

Krystyna Kujawińska-Courtney

ALCHEMY AND EDMUND SPENSER'S *FAERIE QUEENE*
A METHODOLOGICAL INTRODUCTION

The Proem to Book Two of the *Faerie Queene* Edmund Spenser opens with an acknowledgement that some people will complain because they will be able neither to see nor find their way into the world of which he writes. Responding to their predicament he asks the critics to make an analogy with the recent discoveries of Peru, the Amazon and Virginia: these places all exist but until recently, even in the "wisest ages" people had never known of them. And certainly, he adds, as these places were secret, so there are probably many others that remain uncharted by civilization.

In this context the "happy land of Faery" is just as fruitful and exotic as these unknown or barely known countries. Yet, unlike them, the "happy land of Faery" does not lie across the far seas and distant mountains. It is, according to Spenser, somewhere in the world known to everyone:

Of Faery Lond yet if he more inquire,
By certaine signes here set in sundry place
He may it find: ne let him then admire,
But yield his sence to be too blunt and bace,
Than no'te without an hound fine footing trace.¹

Later, he calls the land a mirror of Britain, her Queen and her history.

Although the Proem makes it clear that the senses are insufficient for the task of finding the hidden territory, still a way does exist and, in fact, Spenser promises to provide the "signes" necessary for its discovery. The invitation is enticing; Book Two assumes the aura of a treasure map. In "couert vale" and "shadowes light" the discerning devotee can find "exceeding light" and "the fairest Princesse under sky" and all, so to speak, in his/her own backyard (Proem 4, 5).

¹ E. Spenser, *Poetical Works*, eds. J. C. Smith, E. de Selincourt (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 69. All quotations from *Faerie Queene* are taken from this edition.

Such too, as Spenser was probably aware, is the promise of the science of alchemy. Whoever could find in the cryptic words of the sacred scriptures the means for transition, could make the world around him, as Geoffrey Chaucer's Yeoman says of his master, into a world of riches:

I seye, my lord can switch subtilite...
That al this ground on which we been ryding,
Til that we come to Caunterbury toun,
He coude al clene turne it up-so-down,
And pave it al of silver and of gold.²

Unfortunately, what the honest but deluded Yeoman does not realize is that the true *Arum philosophicum* is seldom manifested in this way. Instead, the gold hidden in matter is much like the land of Faery hidden in the realm of England, and the means for finding both are very similar.

The purpose of this paper is to provide an introduction to a methodology of *opus alchemicum*: its background, ideology, goals and practice, to determine how the study of alchemy may help illuminate some of the shadows surrounding Spenser's world of Faery and some means by which that world may be discovered.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF ALCHEMY

Though there is some debate over when alchemy actually began, early practitioners unanimously considered the Egyptian Hermes Trismegistus to be their first important spokesman. Believed to pre-date Plato and Pythagoras, Hermes was often associated with the time of Moses. Cicero wrote of him as the slayer of Argus who consequently fled to Egypt and "gave the Egyptians their laws and letters".³ Lactantius and Augustine also regarded him as a person of great antiquity and considered his writings sacred prophecies of the coming of Christ.

After the fall of Rome, copies of *Corpus Hermeticum* were preserved in Greek and Arabic manuscripts. In 1463 Marsilio Ficino translated most of the treatises into Latin. Francis Yates comments:

This [that Ficino and others accepted the authority of the early fathers and believed Hermes to be a contemporary of Moses] is undoubtedly a fact, and one which all students of the Renaissance Neoplatonism which Ficino's translations and works inaugurated would do well to bear in mind. It has not been sufficiently investigated

² G. Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, ed. F. E. Hill (New York: The Heritage Press, 1935), p. 454.

³ F. A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), pp. 2-3.

what was the effect on Ficino of his awe struck response to the *Hermetica* as the *prisca theologia*, the pristine fount of illumination flowing from the Divine *Mens*, which would lead him to the original core of Platonism as a gnosis derived from Egyptian wisdom.⁴

Ficino himself notes in regard to the explanation of the creation given in Plato's *Timaeus* that "Trismagistus Mercurius teaches more clearly such an origin of the generation of the world," and he even calls Mercurius "the same man as Moses".⁵

Many of Ficino's contemporaries shared his passion for Hermetic doctrine. His translation of the treatise *Pimander* must have been very popular, since more manuscripts of it exist than of any of his other works. Certainly, the *Hermeticum* inspired Ficino's admirer Pico della Mirandola who joined in with the sacred writings of the Cabala to devise his theories of magic. Pico's most famous essay, the *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, opens with a citation of Hermes's *Asclepius*.⁶

In England, some traces of Hermetic thought can be found in Thomas More's *Utopia* and in the commentary of John Colet, who as Francis Yates says, was "certainly touched by Ficinian influences."⁷ Later, John Dee, Philip Sidney's instructor in philosophy and one of Queen Elizabeth I's favourites, was known as a Hermeticist and practicing alchemist.⁸ Sidney himself, to whom Spenser dedicated his *Shepherd's Calendar*, seemed to have a passing acquaintance with Hermes's philosophy. The following lines of the French Protestant Phillippe Du Plessis Mornay are from his translation:

Mercurius Trismegistus, who (if the bookes which are fathered upon him bee his in deede, as in truth they bee very auncient) is the founder of them all, teacheth euerywhere. That there is but one God: That one is the roote of all things that are; That the same one is called the onely good and the goodnesse it selfe, which hath universall power of creating things. ... That unto him alone belongeth the name of Father, and of Good...⁹

Finally, Spenser's close friend, Gabriel Harvey, who referred to himself as a lover of "All kynde of bookes, good and badd, sayntish and diuinish, that ar to be had," classifies Giordano Bruno as the leading Hermetic teacher of the Renaissance.¹⁰

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 17. It is important to note that Ficino who pretty much gave Plato to the Renaissance had a very high regard for Hermes.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁶ Yates refers here to P. O. Kristeller's opinion. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

⁸ E. J. Holmyard, *Alchemy* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1957), pp. 204-06.

⁹ F. A. Yates, *op. cit.*, p. 178.

¹⁰ See: G. Harvey, *Marginalia*, ed. G. C. Moore Smith (Stratford-upon-Avon: Shakespeare Head Press, 1913), p. 156 and the discussion of Harvey in W. L. Renwick's *Edmund Spenser: An Essay on Renaissance Poetry* (London: Edward Arnold Ltd., 1925), p. 138.

Though he does not specify Spenser's interest in alchemical studies, Harvey does confirm Spenser's other scientific curiosities: his knowledge of the "sphere" and the "astrolabe," and his embarrassment because of "his lack of skill in canons, tales, and instruments."¹¹ Taking into consideration the fact that Spenser had been trained at a divinity school in Cambridge, where both Dee and Colet had taught, and that he had been a close friend of Sidney and the occultist Gabriel Harvey, and that he himself admitted his interests in science, it is fairly reasonable to assume that Spenser acquired at least the basic ideas of Hermeticism – and therefore of alchemy, the Hermetic science *par excellence*.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF ALCHEMY

In the seventeenth century, historians for the first time questioned the authority of the *Corpus Hermeticum*. In 1614 Isaac Casaubon pointed out that Hermes, if there had been such a person, could not have written the works attributed to him – at least not at the time they were believed to have been written. Now it is assumed that Hermetic literature was actually composed by several people who lived in the second or third century A.D. The writings themselves confirm this hypothesis, since by and large the *Hermeticum* is founded upon the tenets of the Gnostic philosophy taught and written at that time.

The second century Academy of Plotinus, who is the most likely candidate to have generated the thinking behind the Hermetic tracts, was not founded in Egypt, but it certainly showed an enthusiasm for Egyptian thought. Plotinus himself spent nineteen years in Egypt studying under Ammonius. His philosophy and the philosophies of others in his school not only demonstrated a concern for the Egyptians, but they also testified to a great eclecticism, combining Christian thought with Oriental and Greek philosophy.

Perhaps the greatest innovation of Plotinus was his conception of the One. Whereas Plato developed the idea of the Ultimate as transcendent Good, Plotinus derived an Ultimate that incorporates the Transcendent Good and the Pythagorean One:

As the one begets all things, it cannot be any of them – neither thing, nor quality, nor intelligence, nor soul. Not in motion, nor at rest, not in space, nor in time, it is the "in itself uniform" or rather it is the "without form", proceeding form, movement and rest, which are characteristic of being and make Being multiple.¹²

¹¹ G. Harvey, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

¹² Plotinus, *The Essential Plotinus*, ed. and trans. E. O'Brien (New York: Mentor Books, 1964), p. 77.

In short, the Plotinian One is the base unity of all multiplicity; and, as Sidney's translation of Mornay indicates, the same idea is the pillar of Hermetic teaching.

Two other Plotinian refinements of Plato's philosophy are crucial to the particular goals of Hermeticism. First, Plotinus clearly articulates that the way to discover the One is to begin with knowledge of phenomena. Although Plato believes that all universal concepts have objective reference, he did not state very clearly the exact relation between the particular and the universal – a weakness for which he was severely criticized by Aristotle, and a weakness which both Aristotle and Plotinus seek to overcome in very different ways.¹³

In Plotinus, one only comes by enlightenment through rational faculties; Erwin Edman puts it: "For Plotinus mysticism [union with God] is not the evasion but the climax of thought."¹⁴ The Hermetic "Emerald Tablet" renders this as knowing the One "by the mediation of the One." for "all things proceed from this One by adaptation."¹⁵

Plotinus's identification of subject and object proved influential to the later science. To know one, he says, is to know the other, for all are founded in the One. R. Baine Harris explains:

Like Aristotle, he [Plotinus] makes knowing a form of abstraction, but it is more than the abstraction of common forms out of common sensibilities. It is an identity of like kinds when the non-essential elements that confuse the issue have been taken away. It is like perceiving like.¹⁶

By understanding the relation of like to like in the macrocosm and the microcosm, Plotinus suggests that man grasps self and the world at once. According to the "Emerald Tablet,"

That which is above is as that which is below, and that which is below is as that which is above, for performing the miracles of the One thing.¹⁷

¹³ See: Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. R. Hope (Ann Arbor: Ann Arbor Paperbacks, 1960), 1.6.987a29, b12, 988a7.

¹⁴ Cited in R. B. Harris, "A Brief Description of Neoplatonism", in R. B. Harris (ed.), *The Significance of Neoplatonism* (Norfolk: International Society for Neoplatonic studies, 1976), p. 6.

¹⁵ M. A. Atwood, *A Suggestive Inquiry Into the Hermetic Mystery* (1850) (New York: Arno Press, 1976). This book is an excellent source of English translations of alchemical documents; many of these documents are now either out of print or available only in Latin and/or in Greek. All references to the *Corpus Hermeticum* and to other ancient alchemical volumes are, unless otherwise indicated, from this text.

¹⁶ R. B. Harris, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

¹⁷ M. A. Atwood, *op. cit.*, p. 498.

THE ALCHEMICAL METHOD

Fundamentally, the science of alchemy arises from these Gnostic principles. It is an ontology: a search for the Essence of matter, with a purpose to transform base substances into that which is perfect and simple. As such, the alchemical art duplicates the act of God's creation where, from the *materia confusa*, God ordered the elements into a harmonious whole. And it is an epistemology: the spirit of the One is omnipresent yet dimly perceived in nature's multiplicity. The stages of the alchemical work necessarily involve stages of illumination. They also define the boundaries of human awareness, the times where even the divine *mens* falls short of perceiving the no-one-thing, the nothing and everything that is the One.

A good guide to the procedures of alchemy, demonstrating the integral relationship of both the physical and metaphysical components of the opus is the Harranite *Liber Platonis quartorum*.¹⁸ The document which pre-dates the tenth century, is composed of four series of correspondences, each containing four "books".

I	II	III	IV
1. <i>De opere naturalium</i> (The work of natural things)	1. <i>Elementum aquae</i> (Water)	1. <i>Natura compositae</i> (Composite natures)	1. <i>Sensum</i> (Senses)
2. <i>Exaltatio divisionis naturae</i> (Emphasis on or exaltation of the division of nature)	2. <i>Elementum terrae</i> (Earth)	2. <i>Naturae discretae</i> (Discriminated natures)	2. <i>Discretio intellectualis</i> (Intellectual discrimination)
3. <i>Exaltatio animae</i> (Emphasis on or exaltation of the soul)	3. <i>Elementum (Aeris)</i> (Air)	3. <i>Simplicia</i> (Simple things)	3. <i>Ratio</i> (Reason)
4. <i>Exaltatio intellectus</i> (Emphasis on or exaltation of the intellect)	4. <i>Elementum ignis</i> (Fire)	4. <i>Aetheris simpliciorum</i> (Things pertaining to yet simpler ether)	4. <i>Res quam concludunt hi effectus praecedentes</i> (The thing included in the foregoing effects)

¹⁸ The series of the *Liber Platonis quartorum* is given with a brief synopsis of the accompanying books in C. G. Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy*, trans. R. F. C. Hull, Bollingen Series 20 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), pp. 262-69.

The vertical columns designate analogous modes of operation: literal, allegorical, moral or categorical, and anagogic. The literal series involves the physical manipulation of metals, the search for the *anima Mercurii* and its fixation. The allegorical series, column two, relates to the act of creation. According to the author, the earth emerges from the chaotic waters of the beginning; it releases the volatile element air, and air gives rise to the "finest" substance, fire. The categorical series, column three, specifies the general dynamics of the chart – the movement from compound to simple, the simplest of course being the quintessence, the primordial Ideas. Lastly, an anagogic level concerns the undefinable and mysterious movement of mind, the transformations it undergoes in passing from perception to apperception.

The horizontal rows, on the other hand, indicate grades or stages of maturation. For example, if one follows the progression of the first column, the literal mode of operation, the work commences with "natural things", that is substances as they exist prior to any human interference. On the second grade, these substance are dissolved by various chemical procedures until the four basic elements (fire, air, water and earth) are fully separated from one another. At the base of the elements lies the precipitate or the quintessence. This is the *anima Mercurii*, or the spirit of the One. The third stage is the exaltation, or, as some say, the sublimation of this spirit, which then changes and converts the whole. The last stage is the effect of the above operations. If they have all been performed properly, and it is the will of God, the philosopher produces a new, perfectly refined being, the *Aurum hermeticum* that is also called *aurea apprehensio*, the "golden understanding".

ALCHEMY AND ALLEGORY

Returning to the *Faerie Queene* Book Two, one discovers that there exist stages in Guyon's journey to Acrasia's Bower which parallel the stages of development given by the *Liber Platonis quartorum*. Cantos i-iv present the reader with images of composite nature. Some figures are in harmony, like gold growing naturally in the heart of the earth, and others are in strife. But the reasons for accord or dissention, beyond a dim conception of Fortune or Fate, are unknown. Guyon, the guide, proceeding through

the four elements, as personified by Pyrocles, Phaedria, Cymocles and Mammon, dissolves the composition in Cantos v-vii, and finds the means to convert the substances in vii and viii, Cantos ix and x, then, the journey through the Castle of Alma, reflect the ascension of reason (the *anima rationalis*) which fuses the elements by bringing them into proportion. Cantos xi and xii pertain to the perfecting of the conversion, the transformation of exoteric nature by the light radiating from the centre.

Further, as the Proem suggests, the actions catalogued above should be understood in relation to various levels of interpretation. The literal, allegorical, moral and anagogic modes all coexist and are in simultaneous relationship in Spenser's poem just as they are in the series.

Carl G. Jung comments that the *Liber Platonis quartorum* expresses "in the clearest way possible the identity of something in man with something concealed in matter".¹⁹ Leonard Barkan says almost the same in the artistic context of the *Faerie Queene*:

The uniqueness of Spenser's contribution lies not so much in juxtaposing the abstract and concrete as in uniting the two just as body and soul are united.²⁰

The spiritual and contemplative nature resides directly in concrete form: in the analogy between the sensual realm and that of the soul.

This similarity can only be perceived by a vision which can see material things in qualitative terms – that is, inwardly, – and that which grasps the things of the soul in material terms – that is objectively and concretely. Both alchemy and Spenser's allegory bring us an art of nature because for them all states of inward consciousness are but ways of the one and the only "Nature" which encompasses all things.

The hidden "Nature" that feeble eyes cannot behold in *Faerie Queene* Book Two is the vision of Queen Elizabeth – an image comprising both time and space. Spenser's metaphor for finding her in the Proem is one familiar to the Adepts.

The hounds that "fine footing trace" Elizabeth appear in their literature as the dogs that led the enthusiastic Acteon from the realm of sense perception to the celestial pool where Diana, the All-In-One, bathes.²¹ It

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 269.

²⁰ L. Barkan, *Nature's Work of Art: The Human Body as Image of the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), p. 132.

²¹ Frances Yates provides a discussion of the Actaeon myth as an allegory of the search for vestiges of divinity in the writing of Giordano Bruno. F. A. Yates, *op. cit.*, p. 278; for the Actaeon myth in other alchemical writings see: M. A. Atwood, *op. cit.*, p. 315.

seems to indicate that the world of Faery and its Queen have to be taken as much more than the corporeal England and its sovereign. The attitude towards them is commensurate with the words of Hermeticist Giordano Bruno, who writes of Elizabeth I in his *Cena de le ceneri*:

If her earthly territory were a true reflection of the width and grandeur of her spirit, this great Amphitrite (the Ocean of the fountain of ideas) would bring far horizons within her girdle and enlarge the circumference of her dominion to include not only Britain and Ireland but some new world, as vast as the universal frame, where her all-powerful hand should have full scope to raise a united monarchy.²²

To discover the spirit of Elizabeth, "the Ocean of the fountain of ideas," is to bridge the universe of God's creation to the universe of the mind and, if the All-In-One holds sway, to create a truly united monarchy.

The "Emerald Tablet" says that this unity was the state of things in the beginning:

And as all things were from One, by the meditation of the One, so all things proceed from this One thing by adaptation.²³

The objective to regain the original nobility of human nature means that a human being must be rendered once again like God; otherwise, the human form cannot be reassumed into its infinite and divine archetype.

The transmutation of lead into gold, spiritually understood, is this act of Becoming. Just as the quality of gold cannot be produced by the outward summation of metallic properties such as mass, hardness and colour, so a human being's perfection is no mere assemblage of virtues, but a harmonious equilibrium of all properties. This is the reason why Book Two, which guides the reader towards the refulgent image of Oneness, is entitled "The Legend of ... Temperance."

TEMPERANCE AND ALCHEMY

Thomas Aquinas comments on the state of temperance in his *Summa Theologica*:

Although beauty is becoming to every virtue, it is ascribed to temperance by the way of excellence, for two reasons. First in respect of the generic notion of

²² F. A. Yates, *op. cit.*, p. 289.

²³ M. A. Atwood, *op. cit.*, pp. 498-99.

temperance, which consists in a certain moderate and fitting proportion, and this is what we understand by beauty as attested by Dionysus (Div. Nom. IV). Secondly, because the things from which temperance withholds us, hold the lowest place in man, and are becoming to him by reason of his animal nature, as we shall state further on (AA. 4, 5:QCXL11, A4), wherefore it is natural that such things defile him.²⁴

Later Aquinas argues that the body or the passions *per se* do not withdraw temperance from us; that which holds "the lowest place" is not the body or the passions *per se*, but the state where they dominate, leading man to act contrary to, or out of harmony with reason.²⁵

The beauty that Aquinas calls the excellence of temperance – the "moderate and fitting proportions" and the movement away from the "lower parts", the animal nature that rejects reason – is actually the force that propels the Hermetic transformation. Beginning with the inferior composite, the four elements are separated and then, finding their quintessence (the *anima rationalis*), they are recombined in the proper proportion to create the philosopher's stone. "Convert the elements", says Arnaldus de Volanova, "and you shall have what you desire: that is to say, separate the matter in its essential relationships and join them again together in harmonious proportion." And, similarly, Sir George Ripley writes: "The elements of Mercury being separated and again combined by equal weight or proportion, make the elixir complete."²⁶

Yet, the harmony of the elements is only part of the perfection of the elixir. Paracelsus explains that the balance of the elements also yokes together body, soul, and spirit. Referring to these as salt (the incombustible and nonvolatile), sulphur (the inflammable), and mercury (the fusible and volatile), he concluded that the infirmities of the flesh are brought about by excesses in one or all of these. When they are balanced, they make the human being immortal.²⁷

The "Golden Treaties" a part of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, anticipates Paracelsus's theory. It likens his three "hypostatic principles" to earth (body), water (soul) and oil (spirit):

²⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica*, trans. Father of English Dominican Province (London: Burns, Oates and Washbournes Ltd., 1932), 2.2.141.2. Cf.: 2.2.143.1.

²⁵ Aquinas writes that excessive pleasure of the body "absorbs the mind", and that it is against nature being "incompatible with the act understanding." 2.2.153.2. Cf.: 2.2.151.4. 2.2.153.5. 2.2.156.1.

²⁶ Atwood compares the words of *Consilium coniugii*: "The elements of the stone are four, which, when well proportioned to one another, constitute the philosophical man, that is, the perfect elixir." T. Aquinas, *op. cit.*, pp. 84 and 116. Cf.: C. G. Jung, *Alchemical Studies*, trans. R. F. C. Hull, Bollingen Series (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967).

²⁷ E. J. Holmyard, *op. cit.*, pp. 174–75.

The Son-Father, which of these is more worthy than the other, to be the heaven or to be the earth? He replies – Each needs the other; for the precepts demand a medium... In every nature there are three from two, first the needful water, then the oily tincture, and lastly the faeces or earth which remains below... But a dragon inhabits all these and are his habitation; and the blackness is in them, and by it he ascends into the air. But, whilst the fume remains in them, they are not immortal. Take away therefore the vapour from the water, and the blackness from the oily tincture, and death from the faeces; and by dissolution thou shalt achieve a triumphant reward, even that in and by which the possessors live.²⁸

Thus again, when body, soul and spirit are properly mixed, the subject withdraws from that which deforms and blackens it, and rises towards the sphere of transcendent nature. According to the "Emerald Tablet": "It (the newly created stone) ascends from earth to heaven, and again to earth; and receives the strength of the superiors and the inferiors."²⁹

The House of Temperance where Alma abides, the apex of Guyon's quest, is built on the same principles of proportion of which the alchemists write. Spenser describes its structure in Canto ix, stanza 22:

The frame thereof seem'd partly circulare,
And part triangulare, O worke diuine;
Those two the first and last proportions are;
The one imperfect, mortall, feminine;
Th'other immortall, perfect, masculine:
And twixt them both a quadrate was the base,
Proportioned equally by seuen and nine:
Nine was the circle set in heauens place:
All which compacted made a goodly diapase.

The inferior triangle (the body) joins the superior circle (the soul) on the base of the four proportioned elements; thereby it is brought into accord with seven (the planets) and nine (the intelligences), and the circle (the soul) even ascends to "heauens place".³⁰

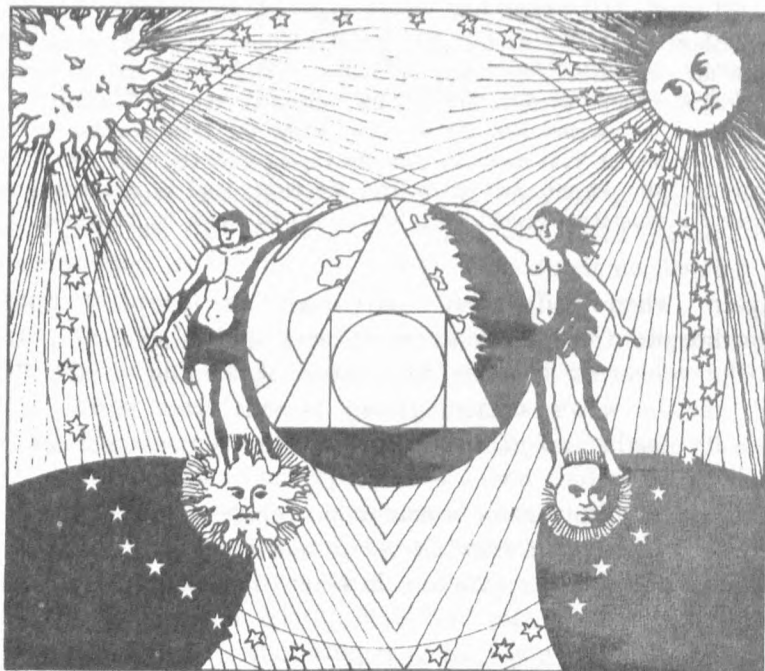
This design of Spenser's House of Temperance is similar to much Hermetic artwork intended to show the harmony of the universe. The figure below, taken from the *Viatorum spagyricum* which dates back to the 1620s.³¹

²⁸ M. A. Atwood, *op. cit.*, pp. 119–20.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 499.

³⁰ See: Sir Kinelm Digby, "Observations", in E. Greenlaw et al. (eds.) *The Works of Edmund Spenser: A Variorum Edition* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1923), pp. 472–78.

³¹ On the basis of the original the figure has been drawn by Barbara Grzejszczak.



The masculine Sol (Spirit) and the feminine Luna (body) are united by the word soul or Mercury. The harmony in the macrocosm is mirrored in the microcosm by the accord between the triangle, quadrangle and circle. The Caption reads: "All things do live in three, but in the four they merry be." Bringing the three together with the one is the power of Mercurius. The ground plan of the Sabaeen temple of Mercurius was a triangle inside a square. In the Scholium to the ancient *Tractatus Aureus*, the sign for Mercurius is a square inside a triangle surrounded by a circle.³²

Spenser may not have such representations of Mercurius in mind when he fashioned Alma's Castle but there is plenty of evidence to suggest that he was thinking of the same concepts. The widespread popularity of Hermeticism among Renaissance scholars, its sacred and empirical character, its influence on the Neoplatonism of Ficino and Pico, the appearance of the celebrated mystic Giordano Bruno in England and his effects on acquaintances like Sidney and Harvey, all present a convincing argument that Spenser indeed knew the precepts of alchemy if he did not himself practice them.

³² C. G. Jung, *Alchemical Studies*, p. 224.

Further, Book Two, which Spenser promises can open the hidden world of Faery, appears to develop along the lines of the four principle steps in the *opus alchemicum*: namely, it begins with compound substances and proceeds toward the simple through separating and recombining the principle elements. It has various levels of interpretation which are all present simultaneously from literal to anagogic, and all are somehow centered on the mystical idea of an All-In-One. The Faery Queen, Elizabeth I, rules over a world perfectly proportioned and unified. The means to her, as the alchemists believe to be the means to God, is to become like her, to bring forth balance and unity and shun all that causes disharmony: It is, in short, to gain the virtue of temperance.

British Studies
and Research Center

Krystyna Kujawińska-Courtney

ALCHEMIA I KRÓLOWA ELFÓW EDMUNDA SPENSERA WPROWADZENIE METODOLOGICZNE

Prezentowany artykuł oparty na literaturze średniowiecznej, renesansowej i współczesnej, ma na celu „wprowadzenie do metodologii *opus alchemicum*”, jego tła, ideologii, celów i praktyki, a także ma określić, jak studia nad alchemią mogą pomóc w oświetleniu spenserowskiego świata czarów w poemacie *The Faerie Queene*.

Punktem wyjścia dla rozważań autorki jest *Proem* do drugiej księgi *Królowej Elfów*, wskazujący na zbieżność myślenia kompozycyjnego poety, oraz teorii i praktyki alchemii, które Spenser musiał poznać podczas studiów uniwersyteckich.

Artykuł składa się z następujących części: krótka historia alchemii, metoda alchemiczna, alchemia i alegoria. W ostatniej części autorka wraca do równoległości między postępowaniem alchemicznym a postępowaniem alegoryzującym Spensera. Używa on metody alchemicznej, łącząc abstrakcję i konkret tak jak duszę i ciało. Ujmując poemat w czterech poziomach interpretacji – od dosłownej do anagogicznej, sprawia, że ziemskie terytorium Anglii staje się odbiciem wielkości i wspaniałości Elżbiety I, Amfitryny Oceanu rozciągającego się do nowego świata i stanowiącego jego symbol. Jednocześnie tytuł drugiej księgi – *Temperance* – odnosi się do cnoty umiarkowania jako drogi do królowej i – w jedność rzeczy – do Boga.