“And dearest loue”: Virgilian half-lines in Spenser’s Faerie Queene

How to cite:

For guidance on citations see FAQs.

© 2018 Richard Danson Brown

Version: Accepted Manuscript

Link(s) to article on publisher’s website:
http://www.virgilsociety.org.uk/proceedings.htm

Copyright and Moral Rights for the articles on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. For more information on Open Research Online’s data policy on reuse of materials please consult the policies page.
“And dearest loue”:
Virgilian half-lines in
Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*

*Revised from a paper given to the Virgil Society on 25 January 2014*

This paper is concerned with errors and incompletions: to use an Elizabethan term, “vnperfections”, of which my original title fortuitously included one.¹ The half-line I intended to use as a title is in fact “And dearest loue”, not “And sweetest loue”, but my memory inadvertently slipped to the final line of the stanza in question and transposed the epithets:

> And all about grew euery sort of flowre,
> To which sad louers were transformd of yore;
> Fresh Hyacinthus, Phoebus paramoure,
> And dearest loue,
> Foolish Narcisse, that likes the watry shore,
> Sad Amaranthus, made a flowre but late,
> Sad Amaranthus, in whose purple gore
> Me seemes I see Amintas wretched fate,

*(III.vi.45)²*

My confused epithets communicate something important about Spenser’s poetic idiom, as well as his debt to Virgil, and, in this case, to Ovid.³ To a significant extent, it doesn’t seem important who is “sweet” or what is “deare” in this stanza: Spenser’s poetic language does not

---

¹ See ‘unperfection, n.’, *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, September 2016.
² Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A. C. Hamilton, 2001, Harlow, 349. All quotations from *The Faerie Queene* are from this edition, unless otherwise stated. After this note, as is customary in quoting Spenser, I give in text references to book, canto and stanza number. Hence above the reference is to book III, canto vi, stanza 45. A fourth number, where used, refers to a line or lines within a stanza.
admit of the sharply turned, affective epithets which he would have found in Virgil. One of Spenser’s staunchest twentieth-century advocates, C. S. Lewis, went so far as to describe his use of adjectives as “abdications of the poet’s true office”.4 Dear, sweet, sad, it doesn’t seem to matter, we might think, so long as it scans. I put it like this because I do not fully believe that to be the case. Spenser’s language is complex, various and devious in the ways it aims to affect its readers. By focusing on The Faerie Queene’s half-lines, I want to try to illuminate how Elizabethans read Virgil, and to develop an understanding of Spenserian unperfectness in the context of how we should read such moments in The Faerie Queene. Are they deliberate? What—if anything—is going on in these minute stylistic allusions to Virgil’s poem? What do they tell us about Spenser’s attitudes to literary form? Such work is necessarily speculative, since The Faerie Queene is, like the Aeneid, unfinished; it may have been that had he lived, Spenser might have tidied up all the remaining half-lines. But this is itself a form of biographical speculation. As I show, there are sound textual reasons for believing that Spenser intended the majority of these half-dozen lines as a deliberate counterpoint to the more uniform appearance of the rest of his poem. Part of the connection between Virgil and Spenser’s half-lines is that they tend not to leave gaps in the sense, so that it is possible for the reader to make sense of metrically “vnperfit” fragments: “Foolish Narcisse” follows on logically from “And dearest loue” in the list-lament of III.vi.45 without the need of further emendation. Still, the half-lines demand interpretation: what is at issue is whether they should be read mimetically (that is, as relating to the poem’s meaning), or as more or less decorative allusions to the Aeneid. As will become clear, my hunch inclines to the former position. Prior to this, I consider how the Aeneid’s half-lines appeared to Elizabethan readers in translations, to illustrate how 16th-century writers sought to render these eccentric elements of the Virgilian text.

**Virgil’s Half-lines**

There are some fifty half-lines in the Aeneid.5 According to Aelius Donatus’ 4th century AD *Life of Virgil*, these are remnants of Virgil’s compositional process—“little struts or props … to support the structure until the solid columns arrived”—which remained in the text because he could not finish the poem to his satisfaction before his premature death.6 Donatus’ text is a strange amalgam of different sources. As David Scott Wilson-Okamura explains, in the Renaissance it was further added to, producing a composite which he calls “the humanistic vita”, and it is this text which was usually printed during the period.7 I quote the most important

---

6 Quoted in Wilson-Okamura, *Virgil* (n.5 above) 102.
7 Wilson-Okamura, *Virgil* (n.5 above) 54.
passage from the Elizabethan translation, probably by Thomas Twyne. This first appeared in the 1573 edition of Thomas Phaer’s translation, *The whole xii. bookes of the Æneidos of Virgill*, which Twyne completed after Phaer’s death:

> “Varus at Augustus commaundment did set forth nothinge, as Virgil willed he shulde not: but generally perused all, leaving also those verses as they were, still vnperfect. Whiche verses diuers afterward tooke in hand to make vp, but they could not for the difficulty therof, for they be all Hemistichia, that is to say half verses[.]”8

My concern is not the precise meaning of this passage in relation to the textual condition of the *Aeneid*, a problem considered in depth by John Sparrow, but is rather what it tells us about the Elizabethan view of the half-lines.9 Though written long after the events it purports to describe, Donatus’ *Vita* is a work of the first importance to understanding Virgil in Renaissance England. Wilson-Okamura comments that the *Vita* “was probably known to more readers (including, presumably, more poets) than Servius himself”.10 Certainly, it was given a prominent place in the later editions of Phaer’s translation. Even though the header describes it somewhat sceptically as “Virgils life, set forth, as it is supposed, by Aelius Donatus”, a description which perhaps indicates Twyne’s awareness of some of the problems in its transmission, the Donatus Life is the most significant interpretive matter offered to readers in the translation.11 Phaer’s translation is an important, and in my view underestimated, facet both of the transmission of Virgil in 16th-century England and of the poetic Renaissance in England.12 Here the central point is that 16th-century readers believed on the authority of “Donatus” that the half-lines in the *Aeneid* were evidence of the “vnperfect” state in which the poem was left after the death of its author. Sparrow’s argument – that some of the half-lines may have been deliberate and that Virgil used this device as a conscious innovation13 – is relevant to Spenser’s half-lines, yet it is not a view which 16th-century readers would have adopted on the basis of Donatus’s *Vita*.

---

8 Virgil, *The whole xii. bookes of the AEneidos of Virgill*, trans. Thomas Phaer with Thomas Twyne, 1573, London, sig. C2v. Twyne’s contributions to the new edition are signalled on the title page: “the first .ix. and part of the tenth, were converted into English meeter by Thomas Phaër Esquire, and the residue supplied, and the whole worke together newly set forth, by Thomas Twyne, Gentleman. There is added moreover to this edition, Virgils life out of Donatus, and the argument before euery booke”, sig. A1r. Twyne signs the dedicatory letter to Sir Nicholas Bacon which immediately precedes the Life (sigs A2r-v), so it is a reasonable assumption that he was also responsible for the translation and its heading discussed below. Unless otherwise stated, all pre-1700 printed materials were consulted through Early English Books Online (EEBO).
10 Wilson-Okamura, *Virgil* (n.5 above) 49–50.
11 Virgil (n.8 above) sig. A3r.
13 Sparrow (n.9 above) 45.
Half-lines in English translations

How should a translator of Virgil deal with these half-lines?\textsuperscript{14} The answer to this question is a combination of “it depends when you’re writing” with the related supplementary “it depends on your chosen verse form”. Such caveats betray broader issues of poetic taste and style at particular points in time. Wilson-Okamura has recently revived the idea of “period style”, which he characterises as “the style that, when you are in a period, does not seem like a style at all. It’s not the cut of your clothes, it’s the fabric they are made of”.\textsuperscript{15} Translation is a pre-eminent witness to period style, in which we read the tastes of a culture rather than those of the individual, as when Edward Fairfax’s translation of \textit{Gerusalemme liberata} as \textit{Godfrey of Bulloigne} (1600) effectually “Spenserianises” the original: Spenser’s then fashionable idiom conditions the kind of poetry Fairfax finds for the job of translating Tasso.\textsuperscript{16}

So, for example, John Dryden’s celebrated 1697 translation of the \textit{Aeneid} into rhyming couplets generally avoids half-lines altogether, although he had used them in his earlier version of the Nisus and Euryalus episode.\textsuperscript{17} Book 2, which has 10 half-lines in the original, the largest for any single book,\textsuperscript{18} has none at all in Dryden’s version; each half-line is smoothed out into regular rhyming couplets and occasional triplets. Virgil’s abrupt, brilliant truncated image of Trojan civilians as prisoners of war, \textit{pueri, & pauidae longo ordine matres / Stant circum} (\textit{Aen.} 2.766–67)\textsuperscript{19} becomes Dryden’s almost too elegantly poised couplet, “A ranck of wretched Youths, with pinion’d Hands, / And captive Matrons in long Order stands”.\textsuperscript{20} Note the way Dryden adds the detail of “with pinion’d hands” to fill out the couplet form, and subtly ages Virgil’s \textit{pueri} to “Youths”. The details are certainly plausible, but they are also characteristic expansions of the Virgilian text. Conversely, modern translations tend to have fewer problems accommodating the metrical eccentricity of half-lines. Robert Fagles’s version, with its looser unrhymed lines pitched between five and seven main stresses, easily accommodates shorter lines as a useful variant. In this passage, Fagles has: “Children and trembling mothers rounded up / in a long, endless line”, though the half-line is then filled out as the translator embarks

\textsuperscript{19} Virgil, \textit{Pub. Virgili Maronis opera}, 1570, London, 173. This edition was printed by Henry Bynneman, who was to publish the Spenser-Harvey Letters in 1580. For the importance of consulting Renaissance texts when discussing the Renaissance Virgil, see Wilson-Okamura, \textit{Virgil} (n.5 above) 4.
on a new verse paragraph. The original is respected, but not literally. The comparison of Dryden with Fagles emphasizes the different period styles of the late 17th and early 21st centuries. Where Dryden gives his readers a polished English version of Virgil which edits out the original’s rough edges, Fagles capitalizes on those same roughnesses as a license for his more flexible measures.

Similar contrasts between competing styles may be observed within the 16th century, inasmuch as choices about verse form betoken often complex cultural affiliations. The rhyming couplet in iambic pentameter has not yet established itself as the dominant poetic form in English, and the (almost) natural choice for heroic poetry. The translations Spenser would have known employ a range of forms. Gavin Douglas’s Middle Scots *Eneados* of 1513 (there was an edition printed in London in 1553) is in decasyllabic couplets and avoids half-lines. Douglas was following the precedent of Chaucer rather than anticipating the practice of Jonson and Dryden. His version of the passage quoted above is the more angular and (according to taste) more prolix “The young children, and frayit matrons eik, / Stude all on raw, with mony piteous skreek / About the treasure whimpering wonder sair”. Douglas’s version was an important crib for the Earl of Surrey’s pioneering translation into unrhymed blank verse (printed by Richard Tottell in 1557), probably the nearest equivalent in English to the poetic effect of the Latin dactylic hexameter. Surrey’s practice is inconsistent in respect of half-lines. On the one hand, he includes several short measures. For instance, his version of book 2’s first half-line (66) is powerfully epigrammatic: “The Grekes deceit beholde, and by one profe / Imagine all the rest”. On the other hand, the *stant circum* passage becomes two full lines: “The children orderly, and mothers pale for fright / Long ranged on a rowe stode round about”.

---


23 See Tottel’s Miscellany: *Songs and Sonnets of Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, Sir Thomas Wyatt and Others*, ed. A. Holden & T. MacFaul, 2011, London, ix–x, for Tottel’s career. As with most London booksellers, literature was something of a sideline for Tottel, though inevitably it is for his few literary publications that his name has survived.

24 The notion of poetic equivalence is necessarily a complex one; see Wilson-Okamura (n. 15 above) 44–47, who suggests that one complete Spenserian stanza offers a “functional equivalent or analogy” (46) for the aesthetic impact of a single line of Virgilian dactylic hexameter, with Spenser’s final alexandrine substituting for Virgil’s final spondee, and Hardison’s comment on Surrey’s blank verse quoted below.

25 Virgil, *Certain bokes of Virgiles Aeneis turned into English meter by the right honorable lorde, Henry Earle of Surrey*, 1557, London, sig. A3r. The Bodleian has two copies of this book, both of which are reproduced on EEBO; I quote from STC / 944:08, because this preserves the beginning of book 2.

26 Virgil (n.25 above) sig. D2r-v.
stresses), the form which incidentally Spenser came to use as the tailpiece for each of his nine-line stanzas. Surrey is inventive and prophetic – O. B. Hardison suggests that “he invented a true English equivalent of sustained heroic verse” – but he had little interest in the accurate representation of the “unperfections” of his Latin original.27

The most extreme Elizabethan Virgil is Richard Stanyhurst’s quantitative version of the first four books (1582). Though widely mocked, Stanyhurst is an important reminder that the triumph of accentual rhyming verse was not a foregone conclusion during the later 16th century.28 Humanists across Europe wanted vernacular verse forms to mirror what they saw as the specialized artifice and technique of Latin verse. The experiment to wrest modern languages to the same metrical demands as Latin was almost natural to a culture educationally and psychologically rooted in classical literature. Spenser was a vocal exponent of quantitative meters at the same moment in time, in the late 1570s and early 1580s. Though Andrew Hadfield’s recent biography suggests that he never invested much faith in the quantitative movement, Spenser published a quantitative poem, and advocated the radical subjugation of conventional English pronunciation, to make it fit better with Latin notions of quantity, even to the extent of insisting that the median vowel of carpenter could be extended to make it scan in a classical fashion, on the grounds that “Rough words must be subdued with Vse”.29 Derek Attridge’s study provides the quantitative movement with an epitaph which pays tribute to its curious fascination:

“Probably at no other time have the attitudes towards metre engendered in English minds by a rigorous training in Latin prosody using an unclassical pronunciation fused so completely with the cultural and aesthetic ideals of the age as during the reign of Elizabeth; and however futile the quantitative movement may seem in retrospect, its achievements remain as impressive testimony to the power exerted by that synthesis.”

As Attridge notes, the problem with Stanyhurst’s version is that it “makes very few concessions to the native tradition of English verse” because of his “strict imitation of Latin accentual patterns and restrictions on word lengths”.30 Because he is strict, Stanyhurst imitates the half-lines

29 Edmund Spenser, Spenser’s Prose Works, ed. R. Gottfried, 1949, Baltimore, 16; A. Hadfield, Edmund Spenser: A Life, 2012, Oxford, 106–09. Spenser’s poem ‘Iambicum Trimetrum’ was published in the correspondence with Harvey: see Spenser’s Prose Works, 7–8. Although this is at one level a relatively slight variation on Petrarchan conventions (“Tell hir, that hir sweete Tongue was wonte to make me mirth”), it remains an experimental text which shows the poet willing to imagine the metrical restructuring of English, in line with the aggressive attitude towards linguistic change shown in the letter to Harvey. See also R. Helgerson, Forms of Nationhood: The Elizabethan Writing of England, 1992, Chicago (1–3, 25–40) for a historicist and political reading of Spenser’s position in the Letters.
30 Attridge (n.28 above) 235–36, 195.
directly; his version of the *stant circum* passage is curiously effective as it focuses on the terror of the captured “mothers”:

*thear ar eke young children in order*

*With cold hart moothers, for Grekish victorie quaking,
Setted on al sides*\(^\text{31}\)

It should be said that this is Stanyhurst at his best. His version of a different half-line passage, *(Aen. 2.345–46)*, on Coroebus’ inability to heed Cassandra’s prophecies, is more typical of his clotted syntax and unusual word choices: “His pheers woud prophycyes not at all the yooncker unhappie / Herd”.\(^\text{32}\) Lexically, Stanyhurst has always been challenging: thus “pheers” means “fere’s” (that is Cassandra, his wife’s mad prophecies),\(^\text{33}\) while the decision to put the subject – “the yooncker unhappie” – at the end of the line fights against English’s natural tendency to want to have the subject ahead of the verb.\(^\text{34}\) By the same token “not at all” struggles for a grammatical function as the reader makes unsteady progress through the line before the arrival of that postponed subject. Phaer’s version of this passage is – perhaps inevitably – closer to the norms of modern English, and is therefore less exciting, though easier to construe: “Vnhappy man, that what his spouse him rauing told in traunce: / Wold not regard”.\(^\text{35}\) Nevertheless, Stanyhurst’s dedication to getting an English equivalence to the Virgilian text produces a text which is at once curious and impressive in its distinctive poetic idiom. Consider the single broken line, “Herd”, which successfully mimics Virgil’s *Infelix, qui non sponsae praecepta furentis / Audierat*.\(^\text{36}\) The satirist Thomas Nashe pilloried Stanyhurst for his “Thrasonical huffe snuffe”, yet as Colin Burrow notes, the strange diction is partly a product of Stanyhurst’s cultural location as an Irish Catholic who emigrated to Leiden, and whose version of Virgil resists the cultural hegemony of Protestant English.\(^\text{37}\) Nevertheless, Stanyhurst is a stylistic cul-de-sac: what might be called an “unherd” argot in an unspoken language.\(^\text{38}\)


\(^{32}\) Virgil (n.31 above) 31.


\(^{34}\) A literal translation of this passage into modern English would be “The unfortunate young man did not hear his wife’s mad prophecy at all.”

\(^{35}\) Virgil (n.8 above) sig. D4r.

\(^{36}\) Virgil (n.19 above) 159.


In contrast, Phaer’s Aeneidos squarely reflects English poetic tastes of the 1550s and 1560s. Its rather lumpen rhyming fourteener couplets embody a period style: a widely used convention shared by a number of writers at the time, but which fell into disuse during the last two decades of the century. Phaer merits longer discussion, both because his version is the one with the largest cultural reach during the 16th century, and because it is the least familiar to modern readers. Phaer’s Virgil also takes us closer to Spenser. It was first published in the decade of his birth, and it is precisely its limitations which can work to remind us of the radicalism of what Spenser was attempting in The Faerie Queene.

Apart from Douglas’s version, Phaer’s is both the fullest translation and the most often reprinted. Between 1558 and 1620, it went through eight editions; this compares well with the three editions of The Faerie Queene published between 1590 and 1609. Phaer died in 1560, having completed books 1–9 and a portion of book 10; the translation was finished by Twyne in 1573, who added a version of Maffeo Vegio’s humanistic thirteenth book in 1584.

Modern commentators take a dim view of Phaer’s abilities as a poet: Hardison describes the Aeneidos as a “competent paraphrase but not a work that conveys the elevation of the original to an English reader”, while Ezra Pound had dismissed it as “tenebrous”. Pound was however a huge admirer of Arthur Golding’s 1564 translation of the Metamorphoses, also into fourteeners. Arguably, his stylistic radar was off beam in both cases: Golding is probably not as good as Pound suggests, while Phaer is certainly not as bad. Pound’s opinion was in any case not shared by Elizabethan readers. William Webbe, in his Discourse of English Poetrie (1586), saw in Phaer’s version a demonstration of the heroic potential of English, even going so far as to suggest that “the coppy it selfe [i.e. Virgil’s poem] goeth no whit beyond it [i.e. Phaer’s version]”. Webbe was also a strenuous advocate of quantitative metres, so this judgement shows the force of his embattled linguistic patriotism, as he wills the Phaer version against his own stylistic predilections into being an epic contender. Even the usually scabrous Nashe described it as “heauenly verse” in the same text which rubbishes Stanyhurst.

---

39 It compares even better with Douglas’s Eneados: though Douglas’s version is manifestly superior poetically, it was printed only once in London (in 1553: n.22 above); Phaer’s success is partly a consequence of his use of a more standard English. See Kendal (n.22 above) vol. 1, xxxix, for the manuscript circulation and printing history of Douglas’s version. See also Brammall (n.14 above) 19.
41 Webbe in Smith (n.37 above) vol. 1, 259. For Webbe’s “conference” of Phaer with Virgil, see ibid. 256–62. For Webbe’s use of “coppy” to mean “that which is copied”, see ‘copy’, n. and adj. IV. 8, OED Online, Oxford University Press, September 2016, citing this passage.
42 Nashe in Smith (n.37 above) vol. 1, 315. In the same sentence Nashe was more waspish about Phaer as a man, enigmatically noting that “had it not bin blemisht by his hautie thoghts England might haue long insulted in his wit, and corrigat qui potest have been subscribed to his workes”. “Insulted” here has the sense of “boasted”; see ‘insult’, v, 1.c, OED Online, Oxford University Press, September 2016, citing this passage.
Like Stanyhurst, Phaer observes all the half-lines in book 2. His rendering of the *stant circum* passage gives a flavour of his translation as a whole. In this case I give a slightly longer excerpt:

*Amids the flore the kéepers stoode, the chief of capteines stout,*

*Both Phenix and Vlisses false with them their trayn about*

*The praie did kéépe, and Greekes to them the Troian riches brought,*

*That from the fiers on every syde was raught: all temples sought*

*And tables from the gods were take, and basons great of gold,*

*And precious plate and robes of kyngly state, and treasours old,*

*And captiue childern stoode, and trembyng wifes in long aray*

*Were stowed about and wept.*

John Thompson long ago pointed out the predictable quality of the caesura in the fourteener, which usually falls after the eighth syllable. For Thompson, this helps to account for the ultimate triumph of the shorter iambic pentameter line, which became freer and less predictable in its placement of caesura. Though there are exceptions to this rule, the point remains that in the fourteener, metrical pattern tends to “overwhelm” speech rhythm and the rhythm of phrase. In Robert Lowell’s evocative summary, Golding’s fourteener “seems like some arbitrary and wayward hurdle, rather than the very backbone of what is being said”. The fourteener is not a metrically flexible form: rather, it tends to constrain syntax and meter to its demands. This passage demonstrates the uneasy dance Phaer has to perform between faithfully rendering the Latin and the exigencies of the form. There is virtually no ambiguity of stress – the iambic pattern is observed almost mechanically. This is why Phaer writes “the gods were take” in place of the more natural English perfect tense, “were taken”:

“the gods were take” in place of the more natural English perfect tense, “were taken”: the latter would add a syllable and disrupt the meter, so the inflected participle is sacrificed to the metrical pattern. But he has some success in varying caesura position; sense is not always contained by the couplet form, with some effective enjambments in phrases like “all temples sought / And tables from the gods were take”.

---

43 Virgil (n.8 above) sig. F2r.
44 There are problems with this argument, particularly in relation to the idea that the iambic pentameter line is always flexible in terms of caesura. Both George Gascoigne and George Puttenham argued that the caesura should always fall after the fourth syllable in a decasyllabic line, and there is significant evidence in the work of poets like Gascoigne, Raleigh and Churchyard that this form – which I characterize elsewhere as the 4 / 6 line – was all but hegemonic in poetic practice during the 1570s and -80s. See Gascoigne in Smith (n.37 above) vol. 1, 54; Puttenham, *The Art of English Poesy*, ed. F. Whigham & W. A. Rebhorn, 2007, Ithaca NY, 162, and C. M. Bajetta, ‘Ralegh’s Early Poetry in its Metrical Context’, *Studies in Philology* 93.4 (1996), 390–411.
fourteener’s tendency to monotony, by virtue of its brevity, its avoidance of rhyme, and the
emphasis which the syntax inevitably throws onto the metrical fragment. Nevertheless, this
is far from the pointed syntax and imagistic sharpness of the Latin, or the versions of Surrey
and even Stanyhurst. Notice the way Phaer introduces the strictly redundant “stowed” to
qualify “the tremblyng wifes”, because he does not want to repeat “stoode” which qualifies
the “captiue children”.

Spenser learnt much from writers like Phaer about keeping a steady beat, but he also varied
their practice by his use of syllabic ambiguity, in which stress is shifted according to poetic
context. A good example of this is the line “But in lewd loues, and wastfull luxuree” from
the climax to book II of The Faerie Queene, the Bower of Bliss (xii.80). While this is a perfect
decasyllabic line which can be stressed as an orthodox iambic pentameter, I would suggest you
miss its full weight unless you are prepared to read the powerful alliterative phrase “lewd loves”
as two consecutive syllables which take a strong accent. There is a similar quasi-spondaic
pattern to the line “To which sad louers were transformd of yore”, quoted above. The Faerie
Queene is full of these metrical grace notes to a far greater extent than is usually acknowledged.
Spenser achieves metrical variety neither through quantitative experiment, nor through the
wrenching of the conventional accent later practised by Donne, but through the cultivation
of syllabic ambiguity and variety of caesura in decasyllabic lines and alexandrines. The
imitation of the Virgilian half-lines is part of this commitment to metrical experiment: by
interpreting Virgil’s poetic lesions as poetic lessons, Spenser achieves variety of effect.

What emerges from these comparisons is that poetic and intellectual fashions in English
verse dictate what is picked up in translation in the 16th century. The status of the half-lines
varies accordingly. The translations most influenced by humanism are those of Stanyhurst
and Phaer, which arguably fail in different ways: one is too eccentric, while the other is too
predictable. Both poets urgently want to find English equivalents for the Virgilian half-lines,
but they do not turn these features to decisive artistic advantage. The idealist Stanyhurst
rigorously reproduces each one; the more pragmatic Surrey, whose verse form would soon
become hegemonic, is less determined to follow the patterns of the Latin original.

47 See G. T. Wright, Shakespeare’s Metrical Art, 1988, Berkeley CA, 149–59, for the argument that Shakespeare
cultivated “metrical ambiguity” (158). The conventional view is succinctly expressed by J. Dolven, ‘Spenser’s
shows a “massive commitment to iambic movement”. While this is true, my point is that such “iambic movement”
necessarily makes room for the spondaic, trochaic and even pyrrhic iamb obseved by Wright in Shakespeare. For
another example, consider III.vi.1, “Seemeth that such wild woods should far expel”, which on Dolven’s account
would be scanned as a trochee followed by four iamb. Using Wright’s model of syllabic ambiguity, I read this
line as a trochee, a pyrrhic, a spondee, and then two iamb.

48 My emphases.

49 See Wilson-Okamura (n.15 above) 31–32, for Spenser’s preference for a looser, Italian model of caesura
placement.
Writing “Virgil” into stanzas

Spenser’s debt to Virgil is both well known and widely discussed. At what was probably an early stage his career, certainly prior to the death of the Earl of Leicester in 1588, Spenser translated the pseudo-Virgilian *Culex* as *Virgil’s Gnat*. It was eventually published in the *Complaints* volume of 1591. As Spenser’s title indicates, he was confident of the *Culex*’s connection with Virgil; he was later to borrow the *Ciris* for aspects of Book III of *The Faerie Queene*, again underlining the extent to which he maintained what Colin Burrow suggests was an unusual interest in the *Appendix Vergiliana*. The extraordinary dedicatory sonnet to the long dead Earl of Leicester, which prefixes *Virgil’s Gnat*, makes explicit the connection Spenser felt between himself and “Virgil”. As Spenser feels himself to have been “Wrong’d” by Leicester, so the translation gives a “clowdie”, or allegorical, account of Spenser’s “evill plight”. For the purposes of understanding the half-lines in *The Faerie Queene*, and how they may or may not imitate Virgil, the still relatively marginal *Virgil’s Gnat* provides a template for the ways in which Spenser reprocessed dactylic hexameter verse paragraphs into rhyming stanzas.

Spenser’s most important stylistic decision was to render Latin dactylic hexameters as stanzaic verse: he chose *ottava rima*, the eight-line stanza form with the interlaced rhyme scheme, 

\[
\text{Ababacdc}
\]

used by Ariosto and Tasso in their epics. This recasting of the *Culex* into a modish verse form gives a flavour of how Spenser reworks Virgil. Wilson-Okamura’s *Spenser’s International Style* worries at an analogous problem: why is *The Faerie Queene* so unclassical, given the importance of Virgil to Spenser and his contemporaries? “Why stanzas for epic”? In effect, he suggests, neither Phaer’s fourteener nor Stanyhurst’s quantitative verse sounds any more “classical” than Spenser’s stanzas. Contemporary epic was pervasively stanzaic. *Virgil’s Gnat* then demonstrates at once Spenser’s interest in Virgil as a precedent, and his sense of the possible equivalence between hexameter verse paragraphs and rhyming stanzas. I do not mean to suggest that Spenser (or indeed Sir John Harington) seriously thought *ottava rima* stanzas were “like” dactylic hexameter; I want rather to underline that

---

50 See Wilson-Okamura (n.15 above) 20–24, for an overview.
53 Wilson-Okamura (n.15 above) chapters 1 and 6.
54 This is not an unvarying rule: the chorographical epics by William Warner, *Albion’s England* (1586; 1589, London) and Michael Drayton, *Polyolbion* (1612, London) use fourteener and alexandrine couplets, respectively. See also Wilson-Okamura (n.15 above) 33, for Italian experiments with *versi sciolti da rima*, the Italian equivalent of blank verse.
55 Sir John Harington, *The Sixth Book of Virgil’s Aenid*, ed. S. Cauchi, 1991, Oxford. As Cauchi notes, the choice of *ottava rima* was “unusual”, particularly in England, though there were Italian precedents (xviii).
Elizabethan culture thought stanzaically. Stanzas were the fashionable idiom of poetry and song; the misanthropic Jacques contemptuously asks the singer Amiens for another song in the Forest of Arden by saying, “call you ’em stanzos?”, yet in the same scene shows himself to be an accomplished parodist of the form. Stanzas were ubiquitous: thus the phenomenon of stanzaic Virgils shows the readiness of 16th-century writers to adapt his works to their own preferred tunes.

Despite the massive differences in tone, language and quality between the Latin originals, comparing *Virgil’s Gnat* with Sir John Harington’s ottava rima version of *Aeneid* 6 is instructive. As English poetry, Spenser’s version is generally elegant and pointed, where Harington’s serves to emphasise the huge aesthetic differences and lack of intrinsic formal reciprocity between the two forms. Virgil of course did not think in stanzas, and Harington’s version shows the pressure of trying to splice the matter of semantically freewheeling verse paragraphs into predetermined, unvarying poetic units. These are not always happy accommodations: Virgilian matter often seems cramped in Harington’s pokier poetic spaces. In contrast, *Virgil’s Gnat* shows Spenser assimilating the Latin into a stanzaic idiom chiefly through processes of leisurely expansion: the work of translation is one of unhurried formal transformation. This significantly adds words and lines to the sparser languours of the Latin original:

\[
O \text{ pecudes, } \text{o Panes, } \& \text{ o gratissima Tempe,} \\
\text{Fontis Hamadryadum: quarum non diuite cultu} \\
\text{Aemulus Ascraeo pastor sibi quisque poëtae} \\
\text{Securam placido traducit pectore uitam.}\]

Spenser was in his element in the blissful locus amoenus, and his version shows the poetic equivalent of the process described by John Donne in ‘A Valediction Forbidding Mourning’ as “an expansion / Like gold to airy thinness beat”, as four Latin lines become eight English ones:

---

56 Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, II.5.15–56.
58 See Brown (n.57 above) 57–58, on stanza 17 of Harington’s version.
59 *Culex* has 414 lines, *Virgil’s Gnat* has 688. Even allowing for the greater semantic weight within an individual dactylic hexameter line in contrast with a decasyllabic iambic pentameter line, this is a significant lengthening.
Brown – “And dearest loue”: Virgilian half-lines in Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* 61

\[O flocks, O Faunes, and O ye pleaasautn springs
Of Tempe, where the countrey Nymphs are rife,
Through whose not costly care each shepheard sings
As merrie notes upon his rusticke Fife,
As that Ascræan bard, whose name now rings
Through the wide world, and leads as joyfull life,
Free from all troubles and from worldly toyle,
In which fond men doe all their dayes turnoyle. (145–52)\]

As Burrow suggests, *Virgils Gnat* is characterized by an almost voluptuous delight in phrase-making. There is a particular enjoyment evident in additions like the line “As merry notes upon his rusticke Fife”, an activity implied rather than stated in the Latin, and which aligns the shepherd with Spenser’s pastoral persona Colin Clout as a “rusticke” poet. But this is more than just rich writing – as I have noted, the cultural transaction we witness here is a movement from thinking in verse paragraphs to thinking stanzaically. Each *ottava rima* stanza is a meshed grid of interlaced rhymes, leading to the definitive closure of the couplet. In this case, the stanzaic implications of the work Spenser does with “Virgil” is shown by the fact that the couplet expands on the single word *securam* in the Latin. Spenser’s couplet at once indulges the fantasy of a world free of troubles while taking the opportunity this vista affords for gentle, almost generous moralizing. It’s a characteristic touch in a poem which shows Spenser subordinating a classical original to the discipline of the stanza, and experimenting with how stanzaic form may be used in an extended poem. Donne, another poet fascinated by the creative affordances of stanzas as a kind of new poetic technology, anticipated “build[ing] in sonnets pretty rooms”. This is akin to what Spenser does in *Virgils Gnat*, as the “pretty room” of *ottava rima* becomes a way of reframing the *Culx*.

---

62 Though not used directly by Spenser in *The Shepheardes Calender*, “rusticke” is an important part of E. K.’s defence of archaism (a device to “make his rymes more ragged and rustical”), while the gloss to “Januarye” makes a direct allusion to Virgil’s use of the term in the *Eclogues*. Later poems such as *Daphnaïda* and *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe* explicitly identify Colin through epithets like “my rustick quill”; see *The Shorter Poems* (n.52 above) 14, 33, 541.

63 The c-rhyme, *toyle: turmoyle*, was probably experienced as a full rhyme by Elizabethan readers, with *turmoyle* sounded as a natural iamb. This is suggested by Spenser’s practice in *The Faerie Queene*, where the word is typically rhymed with terms like *spoile, soyle* as well as *toyle*; see Brown & Lethbridge (n.12 above) 333.

64 Donne, ‘The Canonization’ (n.61 above, 96); compare also ‘The Good Morrow’: “love … makes one little room an everywhere” (ibid. 90). In each case, Donne puns on the etymology of *stanza* from the Italian for room; see ‘stanza’, n, *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, September 2016.
Half-lines in *The Faerie Queene*

Compared with the *Aeneid*, there are only a few half-lines in *The Faerie Queene*. The ratios seem wrong: where *The Faerie Queene* has around 35,000 lines to the *Aeneid*’s less than 10,000, the latter has 50 half-lines where the former musters around 6. The projected poem Spenser described in the Letter to Raleigh (appendend to the 1590 edition) would have been a mammoth of 12, or possibly even 24 books.\(^{65}\) As my formulations indicate, there is some uncertainty about the precise number of half-lines. It partly depends on which of the primary texts you consult: *The Faerie Queene* was published in different editions in 1590, 1596 and 1609.\(^{66}\) Wilson-Okamura gives the following tally based on A. C. Hamilton’s standard modern text: II.iii.26.9; II.viii.55.9; III.iii.50.9; III.iv.39.7; III.vi.45.4; and III.ix.37.5. He plausibly suggests that these instances “all occur in a Vergilian context”.\(^{67}\) I would add to this a few significant anomalies. II.x.24.8–9 in some copies of the 1590 edition is garbled, presumably as the compositor struggled to understand the Welsh text in the manuscript.\(^{68}\) The reader of III.vi.26.4 in 1590 encounters a half-line, “To secke the fugitiue” (the runaway is Cupid, who has fled from Venus in high dudgeon), which sticks out in the same way as “And dearest loue” would later in the same canto in the 1609 edition. By 1596, this loose end is tidied up with the rhyming formula “both farre and nere”.\(^{69}\) Finally, though it does not create a half-line, the change to I.x.20 in the 1609 edition is significant. In 1590 and 1596, this stanza is an “unperfekt” eight-liner; in 1609, it is completed with the addition of a fifth line, “Dry-shod to passe, she parts the flouds in tway”. Though some scholars have argued in favour of the eight-line version on the basis of numerological and theological patterning, the change is clearly authorial, and suggests that Spenser generally placed the satisfaction of the stanzaic pattern ahead of other considerations.\(^{70}\) What follows from this is that those remaining half-lines are stylistically and thematically significant: the correction of I.x.20 supports the view that the “And dearest loue” fragment, introduced in the same edition, is authorial.

\(^{65}\) Wilson-Okamura (n.15 above) 132. For the Letter to Raleigh, see *The Faerie Queene* (n.2 above) 714–18.

\(^{66}\) All published in London; conventionally abbreviated as 1590, 1596 and 1609; see *The Faerie Queene* (n.2 above) xx, 736. 1590 contains books I-III; 1596 reprints these books with some alterations and adds books IV-VI. 1609 adds the Mutabilitie Cantos, with again a number of textual changes, many of which appear to be authorial.

\(^{67}\) Wilson-Okamura, ‘Belpheobe and Gloriana’ (n.5 above) 49.

\(^{68}\) The correct reading is “That not Scuith guiridi it mote seeme to bee, / But rather y Scuith gogh, signe of sad crueltee”; i.e. “not the green shield as it may seem to be but rather the red shield”; see *The Faerie Queene* (n.2 above) 251. Uncorrected copies reduce this to: “That not [ ] he mote seeme to be. / But [ ]”, where visually the gaps on the page seem to recall the lacunae in Eumnestes’ library in the previous canto, “worm-eaten, and full of canker holes” (II.ix.57); see *The Faerie Queene*, 1590, London, 332, using the British Library copy on EEBO, and *The Faerie Queene* (n.2 above) 742, and Fig. 1 below.

\(^{69}\) See *The Faerie Queene* (n.2 above) 745.

Yet it is important to be clear that this textual evidence points in different directions. That the attractive half line of 1590, “To seeke the fugitiue”, could be resolved into a full pentameter in 1596 may imply that Spenser’s unrealised intention was to fill all such gaps. On this account half-lines may be – as with Virgil – relics of the compositional process, and of the difficulties imposed by the search for rhyme.71 “And dearest loue” might conceivably have been plugged by a six-syllable iambic formula, such as “lamented more and more”.72 Spenser’s stanza makes his half-lines typographically apparent as ruptures in the fabric of his poem, which are invariably surprising to readers trained to expect stanzaic unity and uniformity. This is why I cite the press variant of II.x.24: the violence of the semantic gaps in the British Library copy illustrates the way in which any deviation from the typographic form of the stanza impinges on the reader’s consciousness, and potentially disrupts and reorients the reading experience (see Fig. 1).73 When we see gaps like this, we are predisposed to try to make sense of them, either by filling them in (as I have with III.vi.45), or by allegorizing them as symbolic spaces.

71 See Brown & Lethbridge (n.12 above) 71–75, for discussion of the ways in which The Faerie Queene is ordered around the search for rhymes.


One of the most widely discussed half-lines is the blazon of the virgin huntress Belphoebe (a symbolic representation of Elizabeth I), itself an echo of the description of Venus as a huntress in *Aen.* 1:

\begin{quote}
So faire, and thousand times more faire
\begin{itemize}
\item She seemd, when she presented was to sight,
\item And was yclad, for heat of scorching aire,
\item All in a silken Camus fylly whight,
\item Purfled upon with many a folded plight,
\item Which all aboue besprinckled was throughout,
\item With golden aygulets, that glistred bright
\item Like twinckling staires, and all the skirt about
\end{itemize}
Was hemd with golden fringe
\end{quote}

(II.iii.26)

Again, the rupture of the formal design is visually striking. The Spenserian stanza’s formal design interlaces three different rhymes on the pattern *Ababbebec*, where the final line is an alexandrine. The special character of the alexandrine within the stanza is shown by the typography in all early editions (and most modern ones), whereby the first and ninth lines of each stanza are justified to the left while the median seven lines are set slightly to the right. Poetically and spatially, the slouching alexandrine rounds out the stanzaic space (see Fig. 1). Spenserian alexandrines have a marked tendency to fall into two equal six-syllable hemistichs, as in a line from a few stanzas prior to this: “She broke his wanton darts, and quenched base desire” (II.iii.23). In the case of stanza 26, the final line is a maimed half measure, blatantly failing to satisfy the pattern.

What then is the function of such half-lines – are they oversights, or are they deliberate attempts to turn poetic shortfall to artistic advantage? In this case, there is no simple explanation. Louis Montrose suggested that the incomplete alexandrine is a moment of spectacular poetic tact, or “conspicuous silence”, on Spenser’s part: as the blazon goes down Belphoebe’s body, from her “Camus”, or chemise, to her “skirt”, the poet refuses to go beyond “the golden fringe” of Belphoebe’s attire to what lies beneath. As A. C. Hamilton puts it, the half-line potentially “indicates the poet’s distraction when he contemplates Belphoebe’s genitalia, and necessarily moves lower”. To the contrary, Wilson-Okamura insists: “There

\begin{itemize}
\item In *The Faerie Queene* (n.2 above) 184.
\end{itemize}
are crotch lyrics, but no crotch epics, and no epic crotches. For blazonneurs, the epic subject is breasts” – the half-lines are “allusion-markers” to Virgil and nothing more. What this doesn’t explain is why Spenser should formally allude to Virgil here, beyond the fact that that this episode is “modeled on Aeneas’ encounter with Venus” in Aeneid 1, a passage, it should be said, which does not include any half-lines. Perhaps this stanza tells us little more than that Spenser’s half-lines are, like Virgil’s, both tantalizing and hazardous to interpret categorically.

And yet the failure to correct this half-line in either 1596 or 1609 suggests deliberation. Similarly, the fact that it occurs in the middle of what A. C. Hamilton calls the poem’s “longest and most ecstatic blazon” – a passage which at one level idealises Elizabeth I – is also provocative. Surely a “mistake” in a set piece of this kind would have been corrected? Such questions should lead back to the extraordinary poetry of this stanza, which embodies much of the charge of Spenser’s diction and his invention of a poetic language which seemed strange even to his contemporaries. Spenser’s archaic diction is another gesture in Virgil’s direction. In the process of blazoning Belphoebe, Spenser deploys a consciously inflated vocabulary with archaic lexis, where words are chosen partly for their unfamiliarity and partly for their ornamental glitter. “Purfled”, “plight”, “besprinckled” and “aygulet” contribute to a richly ornate surface, which underlines Belphoebe’s exceptional exceptionness. Spenser, we might say, polishes his verse to convey verbally a sense of Belphoebe’s shimmer “That quite bereau’d the rash beholders sight” (II.iii.23). In this context, it could be suggested that the non-alexandrine mimetically enacts the narrator’s amazement at the character he describes. Like David Lee Miller, I tend to think the half-line comprises both that amazement and “a displaced representation of what cannot be displayed” beneath Belphoebe’s clothing.

---

77 Wilson-Okamura, ‘Belphoebe and Gloriana’ (n.5 above) 49–50. For a rejoinder, see D. Lee Miller, ‘Spenser and Historical Stylistics; or, The Case Against the Case Against Close Reading’, Spenser Review 45.2.29 (Fall 2015: http://www.english.cam.ac.uk/spenseronline/review/item/45.2.29): “this argument assumes the half-lines can only be doing one thing: not that, but this. There is no reason the half-line in question can’t be doing both of those things and more”.  
79 The Faerie Queene (n.2 above) 183. Hamilton also notes that the line stands at “the centre of the ten stanzas” that describe Belphoebe (184). 1590 includes a final sheet of “Faults escaped in the Print”, which does not correct this line; see The Faerie Queene, 1590, 606 (British Library copy).  
81 See Wilson-Okamura (n.15 above) 60–62, a discussion which defends Spenser against the strictures of in particular Sidney and Jonson.  
82 Lee Miller (n.77 above).
“The gap here is about what is unrepresentable either because it is numinous and sacred, like a Platonic Idea, or because the viewer is so lewd and the narrator so chaste, or because there are some (satirical) things which it is dangerous to mention out loud. All of these are difficulties of representation, and by leaving a gap, Spenser is leaving it up to the reader to decide which difficulty is at stake. We have to fill in the gap, as it were, and in doing so we must decide whether The Faerie Queene is to be a praise poem, or a dramatic poem … or satirical.”

Spenser’s failure to complete his description of Belphoebe’s skirt shows him failing to finish the edge – the fringe – of his stanza. What we read here is a gap which betokens poetic bewilderment in the face of his subject. Rather than being a sign of the poet’s constraint, it is a mark of his inventive formal freedom, which underlines the difference between stanzaic verse and verse paragraphs, as the unfinished edge hovers into semantically uncertain space on the white page. At the same time, as Pugh highlights, the gap underlines the interpretative work the reader has to do. Allusion markers they may be, but the half-lines demand more active interpretation from the alert reader.

Elsewhere in the poem, there is less ambiguous evidence that half-lines are a deliberate variation of Spenser’s usual stylistic palate. Later in Book II, he uses a similarly curtailed alexandrine to suggest the delicate reciprocity which is developing between the book’s hero, Sir Guyon, and his rescuer, Prince Arthur:

As to the Patron of his life, thus sayd;
My Lord, my liege, by whose most gratious ayd
I liue this day, and see my foes subdewd,
What may suffise, to be for meede repayd
Of so great graces, as ye haue me shewd,
But to be ever bound

To whom the Infant thus, Faire Sir, what need
Good turnes be counted, as a seruile bond,
To bind their doers, to receiue their meede?
Are not all knights by oath bound, to withstond
Oppressours powre by armes and puissant bond?
Suffise, that I haue done my dew in place.
So goodly purpose they together fond[.]

(II.viii.55–56)

83 In correspondence with the author.
84 Compare Montrose’s conclusion: “the poet protects himself by conspicuously censoring himself, marking the constraint upon his text with a lacuna” (n.75 above, 328).
The suggestion that Arthur interrupts Guyon goes back to Ralph Church, who in his 1758 edition noted that, because neither the 1596 nor 1609 editions complete the hemistich, he was “inclined to think Spenser never intended to fill it up. The speech of Sir Guyon is plainly unfinished: The Prince breaks in upon him: -Faire Sir, &c”.

Church’s reading is lent further support by the way in which the b-rhyme of stanza 56 modulates from Guyon’s interrupted word, bound. In interrupting Guyon, Arthur suggests that he need not be “bound … as a seruile bond”. Appropriately, the narrative moves forward with the line “So goodly purpose they together fond”, in which the past participle of find punningly comprises the fondness which is developing between the two knights. Indeed, this rhyming cluster is noteworthy because it includes two metaplastic rhymes, fond and bond, in which Spenser changes conventional orthography for the purposes of rhyme, as though to draw attention to his transgressive freedom with word forms. These are relatively small gestures, yet they take place against the backdrop of the repudiation by Pyrochles (a personification of intemperate anger) of Arthur’s “princely bounty” and his subsequent decapitation earlier in the canto (II.viii.51–52). Read in the light of John Kerrigan’s *Shakespeare’s Binding Language*, which pays meticulous attention to the language of bond and obligation in Shakespeare, this passage shows the way in which Spenser was similarly attuned to the register of social contract and (here) amicable or chivalric obligation. As Kerrigan notes: “During Shakespeare’s lifetime the cluster of words around bind, bound, and bond was used of so many kinds of connection – bonds of kin, allegiance to a monarch, material threads and cords, being bound by good will or service … that usage was coloured with implications that allow binding as act and description to draw fields of meaning together.” Similarly, Guyon’s truncated alexandrine, with its restitution in the following stanza, shows a Spenser prepared to manipulate lineation on the basis of hints he found in the *Aeneid*, for symbolic effect. In Kerrigan’s terms, Arthur repudiates the notion of the “seruile bond” outlined by Guyon, to reassert the old-fashioned – yet still operative within the idealist structures of *The Faerie Queene* – chivalric oath which binds knights “to withstond / Oppressours powre”. Meanwhile, these literal, metaphorical and textual works of severing and restoration anticipate the allegory of the human body in the House of Alma in the next canto.

It is striking that the half-lines listed by Wilson-Okamura occur in the first half of *The Faerie Queene*. The anomalies I have added to this list further stress that this is a phenomenon – or perhaps more strictly an epiphenomenon arising from Spenser’s imitation of Virgil and his complex stanza form – of Books II and III. It may be therefore that the half-lines’

---


86 See Brown & Lethbridge (n.12 above) 26–27, 259, 366.

appearance is significant in terms of the allegorical agendas of these books. Book II is the Legend of Temperance, a core Aristotelian virtue; Book III is the Legend of Chastity, usually understood in a broader sense of appropriate sexuality, while both books further Spenser’s epideictic concern with British chronicle history – what he calls “matter of iust memory” in the Proem to Book II – in the episodes in the House of Alma and Merlin’s cave. Moreover, like Phaer and Surrey, Spenser would have been aware of the differential numbers of half-lines in different books of the Aeneid: thus the concentration of half-lines in these books of The Faerie Queene may be another aspect of Spenser’s intertextual allusion to Virgil. As I suggested earlier, though the Donatus Vita explains the Aeneid’s half-lines as compositional relics, Spenser could well have read them more in the manner of Sparrow, as stylistic variables. In this view, the occurrence of half-lines in The Faerie Queene Books II and III would echo the higher number of such lines in Aeneid 2. The half-lines of II.iii.26 and II.viii.55 might be read in terms of the book’s symbolic concern with sexual conduct and bodily function: Spenser breaks his alexandrines at moments which lend themselves to mimetic reading. I turn now back to Book III to see if the half-lines there may be approached in the similar ways.

Book III’s half-lines fall into two categories. Those at III.iii.50 and III.ix.37 are part of the dynastic matter which runs through both Books II and III, modelled both on the Aeneid and on the Virgilian strategies employed by 16th-century poets like Ariosto. The second example undermines an unreliable speaker, the philandering Paridell, whose narrative recaps the fall of Troy. As his story turns to his “linage”, which he claims to “deriue aright” from Paris, the gap in lineation serves to suggest the wrongness of that derivation: “To Paridas his sonne. / From whom I Paridell by kin descend” (III.ix.37). The incomplete line at III.iii.50 shows a different pattern. It stands in the place of an alexandrine but is only a pentameter line in the 1590 and 1596 editions, and was extended in 1609 to produce a full alexandrine. The 1590 line “(S)He turnd againe, and chearfull looks did shew” becomes in 1609 “(S)He turnd againe, and chearefull looks as earst did shew”.

Ruptures of this kind – to line length and to

---

88 Proem to Book II, stanza 1. For overviews with bibliographies, see The Faerie Queene (n.2 above) 5–17, and R. Graziani, ‘The Faerie Queene, Book II’, and T. P. Roche, Jr, ‘The Faerie Queene, Book III’, both in Hamilton (n.74 above) 263–70 (Graziani); 270–73 (Roche).
89 Wilson-Okamura, ‘Belphoebe and Gloriana’ (n.5 above) 49; for Ariosto and Virgil, see idem, Virgil (n.5 above) 189–90.
91 My emphasis. Spenser, The Faerie Queene, 1590, London, 440; The Faerie Queene, 1609, London, 139, both with the erroneous reading of “Shew” for “He”, picked up in the “Faults escaped in the Print” added to some copies of the 1590 edition; see The Faerie Queene, 1590, London, 606, using the British Library copy on Early English Books Online. See also The Faerie Queene (n.2 above) 744, for textual commentary.
92 See Lee Miller (n.77 above) for discussion of this caesural break in the context of Aen. 6.882–83.
line shape – are useful counters in a tertiary epic which is committed to what W. H. Auden waspishly called “history in the future tense”, but which is always ominously conscious that “the end is not” yet ideologically certain.93

The second grouping of half-lines takes us back to where we began, with “And dearest loue”. These are affective hemistichs, where the verse seems to break down in response to the pressure of the events. As many scholars have noted, Cymoent’s lament94 for her son, Marinell (who turns out not to be quite as dead as he at first appears) alludes to the lament of Euryalus’s mother in Aen. 9:

But if the heauens did his dayes enuie,
And my short blisse maligne, yet mote they well
Thus much afford me, ere that he did die
That the dim eyes of my deare Marinell
I mote have closed, and him bed farewell,
Sith other offices for mother meet
They would not graunt.
Yet maulgre them farewell, my sweetest sweet;
Farewell my sweetest sonne, sith we no more shall meet.

(III.iv.39)

Again, the deliberation and poetic design of the rupture is glaring. Not only does the broken line occur at an emotional high point, but Spenser – as so often – breaks his pattern in order to confirm it by other means thereafter. The broken b-rhyme (well: Marinell: farewell), though strictly closed by the unrhyming “graunt”, is immediately followed by the internal rime riche of a second then a third “farewell” in lines 8 and 9.95 The rhetorical hardwiring of this passage is shown by the anaphora of “my sweetest sweet”, modulated to “my sweetest sonne”: the repetition of simple intensifiers and epithets heightens the emotion.96 These are virtuoso effects of rhyme and repetition by a writer who senses the way in which an opportune shortfall may serve to emphasise the skilful fashioning of his verse. Spenser was

94 The Faerie Queene (n.2 above) 328; Wilson-Okamura, ‘Belphoebe and Gloriana’ (n.5 above) 49. Confusingly, by Book IV, “Cymoent” has become “Cyomodoce”; see The Faerie Queene (n.2 above) 325, 779.
95 See Brown & Lethbridge (n.12 above) 341 (for the cluster), and 38–42 (for rime riche).
96 For anaphora, see Puttenham (n.44 above) 282. Puttenham stresses the formal character of the device – it makes “one word begin, and … lead the dance to many verses in suit” – though his examples (including one from Ralegh) are also passages of heightened emotion.
always a show-off poet, which is perhaps partly why the epithet of “the poet’s poet” stuck to him for so long.97

The passage from the Aeneid which is paraphrased in this stanza – nec te tua funera mater / Produxi, pressiue oculos, aut volnera lavi – does not include a half-line.98 Just before this moment, however, Virgil describes the Rutulians exalting over the dead Trojans with a striking half-line:

Quin ipsa arrectis (visu miserabile) in hastis
Praefigunt capita, & multo clamore sequuntur,
Euryali, & Nisi.99

Mimetic reading is once again hard to resist: as Euryalus and Nisus’s heads are speared, the half-line of forlorn genitives seems to enact the brutal severing the text describes. Cymoent’s lament – with its sense of shortfall and the “maligne” interruption of natural processes – clearly takes some of its stylistic impetus from the deaths of Euryalus and Nisus.

In the case of the Ovidian stanza which I begun with, as already noted, the publication history of The Faerie Queene suggests that Spenser corrected it to look as it does. Moreover, that history suggests that Spenser was looking to place a half-line in this canto, and adjusted his intentions at some point after the 1596 edition. In the two editions published during Spenser’s life time, the stanza is a line short:

And all about grew euery sort of flowre,
To which sad louers were transformd of yore;
Fresh Hyacinthus, Phoebus paramoure,
Foolish Narcisse, that likes the watry shore,
Sad Amaranthus, made a flowre but late,
Sad Amaranthus, in whose purple gore
Me seemes I see Amintas wretched fate,
To whom sweet Poets verse hath giuen endlesse date.100

97 See P. Alpers, ‘The Poet’s Poet’, in Hamilton (n.74 above) 551, for the history of this phrase and its connections with the Romantic view of Spenser.
99 Aen. 9.465–67, quoted from Virgil (n.19 above) 365. “Th y even stuck the heads of Euryalus and Nisus on spears – what a sight that was! – and paraded along behind them shouting” (trans. West, n.98 above, 200).
100 The Faerie Queene, 1596, London, 490. 1590’s misprint of “Marcisse” for “Narcisse” was corrected in this edition.
In both 1590 and 1596, it is printed over two pages, which may have contributed to its missing line, though again there are only a very few incomplete stanzas in this massive poem, and many “perfect” stanza which are printed over two pages. The version with the half-line is first printed in the posthumous edition by Matthew Lownes in 1609. During the 1590s, Spenser’s publisher was William Ponsonby; when Ponsonby died in 1604, Lownes acquired the rights to his stock. As Andrew Zurcher has suggested in relation to the Mutabilitie Cantos (which first appeared in the 1609 edition), Lownes almost certainly inherited manuscripts and a copy of the 1596 edition marked up with Spenser’s corrections. The 1596 Faerie Queene was relatively poorly printed by Richard Field, who incidentally printed Shakespeare’s Venus and Adonis and Lucrece in 1593 and 1594, and was a fellow native of Stratford. As J. C. Smith observed long ago, “And dearest loue” seems “a touch beyond an editor”, particularly given the way the half-line assonates with the a- and the b- rhymes: as I have just noted, Spenser’s ruptures to his patterns often turn out to confirm them by other means. In the 1590 and 1596 editions, the stanza has a preponderance of rhymes on related sounds: the heavy diphthongs of both the a-rhyme (flowre: paramoure) and the b-rhyme (yore: shore: gore) are relieved by the introduction of the hemistich in 1609. “Loue” neatly assonates with the surrounding rhymes without precisely repeating a pattern which otherwise risked becoming cloying. Repetition with difference is one of the key aesthetic tricks of the Spenserian stanza, and the later version of III.vi.45 is in this respect manifestly superior to the earlier version. Finally, as Hamilton suggests, “There may be a witty point … the poet’s verse is cut short even as lovers’ lives have been cut short ‘of yore’ and ‘but late’”. Amintas in this stanza alludes to Thomas Watson’s Latin poem of the same name (1585). This sequence of eleven laments was translated by Abraham Fraunce in 1587, a text which may co-opt Watson’s poems to the mourning of Sir Philip Sidney, who had died in 1586. In these contexts, the isolation of “And dearest loue” serves both to amplify the loss of Hyacinthus and “Amintas wretched fate”.

There is a further aspect to this half-line which has not been previously discussed, as far as I am aware. This concerns the half-line at III.vi.26 in the 1590 Faerie Queene, noted above. The uncorrected stanza reads:

To search the God of loue her Nimphes she sent,
Throughout the wandring forest euery where:

---

101 See above for I.x.20.
104 See Brown & Lethbridge (n.12 above) 243, 348, for the rhyming clusters.
105 The Faerie Queene (n.2 above) 349.
And after them her selue eke with her went
To seeke the fugitive.
So long they sought, till they arrived were
In that same shadie couert, whereas lay
Faire Crysogone in slumbry traunce whilere:
Who in her sleepe (a wondrous thing to say)
Vnwares had borne two babes, as faire as springing day. (III.vi.26)\(^{107}\)

My aim here is not reinstate the line as printed in 1590, although it is in its own way just as effective as “And sweetest loue” or “They would not graunt”. Cupid’s errancy here is stressed as “the fugitive” is given prominence – a prominence partly underscored by the half-rhyme of “fugitiue” with “the God of loue” in line 1. In turn, the strong break at the close of line 4 marks the transition from the hunt for Cupid (unresolved in this poem) to the discovery of Chrysogone in the second half of the stanza. The correction of 1596 – inserting “both farre and nere” – is a formulaic rhyming phrase of the kind we encounter throughout *The Faerie Queene*.\(^{108}\) While it is not semantically necessary (since the same information is conveyed by the second line and the close of the preceding stanza),\(^{109}\) the change shows two things. Firstly, it reinforces the sense that Spenser generally wanted to comply with the form he had created: we see the poet recognising an anomaly which might be easily tidied up. Secondly – and more interestingly – the gap at III.vi.26 in 1590, coupled with the half-line added to III.vi.45 in 1609, hints at Spenser’s sense that this canto in some way required a half-line. Why should it have done so? This canto is one of the symbolic pageants which occur in every book of the poem. It is an aetiological myth of the conception and birth of the twins, Belphoebe (who we have encountered already in Book II) and Amoret (whose travails are one of the central foci of Books III and IV). Imitating Moschus’ “The Fugitive Love”, the first part of the canto narrates the story of “the fugitive” Cupid. In the course of their search for him, Venus and Diana find Chrysogone, who has unconsciously given birth to the “two babes”, that is, Belphoebe and Amoret.\(^{110}\) The second half of the canto turns to the Gardens of Adonis – Venus’s “ioyous”


\(^{108}\) For rhyming formulae, see Brown & Lethbridge (n.12 above) 115–56, where Lethbridge argues for the comprehensively formulaic cast of *The Faerie Queene*. While I have reservations about his interpretation of these formulae, their existence – and poetic importance – is clear from his evidence.

\(^{109}\) III.vi.25: Venus “forth her damzells sent / Through all the woods, to search from place to place / If any tract of him or tidings they mote trace”.

vegetative “Paradise”, where she takes Amoret after her discovery (III.vi.29). III.vi.45 describes the “pleasaunt Arber” at the heart of the Gardins, where Venus has stowed Adonis and where she continues to “reape sweete pleasure of the wanton boy” (III.vi.44, 46). It is a floral as well as an erotic paradise, which in its turn emphasises the subordination of these gardens to “wicked Tyme” (III.vi.39). The relocation of the half-line from the hunt for Cupid to the Gardins suggests Spenser’s sense that the pathos of the second half of the canto was greater than the first. By removing the line, he stressed the importance of the Gardins of Adonis passage, since the few scattered half-lines in *The Faerie Queene* have the function of Virgilian grace notes, echoes of the *Aeneid* which sparingly demonstrate allegiance and literary affiliation. Though taking place within an Ovidian portion of the poem, the revised half-line conveys a Virgilian sense of *lacrime rerum*, as it stresses that the Gardins provide no protection against mortality. I began by citing C. S. Lewis’s dismay with Spenser’s bland adjectives—“dearest”, “sweetest”, “sad”, “wretched”, which seem almost chosen from a list of words typically vetoed by creative writing classes on the grounds that they are exhausted clichés, overdetermined by cultural expectations. How can a sad lover not seem, well, sad? Spenser, like Virgil, wrote and thought differently. What connects III.vi.45 with III.iv.39 is Spenser’s determination that the evanescent sweetness of affection will be turned to poetic account through devices such as anaphora and half-line. The revisions to canto VI enable us to see Spenser thinking through these affective questions of placement. One further related point emerges from this revision: Spenser may simply have liked the sound of half-lines, while realising that they had to be used with restraint. To fail to meet the terms of an elaborate stanza form on a regular basis speaks more of poetic incompetence than poetic premeditation: therefore the half-line is a trick you have to deploy with the utmost care, however pleasing you may find it.

In their different ways, all of my examples show the elegant appropriation of the phenomenon of the Virgilian half-line for exceptional purposes. Most formal readings of *The Faerie Queene* unsurprisingly tend to emphasise its uniformity and compliance over and above its few moments of formal eccentricity. For Susanne Woods, Spenser is an aesthetic rather than a mimetic metrist: that is, his formal effects aim for pleasingness of sound which does not...

---

111 Virgil (n.19 above) 135, where modern texts read *lacrime rerum*, the full line *sunt lacrimae rerum et mentem mortaliatangunt* is translated by West (n.98 above, 16) as “there are tears for suffering and men’s hearts are touched by what man has to bear”.


113 The evidence of Spenser’s other work is that he liked stanza forms with varying line lengths: see the inset lyrics in ‘Aprill’ and ‘November’ in *The Shepheardes Calender*, and the weddings songs, ‘Epithalamion’ and ‘Prothalamion’, in *The Shorter Poems* (n.52 above) 72–76, 189–94, 662–79, 761–69. See Wilson-Okamura (n.15 above) 177, for the ingenious argument that Spenser’s decision to incorporate feminine rhymes in the 1596 edition was because “he was trying to make a big, fat sound”, and my rejoinder in Brown & Lethbridge (n.12 above) 22–23, 47–60. Though I prefer to see literary effects as semantic, this approach does not rule out a sonal angle to the half-lines in Books II and III.
affect “the lexical meaning of the poem’s statement”. Similarly, Wilson-Okamura challenges the paradigmatic view that poetic form is related to content: teachers of literature have been propagating a “Noble Lie”, whereas in fact writing poems is more like baking: “the cake comes first, and frosting goes on when the cake is cool. Writing a poem is no different”. Ornament is the icing on the cake of content, and readers of Renaissance poetry should be more willing to accept this than we usually are. Spenser’s half-lines, I suggest, point in a different direction. What intrigued Spenser about Virgil’s half-lines was the same thing which intrigued translators whose sensibilities were informed by humanism: that the most perfect poem which had ever been written was studded with moments of poetic shortfall. In this respect, the formal purpose of the half-lines is well captured by one of the early commentators on *The Faerie Queene*. In 1751, John Upton suggested that although Spenser had “fettered himself with rhime, yet he found a way of disengaging himself sometimes from these fetters” through the Virgilian device of the hemistich. Like Upton, my suspicion is that the half-lines were something which Spenser very much liked about the *Aeneid*, in addition to the moral allegory of Aeneas as “a good gouernour and a vertuous man”, which he mentions in the Letter to Ralegh. As well as being epic and fixed, Spenser’s forms are in practice both tactical and flexible, and he saw the *Aeneid* as a justification for this.

---

**The Open University**

RICHARD DANSON BROWN

(richard.d.brown@open.ac.uk)

---


116 For related reflection on the way Spenser latches onto the ambiguities of the *Aeneid*, see S. Pugh, ‘Reinventing the Wheel: Spenser’s “Virgilian Career”’, in P. J. Hecht & J. B. Lethbridge (eds), *Spenser in the Moment*, 2015, Madison WI, 3–34, particularly 19–25 on Spenser’s reading of Virgil’s *Fama*.


118 *The Faerie Queene* (n.2 above) 715.