epitaph for Spenser, "concerning some manuscript copies of his, burned by the Irish outlaws in the Irish rebellion"—the first reference, in fact, to the possible existence of lost Spenserian papers.⁸ (Lodge's translation of Seneca's complete

philosophical *Workes* appeared in 1614, long after Spenser's death. Both men, however, attended the Merchant Taylors' School in London during the headship of Richard Mulcaster.)

As philosophy, Neostoicism was largely conventional. Few of Lipsius's recommendations differ sharply from anything we might find in a text such as Geoffrey Chaucer's *Boece* (an earlier conduit for Stoic thought, and itself an influence on Spenser: this translation of Boethius appears in early modern editions of Chaucer). The achievement of Lipsius was instead to demonstrate the contemporary relevance of old thoughts. His *De constantia* explicitly frames its philosophical discussion in the context of civil war in the Netherlands. The text is a dialogue between Lipsius and his friend Carolus Langius, at the start of which Lipsius bewails the state of his native country. "Wee are tossed," he cries, "these manie yeares with the tempest of ciuill warres: and like Sea-faring men are wee beaten with sundrie blastes of troubles and sedition."⁹ Similarly, Du Vair's *Traité de la constance et consolation ès calamités* is set during the siege of Paris in 1589. The image of disaster at sea recurs when the narrator describes himself caught within "this boysterous storme of worse than Ciuill Warres . . . at the Eue of a great shipwracke."¹⁰ Neostoicism purported to offer a lifeline to early modern subjects overwhelmed by the turbulent waters of confessional warfare, internecine violence, incessant change and uncertainty.¹¹

When, ten years after Spenser's death, Matthew Lownes issued his 1609 edition of *The Faerie Queene*, he suggested that the "Two Cantos of Mutabilitie," printed for the very first time, "both for Forme and Matter, appeare to be parcell of some following Booke of the *FAERIE QVEENE, VNDER THE LEGEND OF Constancie*" (7.6.title). There is no way, I suggest, that such a volume could have had nothing whatsoever to do with the various other books of constancy appearing in London booksellers throughout this period, even if its aim was to reject or fundamentally modify their terms of reference. It is true that the status of *The Mutabilitie Cantos* has been the subject of extensive scholarly debate. Northrop Frye, for instance, forcefully argued that they are not a fragment but instead "constitute a single, beautifully shaped poem that could not have had a more logical beginning, development, and end."¹² The case for a continuation is indeed not absolutely watertight. Various arguments have been made: Lownes's use of the word "appeare" and his qualifier "some following Booke" (emphasis added) might be thought to imply a trace of uncertainty about his claims for the *Mutabilitie Cantos*; a knight of Constancy never appears in them; and the *Cantos* are more substantial than any comparable allegorical

inset, such as the account of the Garden of Adonis in book 3. Yet the format of the poem is congruent with the existing parts of *The Faerie Queene*; the four-line ballad stanzas introducing each canto, for instance, seem unlikely to belong to other composition. Beyond that, though, arguments against the idea of a projected “LEGEND OF *Constancy*” tend to invoke aesthetic criteria that are fully implicated in the action of the poem itself, and in book 6 and *The Mutabilitie Cantos* in particular. Boundedness, shapeliness, a desire for fixity and completion: Frye’s terms are precisely those put into question in Spenser’s narrative. Arguments against *The Mutability Cantos* as the “parcel” of a seventh book of the poem on the grounds that (for example) no previous allegorical episode is so sustained treat *The Faerie Queene* as a mere template, possessed of a machinic regularity. They banish from the poem precisely that possibility for alteration and change that *The Mutabilitie Cantos* aim to explore.

I proceed, therefore, on the assumption that the plan for a seventh book of *The Faerie Queene*, whether incomplete or lost, has to be viewed as a fully viable possibility. And if Calidore represents the virtue of courtesy, while Meliboe speaks in the accents of a fashionable late-sixteenth-century Neostoicism, then their debate plausibly models the relationship between book 6 of *The Faerie Queene* and its successor volume. It allows us to begin to think through what might be involved in any transition from courtesy to constancy. Spenser often has his principals interact in this way. When Redcrosse fights Guyon (see 2.1.26–30), or Guyon Britomart (see 3.1.4–12), these encounters tell us something about the internal articulation of his poem: that Holiness endorses the efforts of Temperance, for instance, or that Chastity outweighs it. As the poem progresses, these moments are increasingly anticipatory. Artegall’s emergence as a central character is trailed throughout books 3 and 4, whilst the Blatant Beast, the key antagonist of book 6, makes its first appearance at the end of the preceding volume. So too, I argue, with the dialogue between Calidore and Meliboe. A number of scholars have raised the possibility that a completed book 7 would have been meant to engage with Lipsian constancy. At the same time, it has proven hard to do much with this idea. The most detailed account of *The Mutabilitie Cantos* in the light of Neostoic thinking to date, by Christopher Burlinson, finds as many differences as it does points of contact. (For example: “Senecan constancy is no metaphysical or cosmic principle of unchangingness [as in Spenser, it is argued], but a response, a reasoning response to the vicissitudes of the world.”)¹³ Attending to the appearance of Meliboe

in book 6 can, I argue, clarify this pattern of partial engagement. It shows the movement towards a “LEGEND OF *Constancie*” being prepared for through a detailed but often unsympathetic scrutiny of constancy in its Neostoic aspect.

The connection between book 6 and *The Mutabilitie Cantos* is situational as well as thematic. In the pastoral dialogue, Calidore functions as a kind of reverse Mutabilitie, wishing not to aspire but rather “that my fortunes might transposed bee / From pitch of higher place, vnto this low degree” (6.9.28.8–9). In each case, the desire for a change in status is rebuffed by a voice of constancy.¹⁴ Famously, book 6, canto 9 represents a moment when something seems to have gone wrong with the virtue of courtesy. Calidore abandons his quest for the Blatant Beast; he seeks to downsize his lifestyle; he chases after a shepherdess. Courtesy, here, reaches its crisis point. Yet the voice of the “vnmoved,” constant rigor that resists Calidore’s truancy is not therefore positioned as the simple alternative to a discredited virtue (6.9.22.7). Rather, it is the interaction between these two positions, each questionable in its own way, that seems to be moving the poem in a new direction.

The dialogue between Calidore and Meliboe is framed from the outset in terms of the former’s ulterior motives. Calidore has just laid eyes upon Meliboe’s adoptive daughter. He has already been welcomed into Meliboe’s house. His aim is to secure an invitation to join the pastoral community on a more permanent basis so that he can court Pastorella, and his discourse is therefore flagged as highly strategic throughout. At the start of the episode, we read that

[D]rawing thence his speach another way
[Calidore] Gan highly commend the happie life,
Which Shepheards lead[.]
(6.9.18.7–9)

Later, Calidore is said to “insinuate” his desires (6.9.27.2). Is this courtesy, we might wonder? Part of the interest of the dialogue, however, lies in trying to determine whether Meliboe is not an equally deliberate and calculating speaker. Notably, the *topos* that structures the dialogue—that of the desirability of pastoral retirement—is in a sense irrelevant to both participants, since for Calidore it functions as a mere pretext, whilst Meliboe ends up claiming that it is the mind alone that

determines happiness, not riches or (logically) location. This, then, is a dialogue without debate; or it might seem to be that. Throughout, the episode's energies are focused elsewhere, beneath the surface of the conversation. Indirection is its governing principle.

Calidore praises the life of a shepherd. Here, he says, one leads

[A] life so free and fortunate,
 From all the tempests of these worldly seas,
 Which tosse the rest in daungerous disease[.]

that favorite image of Stoic and Neostoic writers (6.9.19.3–5).¹⁵ Meliboe agrees. “Great ones” (6.9.22.2) may be seduced by “the worlds gay shows” (6.9.22.1). In the country, however, care can never trouble “my minds vnmoued quiet” (6.9.22.7). Meliboe tells Calidore how he once served at the royal court, only to realize after ten years that he had spent his youth in vain. He returned to being a shepherd, and he now enjoys a life of leisure. This entirely conventional narrative leaves Calidore lost in “rauishment” (6.9.26.4)—at Meliboe’s wisdom, but also at his daughter’s beauty, described as the object of the knight’s “hungry eye” (6.9.26.7). And so Calidore expresses his desire to be “transposed” into the “low degree” of a shepherd. This prompts Meliboe’s declaration that each should rest content with what he has, his assertion that the unmoved mind may dictate its own fortunes, and the conclusion that “fittest is, that all contented rest / With that they hold”—a barely-concealed rebuke, in response to which Calidore just blandly restates the proposal that he should join the pastoral community:

Since then in each mans self (said *Calidore*)
 It is, to fashion his owne lyfes estate,
 Give me leaue awihyle, good father, in this shore
 To rest my barcke[.]

(6.9.31.1–4)

There is a finely calibrated interpersonal comedy in these exchanges. Calidore and Meliboe converse in subtly different modes: the one smoothly ingratiating; the other at first luxuriating and expansive (when describing the pastoral lifestyle), then clipped, aphoristic (when it becomes clear that Calidore may be more than just a passing visitor).¹⁶ But there is also a sense in which they don’t converse at all. Their discourse is threaded through with non-sequiturs and failures of engagement. Calidore, for instance, gives little sign of having deeply understood his host. He presently offers to pay Meliboe for his accommodation, a proposal that is scornfully rejected, and his interactions

with Meliboe seem largely superficial. When Calidore responds to Meliboe's argument that "each vnto himself his life may fortunize," he simply uses it as a jumping-off point from which to restate his earlier position. Meliboe, meanwhile, is equally evasive in his way. At 9.28, Calidore wishes that his fortunes might be "transposed." This is not an explicit plea to be received into the pastoral community, but it is surely as good as one. To which, Meliboe declares:

In vaine [. . .] doe men
The heauens of their fortunes fault accuse,
Sith they know best, what is the best for them.
(6.9.29.1-3)

It is not an outright rebuff. Meliboe never straightforwardly tells Calidore that he thinks his plan inappropriate, if that is what he does think. His habit of communicating through sententious set pieces means he can sidestep any direct acknowledgment of his guest's desires. And so Calidore is obliged to ask for "leuve . . . To rest" with the shepherds: the open request that he seemed to have tried to avoid making previously (6.9.31.3-4). At such moments, the dialogue shades away from mutual incomprehension towards a kind of veiled confrontation. And were we tempted to see this dialogue as a too-simplistically conceived contest between smooth-talking Courtesy and rude but principled Constancy, we might reflect that Calidore displays his own intransigence here. There is a version of the conversation in which Calidore plays the role of the unwelcome houseguest, and Meliboe the host too polite to say no. Calidore's offer of money has generally been viewed as inept, but it aims to address precisely this reading of the situation.

At the conclusion of the dialogue, Meliboe welcomes Calidore to the community of poor shepherds. Characteristically, though, what he offers is not quite a welcome, or at least not an explicit one. Meliboe never actually gives the knight permission to stay. He simply refuses Calidore's money, and says:

[I]f ye algates couet to assay
This simple sort of life, that shepherds lead,
Be it your owne: our rudenesse to your selfe ahead.
(6.9.33.7-9)

That is, very roughly: "go ahead—I can't stop you." "[R]udenesse" here means "uncouthness," the pastoral lifestyle as opposed to the chivalric and courtly one. Yet elsewhere in book 6, Spenser's use of the word shades towards its modern meaning. At the start of canto

2, we read that the courteous knight or lady behaves in such a way “that none them rightly may reprove / Of rudenesse, for not yeelding what they owe” (6.2.1.7–8). Perhaps we might wonder just who is displaying “rudenesse” in the pastoral dialogue, Calidore or Meliboe. Calidore gets his way, and Meliboe has his say, but nothing is resolved here. These exchanges are finely poised on the uncertain borderland dividing the hospitable from the hostile.

It seems appropriate that what truly is at issue in this discussion should be Calidore’s problematic status as guest, and that Meliboe should in effect end up disavowing his role as host. In order to further draw out what might be at stake in the encounter between courtesy and constancy, I would like to turn to Gordon Teskey’s account of the former virtue, which describes it precisely as a kind of hospitable openness to difference. In Spenser, ideas are allegorically embodied as persons. “Thinking,” Teskey therefore argues, “is to be understood as an encounter . . . one moves into the presence of the unknown as if the unknown were not an object but rather another subject, a stranger”:

On this scene, accordingly, the metaphorical model for thought is no longer the grasping of a thing but the exercising of courtesy. Such courtesy does not take possession, nor does it invade the object to discover what it is in essence, so that a definition, an imposing of limits, can be formed. Courtesy invites a partial disclosure and opens itself in turn to attention from the other, showing a welcoming openness to the strange . . . it moves into nearness with the otherness of the stranger.¹⁷

For Teskey, as for the sixteenth-century nonconformist Robert Browne, “courtesie or ciuilitie is an humbling or abasing of our selues.”¹⁸ This sociable openness is fundamental to the way Spenser’s poem works: the thinking performed by *The Faerie Queene* is, in Teskey’s account, fluid, mobile, and endlessly self-correcting.

As a description of book 6 of *The Faerie Queene*, this might seem partial. Teskey’s argument develops solely out of an analysis of the Proem, and subsequent cantos seem less to illustrate the virtue of courtesy than to show it running awry. One can certainly see the logic. Throughout book 6, a high value is placed upon hospitality. Closed doors are burst open (see 6.1.22). Functionaries who turn away potential guests are mercilessly punished. Crudor’s porter is slain (see 6.1.23), as is Turpine’s rude groom (see 6.6.20–23). Yet as the narrative moves towards its conclusion, this ethic of openness seems on the point of turning itself inside out. When the hermit counsels Serena and Calepine always to talk in “open sight,” the advice is to remain above suspicion,

not to cultivate their generosity of spirit (6.6.14.8). By the end of the book, it is guileless Coridon who puts himself forward “openly” (6.9.43.5). Calidore, by way of contrast, is shown to be disingenuous in his dealings with Meliboe. Openness persists, therefore, but only in diminished form: only to the extent that the poem shows what its protagonist takes care to hide.

It is perhaps not surprising. Teskey’s account of courtesy commits that virtue to a state of perpetual disruption. In its stance of hospitable openness to change through encounter, Teskey’s courtesy is thought that (to quote Theodor Adorno) “takes as its most pressing business everything it cannot reach.”¹⁹ Courtesy is strenuous work, and its breakdown may be entirely comprehensible. Still, the essential perspicacity of Teskey’s account is suggested when we reflect that the ways in which courtesy goes wrong in book 6 seem to involve either an excess in, or a deficit of, the central dynamic he identifies. In one sense we have the suggestion that courtesy may be excessively labile and accommodating: simply too open—too environmental—to serve as an adequate ground of virtue. Calidore lies without hesitation to Priscilla’s father in order to smooth over an awkward moment; Arthur initially spares the incorrigible Turpin; both Timias and Serena seem strangely vulnerable to the attacks of the Blatant Beast. Many of the book’s antagonists seem like aspects of the virtue it notionally celebrates. Vacuous Blandina entertains Arthur with “courteous glee” whilst the Blatant Beast represents less the denial of the values of a communal order than an alternative modality of their expression (slander, backbiting, and malice) (6.6.41.4). The introduction of the Savage Man seems to hint that courtesy is lacking in some necessary element of rigor or directness. At the same time, though, we increasingly encounter versions of courtesy that seem tougher than they really ought to be, more calculating and instrumental. Calidore’s pastoral truancy is key here. His pursuit of Pastorella, his treatment of Meliboe and Coridon: each in turn hints at a hidden meanness at work within the acts of the knight of courtesy.²⁰

Excessive accommodation on the one hand, veiled exploitation on the other: both are distortions of courtesy’s status as the hospitable virtue. Meliboe enters the scene as if conjured up by this impending disintegration of the ideal. For if courtesy represents an ethic of openness, constancy is preeminently one of fixity and closure. Meliboe’s function thus seems to be less to check courtesy’s movement towards failure than to test out an alternative model of subjectivity. And yet, at the very moment of its introduction into the poem, constancy too begins to come undone.

De Constantia. Two Bookes of Constance. The moral philosophie of the Stoicks. A Treatise of Constance. Were one to open such a volume in 1590s London, one would immediately encounter thoughts resembling those voiced by Meliboe. One would also encounter a worldview sharply at odds with everything implied by Teskey's account of courtesy. Constancy, in its Neostoic variant at least, is the very antithesis of a hospitable virtue.

In its origins, Stoic philosophy emphasized the importance of accommodating oneself to a rational cosmic order. It argued that one single *pneuma* animated and unified the entire cosmos, producing a fluid system of mutual interconnection or *sumpatheia*.²¹ Such teaching seems fully compatible with the radical openness that Teskey describes.²² As a system of practical ethics, however, Stoicism and Neostoicism promoted something very different. "A wise man," Seneca writes, "can loose nothing: hee hath all his good inclosed in himselfe; hee no wayes putteth confidence in fortune; hee entirely possesseth his riches, contenting himselfe with vertue, which hath no neede of accidentall things, and therefore may neither increase nor decrease."²³ Self-enclosure, absolute possession, defense against loss: Stoic psychology represents a systematically thought through disavowal of everything implied by Stoic physics and metaphysics.

One peculiarity of Stoic and Neostoic thinking is its combined emphasis upon a benign and rational cosmic order, alongside the advocacy of a psychic stance designed to fortify the self against the seemingly omnipresent threat of random disaster. The latter, it is acknowledged, cannot be avoided. However, one can control the controllables; and control is achieved through a constant effort directed towards the reduction of internal tension and the eradication of passionate commitment. For Lipsius, constancy is defined as "*right and immouable strength of the minde, neither lifted vp, nor pressed downe with externall or casuall accidents.*"²⁴ The ideal is one of dispassionate moderation and boundedness, the "immouable" self as its own sole motive force. That thing not in one's power? Du Vair recommends that one should say of it, "This thing toucheth not me at all, it concerns not me."²⁵ To the constant mind, externalities are irrelevances. In a telling formulation that crops up in a number of Stoic texts, they are described as "foreign." Seneca's epistle 41 wonders "what is more foolish then to praise that in a man which is forraine [*aliena*] to him?"²⁶ In Chaucer's translation of the Stoic-influenced Boethius, the "suffisaunce" that the wise man aspires towards is defined

as meaning never to be “nedy of foreyne help.”²⁷ Strikingly, even in matters of logic the text favors reasoning that is “homliche knowen,” or analytically produced, over “reasons ytaken fro withouten.”²⁸

Within and without; that which is mine and that which is not. Stoicism is a discourse of property and possession, one that takes the self as its primary object. The implications of this stance are contradictory. Even as Stoic writing advises the wise man to cultivate indifference to worldly goods, the language of ownership resurfaces in its descriptions of the constant subject. Grounded in a constant virtue, Seneca’s wise man “entirely possesseth his riches”; therefore he can lose nothing. Stoicism inculcates an extreme possessive individualism, to which the language of property ownership is fundamental. As G. W. F. Hegel was to argue some two centuries after Spenser, it responds to the threat of disempowerment and loss by reconstituting the self on the model of an object: a thing, differentiated from other things only by the fact of its inalienability.²⁹ Hence the stereotyped view of the Stoic as insensible and object-like, a mere “stock.” However inaccurate that cliché may be in the light of a nuanced account of the most evolved Stoic thinking, it is fully responsive to a very genuine strain of Stoic and Neostoic rhetoric.³⁰ It would scarcely be an exaggeration to describe this as a phobic model of the self: constitutively embattled; infiltrated by a scorn of interdependence; constantly patrolling its own borders in order to assess its own vulnerability to loss. The Stoic cosmos may be woven together through *sumpatheia*; the emotional universe it depicts seems notably insular, costive, and constrained. These characteristics are if anything exaggerated in Stoicism’s early modern variants. The Seneca of the epistles is a comparatively mobile figure, often to be found in transit, changing locations or visiting the harbor; Lipsius’s *De constantia* simply opens with an argument against foreign travel.³¹

Yet we might also reflect that, by taking Stoicism at its word, such an account fails to catch hold of the hidden affects that motivate Stoic thought. If Stoicism is a language of possession, it is noticeably the case that its most significant object is real and not moveable property. Its buried aspiration is towards a place it can call its own. Stoic discourse is underpinned by an economy of topographical metaphors that mark off fundamental distinctions between inside and outside. Over and again, we are invited to imagine enclosed or bounded spaces, now tranquil and reclusive, now profoundly embattled. Chaucer’s *Tale of Melibee*, a source for Spenser’s Meliboe and a text full of allusions to Seneca, imagines the self as a house, into which the world, the flesh and the devil violently “cloumben.”³² In his *Boece*, the philosopher’s quest is

to discover a “perdurable seete.”³³ Lipsius’s *De constantia* contains an encomium of gardens. “Philosophers and wise men,” we read “eschewing the cities and troublesom assemblies of people, contayned themselues within the bounds and limits of their gardens.”³⁴ Like Chaucer’s houses and estates, Lipsius’s philosophical gardens function as external analogues for the constant mind as a space of psychic seclusion. Meanwhile, Seneca’s treatise on constancy gives us an explicitly defensive variation on this theme. “Resolue thy selfe therefore *Serenus*,” it reads, “that this perfect man, full of vertues both diuine and humane, looseth nothing: his goods are enuironed with solide and impregnable ramparts, whereunto thou wouldest in some sort compare the walles of *Babylon*, vpon which *Alexander* mounted.”³⁵ It was another popular image: du Vair’s account of *The Moral Philosophie of the Stoicks* argues that “as the passion cometh from without . . . so nature hath fenced vs within with a strong bulwarke or rampire to backe vs against the force hereof.”³⁶ House, garden, citadel. These are not neutral spaces. They offer security and belonging: a home. They stand in a relation of antithesis to the flux and perpetual displacement represented by that other Stoic favorite, the sea. Impassive Stoicism thus grounds itself in the affectivity of possession. Passion may be imagined to come from without, but the business of being and belonging is itself saturated with otherwise impermissible feeling. What may have looked at first glance like a psychic structure devoted to the constant dampening and moderation of internal intensity in the service of a kind of reality principle can, upon further enquiry, be shown to be given over to the extraction of a hidden dividend of pleasure, drawn from its own inward resources.

Throughout the dialogue between Calidore and Meliboe, Spenser presses on these key features of a constant selfhood, and in particular its topographical underpinnings. It is relevant that any educated early modern reader would have encountered Stoicism as an object of controversy and debate in the works of Cicero and others. The poem had previously shown itself to be skeptical: the proem to book 4 refers disparagingly to “Stoicke censours” who would like to repudiate the experience of love (4.proem.3.8–9). Meliboe, however, is a Stoic in the flesh. He is a sketch—compact, but vivid and penetrating—of a constant subjectivity.

The presentation of Meliboe is ostensibly positive. The narrator quite straightforwardly describes him as a “good old man” (6.9.16.1). In the past, Meliboe has acted hospitably, taking the foundling Pastorella—discovered in the “open fields”—as his adoptive daughter (6.9.14.6). He also invites Calidore to spend the night in his cottage (see 6.9.16.4). Nonetheless, many recent critical accounts of Meliboe have been suspicious of or even hostile toward him.³⁷ As the canto develops, we note, he seems progressively less welcoming, ever more a focal point for skepticism and uncertainty. The pastoral dialogue offers him the opportunity to air his philosophy of life. To be “constant” is, etymologically, to stand together; but not here. Meliboe disdains “forreine helps to lifes due nourishment” (6.9.20.7). Fractional tonal cues give the lie to the constant subject’s sense of his own imperturbability. “I doe not any one enuy,” Meliboe claims, “Nor am enuyed of any one therefore” (6.9.21.1–2). The bare assertion of independence is inflected by the telling assumption that relation could only ever be invidious. Professions of self-sufficiency hint at anxieties over vulnerability. “They that haue much, feare much to loose thereby,” Meliboe comments (6.9.21.3).

Meliboe declares that “[I] doe my self, with that I haue, content”—and what he has is, primarily, his self; nothing else should matter (6.9.20.5). It does, though. Spenser’s pastoral dialogue latches onto Stoicism’s engagement with questions of ownership, and opens them out to view. It is the holding of land in particular that offers the model for the bounded subject here, and it is on this point that the constant self is most inadvertently revealing, as the desire for secure possession begins to overspill its self-imposed limits. The pastoral landscape of canto 9 is a patchwork of independent smallholdings, situated within common ground. Each shepherd grazes his “seuerall” sheep in the “open fields,” then retires to his home at the end of the day (6.9.15.4, 4.1). Within this community, Meliboe wants only to own his “small plot,” not beholden to anyone (6.9.28.4). Here in the countryside, “all the night in siluer sleepe I spend, / And all the day, to what I list, I doe attend” (6.9.22.1, 8–9). Sometimes Meliboe hunts the fox, sometimes he fishes, and when he is tired he rests in the shade or by the river. Just as in Stoic philosophy, description of the self modulates into the description of a place. But the pastoral world can never—cannot even in an allegory such as Spenser’s—perfectly represent Meliboe’s constant selfhood, precisely because it is an external environment, such as he ought to regard with complete indifference. In principle, one location should be as good as another for Meliboe, just as wealth and riches are

one. In practice, he seems just a touch too satisfied with the constant lifestyle he has achieved—a little too invested in its qualities as a place. The syntactical clarity and assurance that blocks out the stanzaic form of canto 9, stanza 30 with which this discussion began—from the first statement of Meliboe’s theme, through successive and opposed examples, to its emphatic restatement—wITHERS AWAY UNDER SCRUTINY. Why should poverty be actively preferred to riches, if wisdom is the only true wealth? Meliboe’s discourse shifts disconcertingly between an austere, maxim-heavy, generalizing style, and an idyllic voice that celebrates the undemanding pleasures of the pastoral landscape. This tonal schizophrenia is central to Spenser’s presentation of him: there is just no way that Meliboe’s luxuriant encomia of rural life can be fully compatible with the declaration that “It is the mynd, that maketh good or ill.” For the truly constant, Stoic subject, location should be, literally, neither here nor there. Meliboe’s unmoved happiness thus rests, just a shade too obviously, on his enjoyment of a pastoral estate. His assumptions about the mind’s invulnerability are underwritten by his status as a smallholder.

Meliboe’s thought is pocketed with discontinuities of this sort. He scorns those “which fortunes doe by vowes deuize” (6.9.30.8). To “deuize” might be to design or plan. It can also mean to bequeath in a last will and testament; Meliboe condemns the rich man “that hath abundance at his will” (6.9.30.3). Yet earlier he had declared that having experienced life at court: “I from thenceforth haue learn’d to loue more deare / This lowly quiet life, which I *inherit* here” (6.9.25.8–9, emphasis added). When operating in Neostoic mode, Meliboe has nothing but scorn for riches and inheritance. When he speaks of his own estate, they are reconfigured as positives. Calidore cunningly mirrors this structure of bad faith when he praises “this small plot of your dominion” (6.9.28.4) as preferable to any degree of “great Lordship and ambition” (6.9.28.5). Are “dominion” and “Lordship” really so very radically opposed? Can size alone mark off a significant distinction between them? Meliboe exercises his “dominion” over a pastoral landscape that is sleepy and undemanding, that requires nothing of him “but onely to attend it” (6.9.21.6). The verb means “to tend,” referring to sheep, but hints at an image of Meliboe as the complacent spectator of his own constant lifestyle. Meanwhile, the way his language weaves him into structures of property and possession that he has notionally rejected suggests the fragility of his claims to independence. In the end, “Hauing small” is not really distinct from any other kind of “[h]auing” (6.9.20.3).

A number of recent philosophical works have sought to articulate models of identity that are in various ways open to otherness and difference and that challenge the assumptions about individual autonomy and self-possession that underpin contemporary political and economic discourse. Judith Butler and Athena Athansiou, for instance, seek to explore a “dispossessed” subjectivity capable of reimagining inherited regimes of property ownership and sovereignty. Their target is a possessive individualism grounded in “the ontological conflation of the individual with property ownership.”³⁸ There is a disconcerting moment in the pastoral dialogue when it looks as though Spenser’s poem is about to stage this maneuver in reverse—as if, in the genealogy of political forms, courtesy’s radical openness were the discarded ancestor of a possessive individualism and not a transformative possibility that lies beyond it.³⁹ In the end, though, this is not quite what happens. Notable studies of early modern literature by the likes of Joseph Campana and James Kuzner have if anything pursued the opposite argument: Kuzner, for instance, claims that Spenser can be aligned with a tradition in which “selfhood is defined by boundaries that do not hold, by a vulnerability to others that undercuts self-control”—the very vulnerability that Stoic psychology seeks to eradicate.⁴⁰ To the extent that book 6 seems to offer a veiled satire on Meliboe as a constant subject, *The Faerie Queene* might be described as an anti-Stoic poem.⁴¹ Yet there is no bare opposition between courtesy and constancy here. Instead, they begin to change places. As we move through the pastoral dialogue, courtesy looks increasingly steely and intransigent; constancy, ever so slightly embattled and helpless, obliged to endure what it cannot change. Meliboe’s central claim is that the mind “fortunize[s]” for itself, unaffected by external accidents. This assertion of invulnerability is swiftly contradicted by events. In the succeeding cantos of the poem he is abducted by pirates and casually put to death. “Old Meliboe,” we read, “is slaine”: no more of him (6.11.18.4). Strictly speaking, there is no contradiction. Death and disaster would count among those circumstances against which a Stoic might claim to be fortified by his philosophy. But in a poem such as *The Faerie Queene*, no fates are random or accidental; all bear some sort of significance. We are confronted with the suggestion that the bounded self may self-defeatingly invite precarity and encroachment, somehow soliciting the externalities it resists. What Sigmund Freud called the “principle of constancy,” narrowly focused upon its own psychic homeostasis and the reduction of unpleasurable internal tension, seems ultimately to tend towards the absolute quiescence of death.⁴²

The opening move in the poem's development towards a projected seventh book is thus not to illustrate a constant virtue but to provide a critique of it. Many accounts of the legend of Courtesy see it, if not as a formal conclusion to the poem, then at least as running aground in fatal doubts and uncertainties that produce a kind of thematic finality. Richard Neuse, for instance, writes that "by the end of Book VI the Beast is triumphant and even threatens to disengage itself from the fiction." "Is this not," he asks, "the poet's final acknowledgement that his quest, though unfinished, has reached the limits of his epic enterprise?"⁴³ What we see in the pastoral dialogue, I argue, is a possible counter-movement of emergence. Plainly, Meliboe does not represent the poem's final word on a constant virtue. Rather, he opens out a new arena of thought. And, running alongside this preliminary exploration of the values of constancy, we have a revision of the terms upon which the poem understands finitude and limitation. The first three books of *The Faerie Queene* had grounded finality in agonistic structures: book 1 ends when the dragon is defeated, book 2 when Acrasia is captured, and book 3 with Busirane's overthrow. The 1596 *Faerie Queene* increasingly finds itself interested in how virtues break down, or encounter intractable problems, or experience a nagging sense of the lack of fit between what they were meant to be and what they end up becoming. Reading Meliboe's fatally "vnmoved" subjectivity as a preliminary maneuver within a larger transition towards a projected "LEGEND OF *Constancie*" is consistent with this developing interest in deriving a kind of progress—a forward movement—from failure and imperfection.

The pastoral dialogue between Calidore and Meliboe represents one version of the relationship between the virtues of courtesy and constancy. Their encounter is complex and mobile. It opens out future directions of enquiry, rather than leaving its protagonists in static opposition. It also offers us one possible version of what the task of a seventh Book of *The Faerie Queene* might be: namely, to set constancy into motion, to open it out and to endow it with something of the hospitable openness to difference that had characterized courtesy.

This is what *The Mutabilitie Cantos* try to do. They represent a gesture of incorporation and recognition, not of rejection; the latter would simply reproduce the phobic psychic economy already held up for scrutiny in book 6. It is true that *Mutabilitie's* claim for universal

rule is dismissed. But Nature's judgment concedes her an extraordinary amount—almost everything, in fact. By the end of the *Cantos*, Mutabilitie's sway over "all things" has been decisively established (7.7.58.2). The work of *The Mutabilitie Cantos*, then, is to try to find ways of thinking through dissolution and change without being crippled by them. It is to remain constant without becoming either closed or brittle. As is often noted, the *Cantos* feature no direct representative of a constant virtue. Jove seems too compromised to perform that role, Nature too enigmatic and remote. Yet the startling transition performed by the two-stanza, "vnperfitte" fragment following canto 7—out of mythological narrative and into a plangent first-person voice—indicates the deeply individual stakes of this project (7.8.title).

One effect of this movement of thought is to highlight the ambivalence and complexity latent in claims to completion. To the extent that it could be said to represent an ending, the resolution reached at the end of *The Mutabilitie Cantos* is achieved through a movement backwards, via a return to the discourses of property and land ownership woven throughout Stoic writing on constancy and problematized in the pastoral dialogue in book 6. Both book 6 and *The Faerie Queene* and *The Mutabilitie Cantos* might be described as essays in the metaphysics of social order. They are an expression of what E. M. W. Tillyard famously called "The Elizabethan World Picture": that is, the attempt to project contingent social arrangements onto the fabric of the universe.⁴⁴ Notably, however, what Tillyard described as stable *doxa* emerges in Spenser as anxiety. Book 6 had worried away at the relationship between the virtue of courtesy, allegedly "deriu'd . . . From heauenly seedes," and contemporary social structures (6.Proem.3.6–7). *The Mutabilitie Cantos*, meanwhile, process metaphysics through an inheritance narrative.

Initially in the *Mutabilitie Cantos*, Mutabilitie's bid for cosmic supremacy is experienced as an assault upon value as such, an anarchic attempt to liquidate all hierarchy and structure. Yet this attempted *coup d'état* by the forces of universal chaos is justified in the most conservative and (for a romance) normative terms: inheritance. Mutabilitie, who defies all laws, advances a legal claim to possession. "I greater am in bloud," she declares, "Then all the Gods, though wrongfully from heauen exil'd" (7.6.26.8–9). As many commentators note, this claim is quietly dropped when Mutabilitie confronts Jove and makes her case before Nature. Jove insists that he rules by right of conquest, not heredity, and Mutabilitie ends up seeking to demonstrate her *de facto* dominion over the world, not her genealogical priority.⁴⁵ Less

often noticed is the fact that the language of inheritance resurfaces in Nature's response to Mutabilitie's plea, where it is deployed to resolve the competing claims of stability and change. After Mutability has spoken, Nature delivers her judgment:

I well consider all that ye haue sayd,
And find that all things stedfastnes doe hate
And changed be: yet being rightly wayd
They are not changed from their first estate;
But by their change their being doe dilate:
And turning to themselues at length againe,
Do work their owne perfection so by fate[.]
(7.7.58)

Earlier, we read of Nature's "good estate" (7.6.5.3). Here, Nature speaks of the "first estate" of things. The Longman Spenser glosses the words as meaning an "original (unfallen) state," and this is indeed how the phrase was most often used in early modern culture. Countless books from this period make reference to a "first estate" as something that can be forsaken, degenerated from, lost or maintained. It represents a fixed point from which assessments of value can be made. Spenser, however, does something more complex with the idea, in part by fully activating its legal resonances. Particularly in the Stoic tradition of thinking about constancy, "estate" carries territorial and proprietary connotations.⁴⁶ The *Cantos* have already referred to Jove's "principall Estate," meaning his throne or dominion (7.6.19.4). Meanwhile, although "first estate" was not quite a legal term of art, it was often used in law treatises with reference to cases in which land had been granted or leased to a second holder. When the property reverts to its original possessor, it returns to its first estate. In Christopher Saint Germain's *Fyrst Dialogue*, we read that where land is granted upon condition, the original owner may re-enter into possession if that condition is not met. In such cases, "it is lawfull by the lawe of Englade for the feffoure to reentre & to take his lande agayn & to holde it as in his fyrst estate."⁴⁷ Similarly, in Edward Coke's commentary on Littleton, when an estate is recovered for breach of condition, "he that entreth for a condition broken shall be seised in his first estate."⁴⁸ These are treatises that analyse the often extraordinarily complex movements of property and title in early modern society, trying to reduce them to order. "First estate" attempts to distinguish between a heritable possession, and one granted or contracted for a limited period of time. As it figures in Nature's argument, it represents the promise of

an underlying continuity of possession. All things shift and blur, yet all shall return to themselves “at length.” The implication, however, is that stability must emerge out of change, rather than merely setting itself in opposition to it. The language of landholding, which we might ordinarily associate with assertions of continuity and enduring value, in this instance surprisingly provides the model for a form of subjectivity that is open to dispossession. Inheritance and the transmission of title emerge, not just as a challenge to the rule of Jove and the claims of metaphysics, but as ways of thinking through the structure of a constant virtue.⁴⁹

Constancy, for Spenser, is about where you stand. It always has the potential to emerge in a territorial register. “First estate” permits the poem to imagine incessant change as part of a trajectory that maps a return to an earlier state of affairs, and *The Mutabilitie Cantos* embed this claim within their own structure of recapitulations or returns, both of earlier material in *The Faerie Queene*, and of texts that *The Faerie Queene* adapts, all of which anticipate Nature’s arguments. Thus, in book 3, Adonis was said to persist, “eterne in mutabilitie, / . . . by succession made perpetuall” (3.6.47.5–6). “Succession,” here, is both sequence in the abstract, and the transmission of a title or property; in book 2, Oberon ensures that Tanaquil will “succeede” him, “by his last will” (2.10.76.5). A perpetuity, meanwhile, was an estate with a restriction on its future alienation. John Doddridge describes it as “an Entayle with an addition of a *Proviso* Conditionall tyed to his Estate, not to put away the Land from his next heyre.”⁵⁰ Adonis succeeds himself, forever; no one else can. And this earlier moment in the poem in turn houses its own returns to medieval antecedents, themselves often marked by Stoic thought. The distinction between the “eterne” and the “perpetuel,” for instance, can be found in Chaucer’s *Boece*, whilst in *The Knight’s Tale* we read:

[S]peces of thynges and progressiouns
 Shullen enduren by successiouns,
 And nat eterne, withouten any lye.⁵¹

Nothing, in short, should surprise us about the conclusion of *The Mutabilitie Cantos*. If Nature’s arguments possess the force of an imaginative coup, it is not because they say anything very new. On the contrary: they sound oddly familiar. “First estate” brings with it a sense of *déjà vu*. It takes its place within a structure of allusions in which the language of inheritance features as a thread of continuity, but also, through the poem’s repeated recourse to it, as a reminder of

the impossibility of ever achieving a position of security and firm “stedfastnes.” Like some sixteenth-century version of Freud’s *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, *The Mutabilitie Cantos*’ reflections upon a psychic economy devoted to a norm of constancy find expression through a narrative rhythm of returns to an earlier state of things. They themselves perform that simultaneous journey towards, and deferral of, the moment of completion that is their most profound subject matter.⁵² Thus the poem keeps itself productively off-balance.

Nature’s judgment is that Mutabilitie rules all—for now. A return to stability is promised, but also indefinitely postponed. And yet, *The Mutabilitie Cantos* don’t feel entirely bleak or desolate—in part, perhaps, because of the way they have digested the fact of change, which features by now less as an external accident than as an aspect of the poem’s own internal resources. The concluding prayer thus finds a voice capable of acknowledging its vulnerability, of bemoaning temporality without being entirely destroyed by it. We might reflect that for Spenser’s (and Lodge’s) schoolmaster Richard Mulcaster, constancy seems primarily to have been just this, a matter of perseverance, not immutability. His *Positions* speak of the “constancie to continew and not to shrinke”; of “constancie in perforuming”; and of “constancie to continue the best.”⁵³ The melancholic patterning of *The Mutabilitie Cantos* might seem to produce a subjectivity that is meager or hollowed out, yet there is something here that is generative, such as finds its analogue in the vibrant celebration of material and creaturely multifariousness that dominates Mutabilitie’s plea before Nature, threatening to overspill the bounds of the *Cantos*’ ostensible didactic intent.

The aim was to lend constancy some of the openness and flexibility that it was seen to lack in the pastoral dialogue in book 6; to render it capable of responsive engagement with a world in which all is “vnperfite”: non-ideal, and as-yet, or never, to be completed. In the process *The Mutabilitie Cantos* substantiate the suggestion earlier made in relation to Meliboe. Truly to achieve a state of “vnmoved quiet” is now, quite clearly, to be dead; the “vnperfite” prayer that concludes the *Cantos* more or less admits as much. Here we get a fully articulated alternative to the agonistic model of narrative, in which success is achieved through the death of the other. We get a way of making dissolution and failure productive. With inheritance standing both for the stability of an abiding state and for the ceaseless shiftings of possession, *The Mutabilitie Cantos* offer a return to the too-facile observation of that failed exemplar of a constant virtue, Meliboe, now

reframed in a genuinely interrogative mood: what is it, “this . . . life, which I inherite here”[?] (6.9.25.9)

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NOTES

¹ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, revised edition, ed. A. C. Hamilton with Hiroshi Yamashita, Toshiyuki Suzuki, and Shohachi Fukuda (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2007), book 6, canto 9, stanza 28, lines 5, 6–7. Hereafter cited parenthetically by book, canto, stanza, and line number.

² See Linda Gregerson, “Telling Time: Temporality in *The Faerie Queene*: The Hugh MacClean Memorial Lecture, international Spenser Society, 7 January 2012,” *The Spenser Review* 42.1 (2012): 1–6.

³ Examples of these maxims include, “accusing Fortune is only excusing ourselves”; “happy is the man who is content with his own lot”; “good and evil are chiefly in the mind” (Judith H. Anderson, *Reading the Allegorical Intertext: Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton* [New York: Fordham Univ. Press, 2008], 100).

⁴ Seneca, *The workes of Lucius Annaeus Seneca, both morrall and natural*, trans. Thomas Lodge (London, 1614), P5^v.

⁵ Seneca, Ff2^v.

⁶ Thomas Nashe, *Haue with you to Saffron-walden* (London, 1596), N3^v, marginal note.

⁷ See Andrew Hadfield, *Edmund Spenser: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2012), 293. Hadfield mentions this dedicatory sonnet and also discusses Spenser’s probable knowledge of Lipsius.

⁸ J. B. Lethbridge, “Spenser’s Last Days: Ireland, Career, Mutability, Allegory,” in *Edmund Spenser: New and Renewed Directions*, ed. Lethbridge (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson Univ. Press, 2006), 307.

⁹ Lipsius, *Two booke of constancie*, trans. John Stradling (London, 1595), B1^v.

¹⁰ Guillaume du Vair, *A Buckler Against Adversitie: Or A Treatise of Constancie*, trans. Andrew Court (London, 1622), B3^r.

¹¹ On Neostoicism, see Gerhard Oestreich, *Neostoicism and the Early Modern State*, ed. Brigitta Oestreich and H. G. Koenigsberger, trans. David McLintock (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2008); Gilles D. Monsarrat, *Light From the Porch: Stoicism and English Renaissance Literature* (Paris: Didier-Érudition, 1984); and Gordon Braden, *Renaissance Tragedy and the Senecan Tradition: Anger’s Privilege* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1985).

¹² Northrop Frye, “The Structure of Imagery in *The Faerie Queene*,” in *Fables of Identity: Studies in Poetic Mythology* (New York: Harcourt, 1963), 71. Frye intuits a parallel sense of finality latent in the Legend of Courtesy. While conceding that Spenser “provides himself . . . with opportunities for carrying on the story,” he argues that Spenser reached the end of book 6 “realizing that he might not write any more of it” (70).

¹³ Christopher Burlinson, “Spenser’s ‘Legend of Constancie’: Book VII and the Ethical Reader,” in *Celebrating Mutabilitie: Essays on Spenser’s Mutabilitie Cantos*, ed. Jane Grogan (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 2010), 206. Burlinson’s essay offers a full discussion of previous scholarship on this topic, while offering a new interpretation of the *Mutabilitie Cantos* in the light of Neostoic thinking.

¹⁴ One of the oddities of the dialogue, in fact, is that Meliboe responds to Calidore in exactly the same terms as if the knight had voiced a desire for greater wealth or higher rank. The point being: it's all the same to him.

¹⁵ The image recurs at 6.9.31.5. We might note the pun on "rest": the question of whether one can isolate oneself from the "rest" of society is very much under scrutiny in this episode.

¹⁶ Etymologically, Meliboe should be a honey-tongued charmer. In the event, as Humphrey Tonkin observes, he often sounds less like an actual person than a compendium of speeches on set themes. See *Spenser's Courteous Pastoral: Book Six of The Faerie Queene* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 116–17.

¹⁷ Gordon Teskey, "'And therefore as a stranger give it welcome': Courtesy and Thinking," *Spenser Studies: A Renaissance Poetry Annual* 18 (2003): 344.

¹⁸ Robert Browne, *A booke which sheweth the life and manners of all true Christians* (Middelburgh, 1582), M4^r.

¹⁹ This is Christian Thorne's own translation, corresponding to the opening paragraph of the section entitled "The Concern of Philosophy" in Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), 8. See Thorne, "Outward Bound: On Quentin Meillassoux's After Finitude," *Speculations* 3 (2012): 279.

²⁰ Michael C. Schoenfeldt discusses coercion and dissimulation in book 6 in "The Poetry of Conduct: Accommodation and Transgression in *The Faerie Queene*, Book 6," in *Enclosure Acts: Sexuality, Property, and Culture in Early Modern England*, ed. Richard Burt and John Michael Archer (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1994), 151–69.

²¹ See Thomas G. Rosenmeyer, *Senecan Drama and Stoic Cosmology* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1989), 93–112.

²² In some measure, it did produce compatible effects, as with the cosmopolitanism promoted in Stoic thinking. On this theme, see Martha Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1994), 341–44. Stoicism developed out of the collapse of the Greek *polis* around 300 BC. Politically, it points in two directions: towards the detachment of the disempowered subject from a community of fellow citizens, or towards the reframing of that community on a more generously conceived scale.

²³ Seneca, Kkk1^{r-v}. The quotation derives from the *De constantia*. The phrase "lose nothing" appears an extraordinary (and quite revealing) number of times in Lodge's translation of Seneca.

²⁴ Lipsius, C1^r.

²⁵ Du Vair, *The Moral Philosophie of the Stoicks*, trans. Thomas James (London, 1598), E2^r.

²⁶ Seneca, X1^v. For the Latin text, I have used *Ad Lucilium epistulae morales*, ed. and trans. Richard Gummere, 3 vol. (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1917–25), 1:277.

²⁷ Geoffrey Chaucer, *Boece*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1987), book 3, prosa 9, lines 31, 29.

²⁸ Chaucer, *Boece*, book 3, prosa 12, lines 181–82. "Foreyne" is again "*alieno*." See Boethius, *Anicii Manlii Severini Boethii Philosophiae Consolatio*, ed. Ludovicus Bieler (Turnholt: Brepols, 1957), 49.

²⁹ In G. W. F. Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Stoicism figures as a defensive rejection of the interpersonal and dependent character of consciousness, as demonstrated through the dialectic of master and slave. Developing out of this moment, Stoicism aims to take possession of the autarchy of the master by modeling itself upon the objects the

slave crafted for him: “the consciousness that is forced back into itself becomes,” we read, “in its formative activity, its own object in the form of the thing it has fashioned, and at the same time sees in the lord a consciousness that exists as a being-for-self” (*Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller [Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1977], 119). The result is a subjectivity that is perfectly self-enclosed. It thinks, “I am free, because I am not an *other*, but remain simply and solely in communion with myself” (120). It is therefore also empty, producing a “lifeless indifference which steadfastly withdraws from the bustle of existence” (121). Stoicism is incapable of proposing reasons that might rouse itself into motion. In the end it is, Hegel concludes, just boring: “The True and Good, wisdom and virtue, the general terms beyond which Stoicism cannot get, are therefore in a general way no doubt uplifting, but since they cannot in fact produce any expansion of the content, they soon become tedious” (122). If that sounds uncannily like the Spenser described here, we might reflect that Hegel is adapting hostile analyses of Stoicism that also circulated in the early modern period, such as the accusation of an object-like, “marble” impassivity.

³⁰ See Monsarrat, 105–8 for a summary of early modern attacks on Stoic insensibility.

³¹ See for example Seneca’s epistles 12, 53, 55, 77, 104.

³² Chaucer, *The Tale of Melibee*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, line 1399.

³³ Chaucer, *Boece*, book 2, metrum 4, line 2.

³⁴ Lipsius, 13ʳ.

³⁵ Seneca, Kkk2ʳ.

³⁶ Du Vair, *The Moral Philosophie of the Stoicks*, E3ʳ.

³⁷ See Anderson, 96 for a discussion that shrewdly compares Meliboe to Despair. Harry Berger, Jr. also writes that “Melibee’s ‘morality’ is in fact the same kind of excuse for laziness used by the moral pastors of *The Shepheardes Calender*; it is a recreative withdrawal from care” (*Revisionary Play: Studies in Spenserian Dynamics* [Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1988], 233). For a positive assessment of Meliboe, to which Judith Anderson’s essay responds, see Paul Alpers, “Spenser’s Late Pastorals,” *ELH* 56 (1989): 797–817.

³⁸ Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou, *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 160.

³⁹ We might note that Neostoicism has been identified as a key component of the political identities under construction in the early modern period: G. Oestreich argues that it provided subjects amenable to the interests of the newly centralized early modern state. See Oestreich *Neostoicism and the Early Modern State*.

⁴⁰ James Kuzner, *Open Subjects: English Renaissance Republicans, Modern Selfhoods and the Virtue of Vulnerability* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2011), 39. See also Joseph Campana, *The Pain of Reformation: Spenser, Vulnerability, and the Ethics of Masculinity* (New York: Fordham Univ. Press, 2012). Kuzner’s study is notable for pursuing the specifically political implications of an open subjectivity.

⁴¹ Campana writes that “the Stoic (and neo-Stoic) goal of virtue achieved through an indifference to pain and vulnerability was yet another manifestation of the ideal of masculine invulnerability Spenser sought to interrogate and reform” (41). Syrithe Pugh similarly argues that, in the 1590 *Faerie Queene*, “Stoic self-reliance and distrust of love is fundamentally unchristian” (“Acrasia and Bondage: Guyon’s Perversion of the Ovidian Erotic in Book II of *The Faerie Queene*,” in *Edmund Spenser*, 178).

⁴² Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle, The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*, 24 vol., trans. James Strachey, Alix Strachey and Alan Tyson (London: Hogarth Press, 2001), 18:9. Freud explains that “the pleasure

principle follows from the principle of constancy: actually the latter principle was inferred from the facts which forced us to adopt the pleasure principle" (9). The pleasure principle is initially identified as the systematic attempt to reduce the level of "unpleasurable tension" in the psychic system (Freud, 7). As Freud's investigation progresses, the search for a psychic economy "beyond" the pleasure principle ultimately loops back towards a deepened sense of what this original model might contain. In the end, the pleasure principle as "a tendency operating in the service of a function whose business it is to free the mental apparatus entirely from excitation or to keep the excitation in it constant or to keep it as low as possible" can be associated with the death drive's impulse towards "the quiescence of the inorganic world" (Freud, 62).

⁴³ Richard Neuse, "Book VI as Conclusion to *The Faerie Queene*," *ELH* 35 (1968): 353.

⁴⁴ E. M. W. Tillyard, *The Elizabethan World Picture* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1943).

⁴⁵ For a detailed analysis, see Andrew Zurcher, *Spenser's Legal Language: Law and Poetry in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2007), 197–202.

⁴⁶ In Chaucer's *Boece*, we read that each thing in superlunary nature follows its assigned course, described as "the werk of his proper estat": a comparatively neutral use of the word (book 1, metrum 5, line 30). Philosophy then asks Boethius if she may inquire into "th'estaat of thi thought," and here we might have a hint of the territorial Stoic psychology described above (book 1, prosa 6, line 2). By the end of the dialogue, however, we read that God is eternal, which means "parfit possessioun" of "an eterne and presentarie estat" (book 5, prosa 6, lines 15, 102–3).

⁴⁷ Christopher Saint Germain, *The fyrst dialogue in Englysshe with newe additions* (London, 1532), L7^v.

⁴⁸ Edward Coke, *An abridgement of the Lord Coke's commentary on Littleton* (London, 1651), M7^v.

⁴⁹ In his account of *The Mutabilitie Cantos*, Teskey argues that inheritance and genealogy produce a Nietzschean exposure of the history of violence that underpins metaphysical claims. Inheritance stands for the genesis of all values in struggles for power; it de-naturalizes all authority. What I am exploring here is the poem's simultaneous attempt to do the opposite, to root allegedly timeless structures in the contingently social. See Teskey, *Allegory and Violence* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1996), 168–88.

⁵⁰ John Doddridge, *The lawyers light* (London, 1629), 11^v.

⁵¹ Chaucer, *Boece*, book 5, prosa 6, lines 98–99; Chaucer, *The Knight's Tale*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, lines 3014–16. Theseus also refers to the "parfit" origins of things, which can be observed "Descendynge so til it be corruptible" (3010). The language of inheritance is thus used to circulate opposed visions of the natural order: on the one hand, nature "descends" from a perfect point of origin, and in so doing becomes subject to mutability; on the other, the "speces" of things shall persist through "successioun"—not eternally, but enduringly.

⁵² Anderson argues for just this kind of intertextuality, used to thicken our sense of what is involved in an ending in Spenser. She notes an echo of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* at the end of *The Mutabilitie Cantos*, producing a structure of allusions that self-referentially "defeat time and acknowledge its destructive power" (Anderson, 60). See also Anderson, 54–60 on echoes of the *Boece* and *The Knight's Tale* in the *Cantos*.

⁵³ Richard Mulcaster, *Positions vvhetherin those primitiue circumstances be examined, which are necessarie for the training vp of children* (London, 1581), Gg3^v, Nn4^r, Nn4^v. Elsewhere, Mulcaster sets constancy in opposition to "mutabilitie of mindes vpon euery infirmitie either of iudgement, or other circumstance" (Oo4^r).