

Indirect satire: theory and Spenserian practice

In Edmund Spenser's *Prosopopoia; or, Mother Hubberds Tale*, a tonal shift characterizes the final episode, in which the villainous Fox and Ape, having wreaked havoc in the three estates as husbandmen, clerics, and courtiers, go even farther by usurping royal power. The self-conscious Chaucerianism of the first episodes—summarized by Kent van den Berg as “the recreative fiction that animals are like men”—gives way to a more fully developed, and more clearly satirical, fictional world in which “men are like animals” (“Counterfeit,” 92). Fable shifts to allegory when the generic landscape of the first three episodes—a vaguely England-like place that has sheep, priests, a court, and so forth—becomes a more sharply focused fictional world, an allegorical world that invites the reader to make connections to the real world and real people. This changed relationship between the fictional world of *Mother Hubberds Tale* and the real England of its readers contributes to the shift from the feeling of medieval complaint to the indirect satire that is the subject of this book.

In this chapter, I aim to begin the process of thinking analytically about indirect satire, an understudied and undertheorized form of satirical writing. Numerous scholars have described Spenser's satirical methodology in ways that emphasize his efforts to balance goals of criticism with a strong impulse toward self-preservation: Lauren Silberman comments on the slipperiness of potential topical identifications in *Mother Hubberds Tale*: “As the poet holds up mirrors more than one to himself and his objects . . . Spenser makes it virtually impossible to isolate a discrete political attack on an identifiable object” (“Aesopian,” 237). Annabel Patterson, analyzing the repeated references to passports in the same poem, extends the concept metaphorically (by way of Sidney's “great passport of Poetry”) to satirical poetry, which “becomes the safe-conduct by which criticism of church and state passes through the world with impunity” (“Still reading,” 444). Speaking of *The Shepheardes Calender* as

part of the broader tradition of sixteenth-century protest literature, Scott Lucas argues that authors of “potentially dangerous material” sought “rhetorical forms that could at once maximize the communicative function of their works while minimizing the chance that hostile readers could use their own words against them as evidence of offensive intent,” a more direct expression of the metaphorically expressed ideas quoted from Patterson and Silberman (Lucas, “Diggon Davie,” 152).

Thus, the *why* of Spenser’s satirical methodology seems clear. I wish to add to the conversation an analysis of *what* indirect satire is and *how* authors such as Spenser and his imitators create literary works that convey criticisms of particular persons or institutions only through hints or allusions that prompt the crystallization of satirical meanings within the mind of the reader. In contrast to direct satire, which more or less clearly identifies its targets of criticism, both scholars and readers have a harder time identifying and interpreting indirect satire, because of the satirist’s efforts to provide a smokescreen of deniability about criticisms launched at those with the power to punish. Thus, it is important to carve out space from the genres of fable, complaint, and pastoral for the indirect satirical poems written by Spenser and imitated by many others at the end of the sixteenth century.

Indirect satire, distinct from the less focused criticisms of humanity or society found in fables or complaint, which I will refer to as “general satire,” creates a fictional world that references the real world—that is, an allegorical world—in order to criticize the real world. The author uses allusion, symbol, and analogy selectively to point the reader to make connections on the appropriate axes between the allegorical and real worlds. If we imagine the real world as one plane and the fictional allegorical world as a parallel plane, these indirect references serve to connect points on the real plane with points on the allegorical plane: more connecting lines make the reader’s job of interpretation easier but increase the possibility of punitive or censoring retribution; fewer of these indirect references, of course, have the opposite effects, leading to the vanishing point of general satire found in fable, complaint, or pastoral, the genres that indirect satire often purported to be in the late sixteenth century.

Why call it “indirect satire” if allegory is a key to its creation of meaning? Why not call it “allegorical satire”? I focus on indirection because allegory is a pervasive mode of satirical meaning-making (and indeed, pervasive in literary meaning-making in general): the general satire one might find in a fable or pastoral derives from the allegorical connection between, say, the barnyard of the fable or the Arcadia of the pastoral and the real world

of writer and reader. Even satires as direct in their attacks on targets as the Martin Marprelate tracts use allegory to create some meanings simply to be clever: what is the creation of the brothers Martin Junior and Martin Senior but an allegory representing the idea that repression of dissent will breed more dissent? Although I will focus repeatedly in this book on the way that “allegorical intuition”—which sometimes hits a reader in a flash midway through a poem with the sense that the work references the real world in some way—serves as a signal to seek and decipher satirical meanings, I interest myself here in the approach to and specificity of the writer’s targets, with indirect satire toeing an uneasy line between general satire and direct satire.

The reader may intuit this sense that the author intends meaning beyond the text when the author’s use of apparently benign modes such as complaint, fable, and pastoral is characterized by details that suggest that the fictional world of the work allegorizes the real world. Satire appears, in either large or small doses, in a number of Spenser’s works, and the fruitfulness of his invention and his talent leads to a variety of forms, but Spenser’s signature in satire is indirection, as we see him create countless ways of expressing criticism, contempt, disgust, without quite coming right out and saying it. Before moving into a more theoretical discussion of indirect satire, I will illustrate my points about the techniques of indirect satire by attention to Spenser’s most famous satirical character, the Fox, with reference to the precursors of the figure.

The literary ancestry of Spenser’s Fox

Of the two main characters in *Mother Hubberds Tale*, Spenser repeatedly emphasizes the greater guilt of the Fox: the first reference to the characters tells us that the Fox “misguided” the Ape, and the last reference calls him “first Author of that treacherie” (Spenser, *Mother Hubberds*, lines 38, 1379). In between, Spenser develops a portrait of a bloodthirsty, greedy, corrupt creature who aims for ever-increasing power, most importantly through his role as chief advisor to the Ape in his role as the false king. Whereas sixteenth-century allegorical satire often leads to readerly and critical dissension, with multiple competing hypotheses regarding attribution (including multiple scholarly disagreements about whom Spenser satirizes through the Ape), reading the Fox has been, from the beginning, uncomplicated: the Fox allegorically represents William Cecil, Lord Burghley, Queen Elizabeth’s chief advisor. We know that Elizabethans interpreted Spenser’s Fox as referring to Burghley because of Richard

Peterson's discovery of a letter from Thomas Tresham regarding the "calling-in" of the *Complaints* volume and by Bruce Danner's careful cataloguing of numerous sixteenth- and seventeenth-century readers' identification of the fox in *Mother Hubberds Tale* with Burghley (Petti, "Beasts"; Peterson, "Laurel crown"; Danner, *Edmund Spenser's War*, chapter 5). So Spenser succeeded in communicating with his audience, though perhaps too well, given that *Mother Hubberds Tale*, after being called in by March 1591, was not published again until 1612, after the deaths of not only Lord Burghley himself but also his equally powerful son, Robert Cecil, Earl of Salisbury. Although this indirect satire may thus have been a bit too direct, the relatively clear interpretive response of its earliest readers to the Fox makes this an excellent object for analysis of Spenser's characteristic satirical methods.

Other foxes in Aesopian fables such as Chaucer's *Nun's Priest's Tale*, *Reynard the Fox*, mid-sixteenth-century anti-Catholic polemic, and Spenser's own "Maye" from *The Shepheardes Calender* illustrate the two "types" of prosopopoeitic foxes in early modern literature—fox as corrupt courtier and fox as corrupt pastor. Both types of fictional fox import meaning intersemiotically from medieval and early modern fox symbolism and natural-historical ideas about foxes (a concept that Sean Henry explores with reference to the crocodile in *Mother Hubberds Tale* in "How doth the little Crocodile"). The varying connections between the fictional world and reality in these different texts demonstrate the continuum between fable and satirical fable, and the same continua can be imagined, of course, between complaint and satirical complaint, pastoral and satirical pastoral, or any other genre or mode that an indirect satirist might coopt for satirical purposes.

Fable functions allegorically, of course, with the explicitly stated moral guaranteeing that all readers will be able to make the desired connection between the forest or barnyard and the real world. In the terms of cognitive blending theory, best known to literary scholars through its influence on cognitive metaphor theory, we can speak of the barnyard or forest as one of the "input spaces" (see Fauconnier and Turner, *The Way We Think*, chapter 3). In Chaucer's *Nun's Priest's Tale* and the anonymous *Reynard the Fox*, "the court" serves as another of the input spaces, but they function differently, with Chaucer juxtaposing court and barnyard language and imagery in order to create the mock-heroic sense of deflation and the *Reynard* poet progressively metamorphosing the setting from a fully animal world to a hybrid world in which Reynard seems "really" to be royalty. Although *Reynard* offers a clearer picture of real-world courtly

abuses, neither poem attacks a specific target, and thus both are, at most, general satire.

Chauntecleer, Pertelote, and Russell the Fox inhabit a fable-world barnyard, not a pointedly allegorical version of the real world. Chaucer's references to the court create a blended space in the reader's mind, but in a way that pushes the scene firmly back to the barnyard, rather than pointing insistently to the real world. Quick juxtapositions of barnyard and court crystallize in readers' minds the sense that Chauntecleer is not a hero or prince but a mock-version of same. Immediately after a detail that emphasizes the animality of the characters, when Chauntecleer clucks to call his hens to him "For he hadde founde a corn, lay in the yerd" (Chaucer, *Nun's Priest*, line 3175), Chaucer describes him as royal ("real"), as looking like a "grym leoun," and as walking on his toes because he disdains to set his whole foot on the ground (lines 3176, 3179–81). Immediately thereafter, "he chukketh whan he hath a corn yfounde," and then the narrator describes him as "roial, as a prince is in his halle" (lines 3182, 3184). The incongruous blend of barnyard and court doesn't prompt the reader to seek real-world targets to connect with Chauntecleer's pride; instead, it delineates his character in a way that motivates his susceptibility to the flattery of the fox, Russell. Both Chauntecleer and Russell are susceptible to flattery because they prize themselves too highly, as though they really are courtiers, but both remain for readers simply animals. The explicit moral to courtly readers ("Allas, ye lordes, many a fals flatour / Is in youre courtes / ... / Beth war, ye lordes, of hir trecherye," Chaucer, *Nun's Priest*, lines 3325–26, 3330) invites readers to apply the lessons of the fable to real life. Yet this moral, applied from the barnyard to the real world, clarifies the distance between the two worlds.

In *Reynard the Fox* (translated into English by William Caxton in 1481 and reprinted several times over the following century before the time of Spenser's career), like *The Nun's Priest's Tale*, the work begins in a fable-world, with animals behaving like animals: the initial complaints of the animals against Reynard, like Chauntecleer's corn in the yard, remind us of animal behaviors and preoccupations, not those of humans. Isegryme the Wolf complains that Reynard "hath bepossed my children where as they lay, in suche wyse that they therof be waxen blinde" (*Raynarde the Foxe*, A5v). Curteyse the Hound accuses Reynard of stealing a pudding from him. And although Reynard's home, Malepardus, is called a "castel" (*Raynarde the Foxe*, *passim*), the description calls to mind a fox-hole: "for Malepardus was ful of holes, here one hole & there an other, and yonder an other, narrow, croked, & longe, with many wayes to go out, whiche he

opened & shette when it pleaseth hym, and when he had nede” (*Raynarde the Foxe*, B5v).¹

As the plot progresses, however, the characters begin to seem more human, and the fable-world contains enough of the institutions of the real world (a king, legal system, castles, duels, and so forth) to take on the character of a hybrid world, fully animal and fully human, in which Reynard’s crimes begin to seem less like those of a fox and more like those of a sociopath. He expertly plays the typical desires of the animals who try to bring him to justice (Bruin the Bear wants honey, Tybert the Cat wants mice) against the fable-humans’ desires to acquire and defend property in order to punish his animal summoners, allowing him to avoid his day in court. Reynard’s character changes over the course of the work, so that by the end, the animal who had “bepissed” the eyes of the wolf cubs becomes a nobleman who “with his frendes and lynage departed nobly fro the kyng; and wente unto his castell Malepardus” (*Raynarde the Foxe*, S8r). The work by the end clearly references the real world of medieval Europe:

There is in ye worlde moche sede lefte of ye Fox ... though they haue no reed berdes, yet there ben found moo Foxes now than euer were here tofore ... These reigne now moche in euery countre ... in ye popes court ye emperours, the kynges, dukes or any other lordes. (*Raynarde the Foxe*, T1r–T1v)

Yet the author cautions the reader not to read too closely: “There is no good man blamed therein[;] it is spoken generally. Let euery man take his owne parte as it belongeth & behoueth, and he that fyndeth hym giltye in any dele or part therof, lette hym amende hymselfe” (*Raynarde the Foxe*, T4r).

In other words, the narrator avers that this is general satire, not indirect satire. *Reynard the Fox* allegorizes the real world more clearly than does *The Nun’s Priest’s Tale*, but still not specifically, and so I find no evidence of indirect satire in the English version.² The names of the animals are unremarkable and thus do not suggest allusions to real people. The most unusual word in the work, Malepardus (“Maleperduys” in Caxton’s 1481 edition), the name of Reynard’s fox-hole/castle, turns out to be a corrupted

- 1 Compare with Edward Topsell’s description of foxes’ dens: “for the abode of Foxes in the day time is in the caues and holes of the earth, and come not abroad til the night. These dens haue many caues in them, and passages in and out, that when the Tertars shall set vpon him in the earth, he may go forth some other way” (Topsell, *Historie*, 223).
- 2 The Reynard tales originated in the twelfth century with the Latin *Ysengrimus*, and French, Dutch, German, and English versions and translations circulated in Europe during the late medieval period. Scholars have found topical satirical content, with various targets, in the medieval Continental versions; see Varty, *Reynard the Fox*, especially chapters by Jill Mann, Jean Subrenat, and Jean-Marc Pastré.

version of the French word for St. John's wort: "This plant is called *Millepertuis* (or thousand holes) because the leaves of it are all full of so small holes, that one can scarce see them, but onely betwixt their sight and the sun" (de la Primaudaye, *French Academie*, 335). Obviously a name that means "thousand holes" serves as a fitting moniker for Reynard's confusing den with many paths and exits, not an allusion to signal a real-world satirical target. Without verbal allusions or plot segments that parallel real-world occurrences in order to connect fiction to reality in a way that creates a clear, sharp critique of some particular person or institution, the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century English versions of *Reynard the Fox*, in their application to the real world, remain general satire.

Both *The Nun's Priest's Tale* and *Reynard the Fox* exemplify the Aesopian tradition of fable, which Annabel Patterson describes as a "complex medium of political analysis" that in the late sixteenth century became in England "a flexible and constantly renewable system of metaphorical substitutions for actual events, persons, or political concepts that can, but need not, be recognized as such" (Patterson, *Fables*, 75, 52). The fable form itself, Patterson argues, codes political ideas in animal stories (just as the pastoral and the complaint are known for calling attention to the evils of the world), but this does not always rise to the level of a clear particular attack. Nevertheless, in the Reynard stories, the figure of the fox serves to satirize a specifically courtly set of abuses, even if no particular persons seem to be targeted.

In addition to this political, courtly type of fox satire, Spenser also draws on a distinct tradition of prosopopoeitic foxes that derives from what Katherine C. Little refers to as "ecclesiastical pastoral" (*Transforming Work*, 3–5), in which foxes allegorize one type of corrupt pastor. Little argues for a medieval influence on early modern pastoral through the ecclesiastical pastoral that allegorizes priests as shepherds, as distinct from the classical pastoral tradition that has received the bulk of scholarly attention for its influence on early modern pastoral. Similarly, with regard to the literary ancestors of Spenser's Fox, we can distinguish the foxes that form part of the Aesopian tradition, which tends to comment on political situations, from foxes that derive from sixteenth-century ecclesiastical pastoral and thus comment on concerns about the clergy.

Little's definition of ecclesiastical pastoral as "allegorical pastoral ... in which the reader is meant to understand the shepherds as priests and the 'shepherding' they discuss as referring to clerical duties and/or religious beliefs and practices" can illuminate the way that this type of pastoral shades into satire through extension of the allegory (Little, *Transforming*

Work, 3). The evil figure who thwarts the good shepherd is not a bad shepherd but rather a fox or a wolf; a usefully heavy-handed example of this appears in the mid-sixteenth-century polemics of William Turner, who wrote *The Hunting and Finding Out of the Romish Fox ...* (1543), *The Rescuing of the Romish Fox ...* (1545), and *The Hunting of the Romish Wolf* (1555; republished with a new preface and title during the 1560s as *The Hunting of the Fox and the Wolfe, because they make havocke of the sheepe of Christ Jesus*). Harold Stein summarizes the overall symbolism of Turner's works thus:

Thus to Turner a fox is a person who seems to be or pretends to be a member of the Church of England, though at heart he has Romish beliefs, while a wolf is a Romanist in both belief and outward profession. Edwardian foxes become Marian wolves, and, as we now know, Marian wolves similarly become Elizabethan foxes. (Stein, "Spenser and Turner," 349–50)³

Numerous scholars have noted the applicability of this animal symbolism to Spenser's "Maye" and "September" eclogues, citing as evidence the facts that, in "Maye," Spenser changed the wolf of his Aesopian source (Caxton's ninth fable of book 2) into a fox and that, in "September," Hobbinol's naïve response to Diggon Davy's comment on (allegorical) wolves that there are no (literal) wolves in England follows a passage in Turner's *The Hunting of the Romish Wolf* (Hume, *Edmund Spenser*, 21–23; Stein, "Spenser and Turner," 350–51; Norbrook, *Poetry and Politics*, 66–67).

Additionally, at least some readers of Spenser's *Mother Hubberds Tale* in 1591 would come to the text with the knowledge that William Cecil, Lord Burghley, was nicknamed "the fox" by his enemies. Anthony Petti cites numerous examples of references to Burghley as a fox, though Petti is sometimes unclear about whether such references pre- or post-date Spenser's poem. Within the circle of the court, Robert Devereux, Second Earl of Essex, commonly referred to Burghley as "the old fox"; Petti also finds fox imagery applied to Burghley by a (relative) outsider in a mid-1570s letter written by a Catholic that included a key to the letter's animal-themed cipher beginning: "The names of our enemies. The hare, the ladie Elizabeth that calleth herself queene; the foxe, Cicill" (qtd. in Petti, "Beasts," 79). Although Thomas Herron has complicated our understanding of the topical references in Spenser's satire by reminding us of the need to consider Irish readings and identifications of the Fox and other characters, for the English audience analyzed here, fox imagery

3 Janice Devereux notes that in addition to William Turner, Luke Shepherd and John Bale also referred to their enemy, the Catholic Stephen Gardiner, Bishop of Winchester, as a fox in the mid-sixteenth century (Devereux, *An Edition*, 121n182).

strongly represents Lord Burghley (Herron, “Reforming the fox”).

Spenser reinforces the reader’s awareness of the Burghleyan fox connection in *Mother Hubberds Tale* by making an even clearer attack on Burghley in *The Ruines of Time*, the poem that opens the *Complaints* collection. Elegizing Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, Spenser writes: “He now is gone, the whiles the Foxe is crept / Into the hole, the which the Badger swept” (*Ruines*, lines 216–17). The belief that foxes usurped the dens of badgers, claiming a badger’s clean (“swept”) den by marking it with urine and excrement, was part of English understanding of the natural history of real foxes (see, e.g., Topsell, *Historie*, 34, 223). Calling to the reader’s mind Burghley (whose political ascendancy following Leicester’s death makes him the obvious referent for the fox) while also reminding Elizabethans of the disgust attached to the actual animal makes this a stinging insult. Bruce Danner argues that *Ruines of Time* creates more offense than *Mother Hubberds Tale*, because “the *Ruines* criticizes Cecil without the mediating fiction of an allegorical beast fable. . . . Such remarks constitute a level of specificity beyond even the suggestive, but allegorically inflected allusions to Burghley and Robert Cecil in *Mother Hubberds Tale*” (Danner, *Edmund Spenser’s War*, 92–93).

All of these symbolic foxes—the Aesopian/Reynardian political fox, the ecclesiastical pastoral fox, the Burghleyan fox—inform Spenser’s character of the Fox in *Mother Hubberds Tale*. Lauren Silberman observes that Spenser does not characterize the Fox and Ape as static figures; instead, “the way in which they are presented shifts along the continuum from naturalistic to anthropomorphic—from the pole of ‘mouse’ to the pole of ‘Mickey; if you will’” (Silberman, “Aesopian,” 228). In part, as regards the Fox, these shifts in characterization occur when Spenser moves to another symbolic context for the meaning he wishes to convey through this figure. The first two episodes play with the conventions of pastoral ecclesiastical satire: as literal shepherds of actual sheep (the Ape disguised as a “shepherd swaine” and “the false Foxe [as] his dog” [Spenser, *Mother Hubberds Tale*, lines 303–4]), they devour their charges mercilessly, just as allegorical wolf- and fox-pastors do in ecclesiastical pastorals such as those by Turner and those in *The Shepheardes Calender*. As always, the Fox serves as the instigator and is thus more guilty than the Ape:

[E]ver as they bred,
They slue them, and upon their fleshes fed:
For that disguised Dog lov’d blood to spill,
And drew the wicked Shepheard to his will.

(Spenser, *Mother Hubberds Tale*, lines 317–20)

In the next episode, however, when they infiltrate the clergy, with the Fox as priest and the Ape as his parish clerk, they shift, to use Silberman's analogy, from "mouse" to "Mickey," because their crimes as clergy are not the allegorical devouring of sheep, which they have already done literally in the first episode, but everyday corruptions: they "ill / Did order their affaires" and were accused by their parishioners of unnamed "crimes and heresies" (lines 559–60, 564). Both episodes draw on native English traditions of polemic and complaint, with the first episode perhaps more indebted to the polemics of rural laborers and poverty that draw on the *Piers Plowman* tradition, as analyzed by Mike Rodman Jones (*Radical Pastoral*). They are linked by their preoccupation with ordinary people, as opposed to courtiers, and by the clever twist of having the Fox and Ape perform their crimes of bloodthirsty rapine as *actual* shepherds, immediately before their turn as clergy members.

The rural ecclesiastical satire of the first two episodes then shifts to court satire for the final two episodes: the Ape as courtier, with the Fox as "his man Reynold" who "Supports his credite and his countenance" (lines 667, 668), and the Ape as usurper-king, on the condition that he will swear to be "ruled . . . / In all affaires" by the Fox (lines 1051–52). Where the first two episodes, in line with the fox symbolism of ecclesiastical pastoral satire, characterized the Fox with reference to his bloodthirstiness (first episode) and lack of care for parishioners (second episode), the literary context now changes to the courtly satire reminiscent of the Reynard tales, especially in the third episode, and political satire akin to the Aesopian tradition in the fourth episode, which is generally recognized as having the most direct topical applications but also the most careful efforts at creating "Aesopian political deniability" (Silberman, "Aesopian," 242). As van den Berg summarizes the fourth episode: "on the one hand, it retreats from the human world to the animal kingdom; on the other, it engages the human world more directly through sustained topical allusions to actual persons and specific abuses" ("Counterfeit," 92). We see this continued concern with the lines between human and animal in the Ape and Fox's argument over which should act as the king, when the Fox says:

where ye claime your selfe for outward shape
 Most like a man, Man is not like an Ape
 In his chiefe parts, that is, in wit and spirite;
 But I therein most like to him doo merite
 For my slie wyles and subtill craftinesse,
 The title of the Kingdome to possesse.

(lines 1041–46)

The courtly and royal contexts of these final two episodes are too obvious to require proof, and I believe that the Fox's character becomes inflected here with a slightly different meaning because of the connection to courtly, political beast satire associated with the Reynardian and Aesopian tales.

Significantly, it is also in these final episodes that the connections linking the Fox with William Cecil, Lord Burghley, come into play. In *Mother Hubberds Tale*, although the Fox shows his corruption throughout the poem, he becomes most similar to Lord Burghley in the fourth episode, in which the Ape impersonates the king and the Fox serves as his second-in-command. Here Spenser moves beyond allusion (to earlier literary foxes and perhaps to fox references to Burghley) and symbolism (from the disgust attached to foxes from popular natural histories as exemplified by Edward Topsell) to create satirical meanings by means of analogous situations. The narration of the Fox's crimes allegorizes the litany of complaints leveled against Burghley: he is greedy (nothing "that might him profit bring, / But he the same did to his purpose wring" [lines 1141–42]); he wields disproportionate influence with the monarch ("Nought suffered he the Ape to give or graunt, / But through his hand must passe the Fiaunt" [lines 1143–44]); he does not support learning and the arts ("For men of learning little he esteemed; / His wisdome he above their learning deemed" [lines 1191–92]); and his ostentatious building projects show his pride and selfishness ("But his owne treasure he encreased more / And lifted up his loftie towres thereby" [lines 1171–72]).⁴ Bruce Danner notes that the Fox's building program is out of place: it "plays no previous or subsequent role in the poem," and so, he suggests, "Its function ... seems calculated to draw attention beyond the formal boundaries of the narrative to the arena of contemporary reference" (Danner, *Edmund Spenser's War*, 164).

Early readers recognized mockery of Robert Cecil's hunchback in the reference to the Fox's cubs, whose "backs nigh broken were" from the weight of all the honors and offices he heaped upon them (line 1158), a passage Catholic polemicist Richard Verstegan alludes to by mentioning "the false fox and his crooked cubs" in his attack on Burghley (Verstegan, *A Declaration*, 68). Danner has carefully catalogued the numerous contemporary identifications of the Fox with Burghley, noting that these consistent identifications constitute "nothing less than the most thoroughly documented topical allusion of Spenser's career" (Danner,

4 See Danner, *Edmund Spenser's War*, chapter 5, for a thorough analysis of the historical context of Burghley's building projects.

Edmund Spenser's War, 163). Although we can thus with some certainty identify the Fox as Burghley, we nevertheless do not know the source of Spenser's animus against him; Andrew Hadfield outlines a number of possibilities before concluding that "we shall probably never know for certain why Spenser singled out Burghley as the representative of all that was wrong with court life" (Hadfield, *A Life*, 275). Certainly the volume as a whole indicates Spenser's confidence and willingness to provoke controversy, as Hadfield notes.

The social dynamics of satire

Whereas the many criticisms of the Fox quoted in the previous section certainly applied to Burghley, the Fox's building projects, in their specificity and lack of connection to the plot—similar to the reference to his "cubs" that marks him as a parent—lead the reader to look outside the text for meaning, that is, to think allegorically by looking for parallels in the real world to explain something unusual or out of place in the fictional world. This, I argue, is what makes indirect satire, as practiced by Spenser and others who imitated him, distinctive: the greater cognitive demands it makes of the reader. When the writer places in the text only *clues* to satirical meaning—allusions, symbols, and analogies that prompt the reader to use prior knowledge, outside knowledge, to read allegorically to make sense of the text—the reader must interpret the clues to arrive at the satirical meaning. The author thus increases personal safety, but at cost to comprehensibility: some satirical meanings may go unnoticed, and others may be found that the author never intended. This affects the reception of the text both at the time of composition and in later centuries, as critics struggle to interpret correctly satirical messages that depend upon the knowledge and attitudes of the original target audience.

In making a distinction between "general," "indirect," and "direct" satire, my goal is not to return to the somewhat rigid taxonomizing impulses that characterized the study of Renaissance satire in the mid-twentieth century. We can see new-critical interests at work in, for example, Alvin Kernan's ideas about the importance of the satiric persona, Mary Claire Randolph's two-part taxonomy of formal verse satire as attacking a vice and endorsing the corresponding virtue, or John Peter's dichotomized association of complaint with the medieval period and satire with the Renaissance (Kernan, *Cankered Muse*; Randolph, "The structural design"; Peter, *Complaint and Satire*). In all of these examples, interest focuses on the *text*, with attention to the persona of the speaker as found in the

text. Discussions of prose vs. verse satire, “Juvenalian” vs. “Horatian” vs. “Menippean” have continued to develop the new-critical taxonomic impulse by focusing on form and tone.

Instead of adding a new type of taxonomy, I want to bring to the study of Renaissance literature more recent satire theorists’ approaches, which, taken together, constitute what we might call a “social turn” in satire studies, expressed most succinctly in W. Scott Blanchard’s definition of satire as a “genre for the expression of social dissensus” (“Renaissance prose satire,” 118). The decision to write general or indirect or direct satire—and these should be conceptualized as a continuum, not a set of discrete quantum levels—arises in part from concerns related to the social sphere:

1. The actual specificity of the real-world target: Does the author genuinely want to criticize a large group of people, such as “courtiers,” or one specific courtier, such as the Earl of Oxford?
2. The potential social costs of directly attacking the target, ranging from social awkwardness to difficulty getting published to imprisonment or execution.
3. The ability of the anticipated audience to piece together satirical meanings from indirect clues: the audience will be more able to make these cognitive leaps if author and audience share extensive background knowledge.

This way of thinking about satire as a social practice draws from and adds nuance to the work of numerous critics who have considered the social dimension of satire. Fredric Bogel describes satire’s social function as exclusion: creating and policing boundaries between the in-group and the outsider (Bogel, *Difference Satire Makes*). George A. Test explains the multiplicity of satirical forms as deriving from the limitless possibilities created by theorizing satire as exhibiting greater or lesser degrees of four traits that work together to create satire: aggression, judgment, laughter, and play (Test, *Satire*)—characteristics not so much formal or historical as *social*: aggression *toward*, judgment *on*, laughter *at*, play *with*. Test’s illustrations of these social relations in various examples of satire tend to emphasize the connections between author and subject, leaving the reader in a somewhat more passive role. Dustin Griffin balances this view by arguing that inquiry, specifically the shared inquiry into a subject by writer and reader, characterizes satire at its most morally complex and interesting (Griffin, *Satire*). To the extent that interpreting indirect satire depends upon reading allegorically to connect the text to the pretext or

context, I draw also from Maureen Quilligan's careful analysis of the role of the reader in making sense of allegorical writing (*The Language of Allegory*, chapter 4).

The distinction I make between direct and indirect satire continues this emphasis on the social experience of reading or writing satire, specifically with respect to the making of meaning. Many of the theoretical comments on satire refer to and analyze what I am calling "direct satire," which we now call simply "satire," because greater freedom of expression in Western democracies since the late seventeenth century has diminished authors' need for a toolbox of indirect satirical methods. Indirect satire flourishes under repressive conditions, complicating comments such as Ralph Rosen's discussion of ancient satire, in which he asserts "the antagonism itself is always explicit, for it is in the poet's interest to clarify who is the blamer and who the target" (*Making Mockery*, 19). This tendency to consider only direct satire in analyses of "satire" also plays a role in the idea that satire must be funny; Rosen again: "it must be said, at the risk of stating the obvious, that I understand satire as a species of comedy, or more generally 'the comic' ... it exists in order to make an audience laugh" (19). Of course satire can be funny, but satire is not the same as comedy any more than satire is the same as pastoral. Using George Test's taxonomy, we could say that Rosen is describing a type of satire strong on aggression and laughter, whereas indirect satire is stronger on Test's judgment and play. Thinking of satire as aggressive and laughter-provoking works well for examples of early modern English direct satire such as the tracts of the pseudonymous Martin Marprelate, which attacked particular English bishops by name, referred to specific foibles and embarrassing incidents, and mocked both; Thomas Nashe's satirical abuse of Gabriel Harvey and his brothers; the Catholic apologist Richard Verstegan's attacks on William Cecil, Lord Burghley; and the sort of personal libels collected by Alastair Bellany and Andrew McRae on their "Early Stuart Libels" website.

These four examples of direct, naming-names satire in the late Elizabethan and early Stuart period provide a useful primer on the dangers of direct satire at this time of heavy censorship.⁵ The Marprelate tracts, unregistered with the Stationers' Company and printed on a secret press, led to a manhunt, a public-relations war, and the execution of John Penry (Black, "Introduction"). The Bishops' Ban of 1599, which primarily

5 For general studies of press censorship during this period, see Clegg, *Press Censorship Elizabethan*; Clegg, *Press Censorship Jacobean*; Dutton, *Licensing, Censorship*; and Patterson, *Censorship and Interpretation*.

singled out specific, named works, made a blanket condemnation of the whole Nashe–Harvey controversy by decreeing “That all nasshes bookes and D Harvyes bookes be taken wheresoever they maye be found and that none of their bookes bee ever printed hereafter” (qtd. in McCabe, “Elizabethan satire,” 188). Verstegan’s books were printed on the Continent and smuggled into England, and the libels collected by Bellany and McRae remained unpublished and circulated in manuscript. In sum, then, three of these four examples constitute what McRae terms “unauthorized texts” (McRae, *Literature, Satire*, 1), and the authorized texts of the Nashe–Harvey squabble later became censored texts.

We can easily understand the rage of the Elizabethan bishops at the ridicule dished out by the witty and irreverent Martin family (the pseudonymous Martin Marprelate turned out to have two sons, Martin Junior and Martin Senior), though we might consider the bishops’ murderous response somewhat lacking in moderation. No one needs to write an article explaining why the Elizabethan bishops took offense at the Marprelate tracts; I will provide a single example, a syllogism from the *Epistle*, remarkable for the sheer number of bishops that it insults directly: “Those that are petty popes and petty antichrists ought not to be maintained in any Christian commonwealth. But every lord bishop in England, as, for ilsample, John of Cant., John of London, John Exeter, John Rochester, Thomas of Winchester, the bishops of Lincoln, of Worcester, of Peterborough, and to be brief, all the bishops in England, Wales, and Ireland, are petty popes and petty antichrists. Therefore no lord bishop ... is to be tolerated in any Christian commonwealth” (Marprelate, *The Epistle*, 9). It requires no great critical acumen to recognize why a bishop in the Church of England at the end of the sixteenth century would prefer not to be named as a petty pope and Antichrist. In direct satires such as these, plenty of interpretive issues and problems remain, of course, but the reader does not wonder whom the author is criticizing, even at a remove of more than four hundred years.

Other censorship episodes, however, offer less clarity. In the case of the 1591 “calling in” of Spenser’s *Complaints* volume, scholars treated the censorship as an unconfirmed rumor until 1997, when Richard Peterson published a newly found letter from Sir Thomas Tresham written in March 1591 (new style) during the actual recall of the book. Although everyone could agree about *why* Lord Burghley would want the book censored, the lack of proof that the book had indeed been suppressed led to scholarly caution and uncertainty. Harold Stein, for example, speculated from the lack of an official proclamation regarding the calling in that

the authorities used “semi-official pressure” to get Spenser’s publisher, William Ponsonby, to impound the unsold copies himself (Stein, *Studies*, 85). Cyndia Clegg, presumably partly because she bases her argument on the belief that critics have overstated the extent of literary censorship in the Elizabethan period, treats the censorship of *Complaints* as a minor event, despite Peterson’s proof by the time of Clegg’s publication that the book was called in. Clegg dismisses the seriousness of the event by commenting that “whatever concern Spenser’s tale elicited, it was mitigated shortly after” (Clegg, *Press Censorship Elizabethan*, 223).

Likewise, scholars have not been able to determine with certainty against what offense or offenses the Bishops’ Ban reacted, leading to interpretive proliferation over the past decades. Those arguing for moral motivations for the ban include John Peter (*Complaint and Satire*, 149), Bruce R. Smith (*Homosexual Desire*, 164), and Lynda E. Boose (“Bishop’s Ban,” 196). Arguments for political causes for the ban appear in works by Richard McCabe (“Elizabethan satire”), Annabel Patterson (*Censorship and Interpretation*, 47), and Cyndia Clegg (*Press Censorship Elizabethan*, 198–217). Given the generic diversity of the texts included in the ban, recent critics have looked for overarching themes that can help to explain the collective offensiveness of the named works. According to Douglas Bruster, the named works’ “embodied writing” offended because they “took liberties with bodies considered either above mention or above certain kinds of mention” (“Structural transformation,” 50, 53). William Jones also avoids genre-based interpretations by arguing that the ban attempted to address a concern about ideology, specifically the Juvenalian mode as “a tangible threat to the ideological stability of the English nation” (“Bishops’ Ban,” 332). If we think in social rather than taxonomic terms, it becomes less important to find a common thread connecting all of these named works. The books were banned not because they outraged the public, and not because they outraged one bishop who created the entire list. Rather, we likely see here a collection of personal prejudices, but because they are the personal prejudices of a *group* of bishops, rather than a single bishop, we cannot find one common offense that each work offers.

Both of these examples—uncertainty regarding the circumstances surrounding the censorship of Spenser’s *Complaints* and uncertainty about what inspired the confirmed censorship of the Bishops’ Ban—arise from the slipperiness of indirect satire. It makes sense that the Elizabethan authorities in charge of these suppressions would prefer to be as vague as possible regarding their decisions: after all, by its nature, indirect satire is

not readily comprehensible to every reader, so the suppressors would not find it in their interest to help naïve readers to become knowing readers.

Meaning-making in indirect satire: allusion, symbol, analogy, and the “allegorical intuition”

In the previous section I noted that social considerations play a significant role in an author’s decision to write indirect satire instead of more general or more direct satirical works and discussed the specificity of the target and the potential social costs of writing more direct satire. This section will analyze the greater interpretive burden that indirect satire puts on the reader. For any instance of indirect literary meaning-making to succeed, the writer and the reader must share a common store of knowledge, or else the reader will not be able to make the appropriate connections in order to perceive the intended meanings. Brenda Machosky, in a discussion of allegory, claims that “all acts of interpretation are metaphoric in principle, substituting meaning for the literary text. (Hence Northrop Frye’s famous comment in *The Anatomy of Criticism* that ‘all commentary is allegorical interpretation’ [89].)” (*Structures of Appearing*, 191).

Machosky conflates metaphor and allegory in this quotation, but teasing the two apart is important because of its implications for seeing the process of understanding indirect satire as *allegorical* interpretation, not metaphoric. Cognitive metaphor theorists define metaphor as the mapping of ideas and images from one conceptual domain (the “source domain”) on to another (the “target domain”), so that the unknown or less known can be understood through comparison with a more familiar domain of meaning (Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors*). Whereas I.A. Richards’s highly influential discussions of metaphor tend to oversimplify the process of communication and meaning-making (for example, in the suggestion that the “tenor” or message is uncomplicatedly transported by the “vehicle,” creating a conceptual barrier between meaning and expression that underestimates the complexity of the processes of both writing and reading), contemporary cognitive metaphor theorists postulate more fluid boundaries between the source and target domains, such that meaning flows, at least potentially, in both directions.

In several articles extending the work of cognitive metaphor theorists to allegory, Peter Crisp argues that we can distinguish allegory from extended metaphor because allegory includes no direct references to the target domain (i.e., the meaning or world “out there” that allegorical figures and events represent); according to Crisp, whereas an extended

metaphor will bring together linguistic details reminiscent of both the source and the target domains, allegory creates a self-contained world: all source domain, with perhaps an allusion to the target domain in the form of personifications (“Allegory, blending”). I find Crisp’s argument for the distinction between extended metaphor and allegory compelling, even though I disagree with him about the cognition involved in making sense of allegory. The human mind’s ability to make sense of allegory—to correctly identify, say, the real-world satirical target of a short poem that does not mention the person by name—depends, according to Mark Turner, on three “principles of mind,” story, projection, and parable, that allow us to make sense not only of literature but also of reality, with “story” organizing our thinking, “projection” describing how “one story helps us make sense of another,” and “parable” being “the projection of one story onto another” (Turner, *Literary Mind*, v).

Turner’s “parable” uncontroversially names what we mean when we speak of allegorical interpretation, but, especially when a satirist aims at self-protection by writing allegorically, how does the reader know what to project? What hints create the allegorical intuition that prompts further reflection, leading to appropriate projection? Crisp repeatedly notes that allegory makes no “direct” reference to the target domain, but he leaves unexplored the ways that allegory makes *indirect* reference to the target domain, and this indirection in the creation of meaning is what makes indirect satire possible. I will discuss three ways that an author can *indirectly* refer to the target domain, providing clues to spur allegorical interpretation: allusion, symbol, and analogy.

By “allusion,” I refer to a primarily verbal or naming reference that points the reader outside the text. Theorists of allusion have focused, not surprisingly, on literary allusion, but I extend their work here to historical allusion, given that such allusions are of primary interest when considering indirect satire; we can extend these theorists’ comments about the relationship that develops between two (literary) texts to the relationship that develops in the reader’s mind between the text and the historical situation to which it alludes. Ziva Ben-Porat, for example, asserts that “the literary allusion is a device for the simultaneous activation of two texts,” leading to “the formation of intertextual patterns whose nature cannot be predetermined” (Ben-Porat, “Poetics,” 107–8). For Ben-Porat, then, the desired “end product” of allusion—those “intertextual patterns”—exists not in either text but in the reader’s mind. Allan Pasco uses the botanical metaphor of grafting, in which “the grafted cutting becomes an integral part of the new stock,” to define allusion as existing in this

between-texts space: “Neither the reference nor the referent, it consists in the image produced by the metaphoric combination that occurs in the reader’s mind” (Pasco, *Allusion*, 12). Thus, the reader plays a key role in piecing together the full meaning of an allusion. In Spenserian satire, we find satirical allusions most notably in *The Shepheardes Calender*, where anagrams or nicknames (e.g., Morrell for Aylmer) serve to clue the reader to the allegorization of historical personages.

When I refer to “symbol” as a way of pointing the reader of an indirect satire outside the text to prompt allegorical interpretation, I speak of the complex of an object or image and the set of visual and conceptual meanings that attach to it within a particular culture. (Note that I believe Coleridge’s distinction between symbol and allegory, in which symbol is natural and allegory is arbitrary, has clouded discussion for too long, so I will simply state that I use both terms here to refer to processes of meaning-making that depend on social construction and communal understandings shared by members of a culture.) In *The Faerie Queene* (2.4.4), the forelock of the figure eventually identified (allusively, several stanzas later) as Occasion served within the culture as a symbol of Occasion or Opportunity, generally represented in contemporary emblem books as positive opportunities. Spenser alters this symbolic meaning by combining it with the negative associations that his culture attached to ugliness and age, so that the hag becomes an appropriate personification of the occasion to wrath. I view personification, then, not as a separate figure of indirection in satirical or allegorical meaning but as a way of pointing to the target domain that relies on a combination of allusion and symbol; Spenser is well known for ekphrastically developing the symbolic signification of a personification before he clarifies the figure’s identity by allusion to the abstract quality that it represents.

What I am calling “analogy” or “analogous situations” in this book represent the most indirect of the indirect methods of signaling satirical meaning. Whereas all satirical meaning-making in allegorical satire depends upon Turner’s principle of mind “parable,” with analogy, the reader’s only clue or connection to the real-world target space of the satire’s critique comes from the plot or narrative’s similarity to some real-world situation that the reader already knows about. Spenser uses analogy extensively in the satirical episodes in *Faerie Queene*, especially Book 5’s trial of Duessa, the Burbon episode, and the Belge episode. But in these cases, Spenser supplements the use of analogy with allusion and symbol. When there is high potential for censorship or punishment, however, creating indirect satire strictly through analogous narratives offers the

greatest amount of deniability, and we see Spenser relying on this method in the fourth episode of *Mother Hubberds Tale*.

As I already noted, from the time of its publication in the *Complaints* volume in 1591, readers connected the Fox in *Mother Hubberds Tale* with William Cecil, Lord Burghley. By making his main villain a fox, Spenser alluded to Burghley, who was referred to as a fox before 1591. But not everyone knew that Burghley was connected to foxes; readers who were naïve with regard to the allusion to a nickname for Burghley would perhaps catch the allusions to earlier literary traditions of prosopopoeitic foxes, and even readers not well read in those literary works would still know the folk culture's natural-historical ideas about foxes as dirty and wily, so that this symbolism would attach to a fox character as well.

Yet these allusions and symbolism alone might not have been enough to render the setting of *Mother Hubberds Tale* no longer a fictional beast-fable world, but a world suggesting clear parallels with the real world of sixteenth-century England. The situations in the fourth episode that are clearly analogous to situations in Spenser's England—an advisor to the monarch who shows favoritism toward his sons is greedy, holds plural offices, undertakes elaborate building projects, and controls access to the monarch—illustrated common complaints about Burghley with sufficient detail to help readers, primed by the genre of beast fable to look for connections, to make the identification. Despite the wealth of allusions, symbolism, and analogies, the satire is indirect, in the sense that Spenser does not use Burghley's name or official titles, but Burghley—presumably the “Superior awthoritie” referred to in 1591 by Sir Thomas Tresham who took the poem “in suche earnest” that he “called in” the entire collection in which the poem appeared—must have seen Spenser's poem as entirely too explicit a way of referring (Peterson, “Laurel crown,” 7).

Bruce Danner's chapter on *Mother Hubberds Tale* illustrates the importance of small details; Danner contextualizes Spenser's references to the Fox's grand building projects as chief advisor to the Ape as false king (that is, the reference to “loftie towres” quoted above) by exploring the similarities to Burghley's excessive and expensive work at his estate Theobalds, and he notes that the Fox's building work does not connect to the rest of the narrative. The strangeness of the incongruous detail invites readers to consider real-world applications and satirical meanings. Writing of Aesopian discourse in England, Annabel Patterson comments that “The fable gives up its goods more generously when its details are recognized as *specifying*, not generalizing; and those details, in turn, constitute an unusual and untapped archive for the early history of political and social thought”

(Patterson, *Fables*, 43). Essentially, this is my method in excavating satirical meanings from the four-hundred-year-old poems I examine in this book: I look for strange details, words or images that don't quite fit or that introduce a remarkable degree of specificity into a passage—these are one form of what Annabel Patterson elsewhere calls “entry codes”: textual material that serves to flag the presence of hidden satirical meaning (Patterson, *Censorship and Interpretation*). I then examine those small details to ascertain in what ways they may function as entry codes that create allegorical connections between the fictional world in the text and the real world of the writer and reader. I am especially interested in the ways that other authors used Spenser as source and inspiration for their own satirical poetry. Just as, for example, Spenser alludes to and adapts to his own purposes a number of different textual, generic, and cultural versions of the fox in creating his own Reynold the Fox, authors developing the indirect, Spenserian form of satire in the 1590s and beyond often use Spenserian allusions to function as entry codes, so that Spenser provides for such authors both satirical tools and a satirical tradition to link to through allusion.

A portrait of the artist as a satirist

Scholars have paid a great deal of attention to Spenser's satirical poetry, but in a fairly piecemeal and atomistic fashion, looking at individual texts or, in the case of *The Faerie Queene*, individual moments of satirical tone or meaning within the epic. The rest of this book will demonstrate this same sort of local-level attention to particular texts, with close attention to *Shepheardes Calender* and *Daphnaïda* in the next chapter, followed by close readings of the satirical inspiration provided to other authors by specific Spenserian texts. However, because the purpose of this whole book is to convey a sense of story—the story of Spenser as a satirist working within and responding to a print culture ever under the threat of possible censorship, and the story of how that story of Spenser as principled poet speaking truth to power inspired and influenced other poets in the 1590s and early seventeenth century—I want to create a narrative of “satirical Spenser,” a storyline connecting key events in Spenser's career in which he adopted a more satirical stance in his poetry.

I do not wish to argue, or at least not to argue strenuously, against comments such as Richard Helgerson's that Spenser “studiously avoided” presenting himself as a satirist, keeping Colin Clout out of the satirical eclogues in *Shepheardes Calender* and dissociating himself as poet from

Mother Hubberds Tale (Helgerson, *Self-Crowned Laureates*, 85n37). Helgerson's and Patrick Cheney's (*Spenser's Famous Flight*) persuasive analyses of Spenser's self-fashioning as a poet, the ways that he presented individual works as part of a *career*, prioritize individual, self-consciously canonical works in ways that seem to me to fit with Spenser's own *stated* goals as a poet. Still ... by naming his poetic alter ego "Colin Clout"—even if he does then send Colin to an undisclosed location when it is time for a satirical eclogue—Spenser *already* alludes to satirical poetry by referencing John Skelton's most famous poetic narrator, as I will discuss in the next chapter. Although Spenser does not proclaim himself a satirist, or self-consciously link a series of satirical works into an *oeuvre* or career, he demonstrates a consistent, sustained interest in using his poetry to comment on and criticize the real world. This desire to make poetry matter, coupled with an equally strong desire to avoid punishment or censorship, leads to several discrete episodes in which we see Spenser trying to negotiate the boundaries governing licit poetic meddling in affairs, trying to find "the line" but not cross it, with greater or lesser success.

In *The Shepheardes Calender*, Spenser obviously succeeded, fabulously, in creating a work that would position him as the premier poet writing in English, a key work whose importance scholars analyzing Spenser's career universally recognize (e.g., Helgerson; Cheney; Rambuss, *Spenser's Secret*). And yet we don't know to what extent Spenser achieved his additional goal of criticizing specific abuses in England: he may have been satisfied that enough people, or the right people, sufficiently understood his indirect satirical critiques. Algrind's identity as Bishop Grindal, Morrell's as Bishop Aylmer, the bald-faced reference to Lettice Knollys, the wife of the Earl of Leicester, as "Lettice"—the ways that these and other allusions place Spenser as a firm Protestant and as connected with the Leicester circle have been well rehearsed, including book-length studies such as Paul McLane's sometimes too-ingenious allegorical readings in *Spenser's Shepheardes Calender: A Study in Elizabethan Allegory* and the more cautious readings advanced in Robert Lane's *Shepherds Devises*.

But did enough readers even at the time of publication understand, say, the story of Roffy and Lowder in the "September" eclogue, an allegorization of some event now utterly lost to us? We can recognize this episode as an instance of indirect satire by perceiving two allusive names, Roffy and Lowder. We know that Roffy refers to John Young, Bishop of Rochester and Spenser's employer at the time of composition, but we don't know to what person the name Lowder alludes, and although we presume that the plot was recognizable to knowing readers as an analogue

of real-world events, we are unable to connect the analogue to any event we know of. Our ignorance, however, does not mean that “September” should be considered general satire—it doesn’t make sense as general satire that can be understood by a general audience. The episode requires a knowledgeable audience; it is undeniably indirect satire, but we cannot understand it and probably never will.

Spenser makes so much of the secrets contained in his book through E.K.’s repeated references to secrets (e.g., the author’s “labouring to conceale” “the generall dryft and purpose” of the work, the “few” things “whose speciall purpose and meaning I am not privie to,” and numerous references within the notes [Spenser, *Shepherdess*, 19, 23; see Rambuss, *Spenser’s Secret*, chapter 2]—did his contemporaries “get” enough of them? Or did Spenser wish for a fuller appreciation of his work as social criticism? William Webbe wrote a great deal about the *Calender* in his 1586 *A Discourse of English Poetry*, but he is willfully vague about the extent to which he himself succeeded in understanding the hidden secrets; instead, he focuses on some of the most general, banal messages a reader might take away from the collection, mentioning only briefly the potential for sharper critiques:

The occasion of his worke is a warning to other young men, who being intangled in loue and youthful vanities, may learne to looke to themselues in time, and to auoyde inconueniences which may breede if they be not in time preuented. Many good Morrall lessons are therein contained, as the reuerence which young men owe to the aged in the second *Eglogue*: the cauate or warning to beware a subtill professor of freendshippe in the fift *Eglogue*: the commendation of good Pastors, and shame and dispraise of idle & ambitious Goteheardes in the seauenth, the loose and retchlesse lyuing of Popish Prelates in the ninth. The learned and sweete complaynt of the contempt of learning vnder the name of Poetry in the tenth. There is also much matter vttered somewhat couertly, especially ye abuses of some whom he would not be too playne withall: in which, though it be not apparant to euery one, what hys speciall meaning was, yet so skilfully is it handled, as any man may take much delight at hys learned conueyance, and picke out much good sence in the most obscurest of it. (E4v–F1r)

We know that the John Stubbs episode, which had nearly cost Spenser’s publisher, John Singleton, his hand the month before publishing *Shepherdess Calender*, might have induced Spenser to exercise extreme caution. We know of no censorious objections or reactions to *Shepherdess Calender*. We do not know, however, whether Spenser was satisfied with the extent to which this volume of poetry allowed him to express his ideas

about and criticisms of the world around him. His choice of the poetic alter ego Colin Clout, a name that in 1579 stood not for Spenser but for the satirical poem by John Skelton, and the decision to title his work after a book that, according to John Foxe in *Acts and Monuments*, had been “accused & detected” by Catholic persecutors of Protestants in the early sixteenth century (both of which I will discuss more fully in Chapter 2), suggest a greater commitment to poetic intervention into political and religious matters than he received credit for at the time. At any rate, with *Shepherdess Calender*, although we cannot know the extent to which Spenser achieved his rhetorical goals related to satirical allegory and critique, we do know that authorities did not judge that he had crossed the line into actionably offensive work.

Eleven years later, when *Complaints* was entered into the Stationers’ Register, Spenser had a very different status than did the “new poet,” “Immerito,” at the time of *The Shepherdess Calender*. The success of that venture and the publication of the first installment of *The Faerie Queene* (1590) established Spenser as the premier English poet, and some have thus found surprising the publication of *Complaints*, with its multiple poems insulting to Burghley, in the following year. Scholars differ on whether or not Spenser participated in the publication of the work, with Jean Brink arguing that, because of the offensiveness of some of the poems, Spenser must have intended for them to remain in manuscript (“Who fashioned”). On the other side, Andrew Hadfield believes that the care taken with presentation and the handsomeness of the volume support the view that Spenser participated in and supported the publication process (*A Life*, 273–74, 283–84), and I have argued elsewhere that the multiple dedicatory materials included in the volume, especially to the Spenser sisters, constitute a self-conscious bid for patronage and support at the crucial moment in Spenser’s career when he was waiting for approval of the pension he was ultimately to receive as reward for his labors on *The Faerie Queene* (Hile, “Auto/biographical fantasies”).

Whether or not Spenser participated in the publication process for this volume, his writing of poems such as *The Ruines of Time* and *Protopoia; or, Mother Hubberds Tale* indicates that he felt a great deal of self-confidence (and perhaps also a great deal of self-righteous conviction that Burghley had responded unfairly to *The Faerie Queene*, as Bruce Danner argues). We can speculate what impact Spenser hoped to achieve with these poems, but we do not know whether he was surprised and dismayed by the censorious government response or whether he relished the knowledge that his barbs had bitten. At any rate, Spenser’s book was

punished, but not his body, and the scandal died down quickly. Thomas Tresham's letter, dated "the sixth of Marche 1590" (i.e., 1591 new style), describes the details of the contemporary scandal, with Spenser recently having returned to Ireland, authorities trying to collect all copies of the offending book, and booksellers profiting by selling the book at inflated prices (Peterson, "Laurel crown"). In the following year, Gabriel Harvey criticized Spenser for writing the work, because "Mother Hubbard, in heat of choller, forgetting the pure sanguine of her sweete F[ae]ry Queene, wilfully ouer-shott her malcontented selfe"; this work was entered in the Stationers' Register on December 4, 1592 (Harvey, *Fovre Letters*, 15). In Thomas Nashe's response to this criticism, he charges that "If any man were vnderuedly toucht in it, thou hast reuiued his disgrace that was so toucht in it, by renaming it, when it was worn out of al mens mouths and minds" (Nashe, *Strange Newes*, 282). This work was entered in the Stationers' Register January 12, 1592 (i.e., 1593 new style), and thus we learn that the scandal, at least as it touched Spenser, was of relatively short duration. However, whereas the gossip was short-lived, the impact on *Mother Hubberds Tale* was not: Although the other *Complaints* poems were republished without *Mother Hubberds Tale* in 1611, that poem was not reprinted until 1612, following the death of Lord Burghley's son Robert Cecil, Earl of Salisbury (Lord Burghley having died in 1598).

This censorship episode certainly contributed to Spenser's credibility as a satirist to other poets in the 1590s, leading to other poets finding satirical inspiration in such poems as "March" and *Muiopotmos*, as I discuss in Chapter 4, in addition to beast fable and fox allusions more commonly recognized. This image of Spenser as a principled poet who was willing to take risks in order to express his ideas about the world around him affected not only how other poets in the 1590s thought of and responded to him, but also how Spenser thought of himself, and I believe this sense of himself, coupled with the self-confidence derived from his success as a poet, explains the presence of topical allegories, many with the bite of satire, in the 1596 installment of *The Faerie Queene*, which the 1590 books generally avoided. (The extended satirical critiques of the Roman Catholic Church in Book 1 hardly qualify as *dangerous* satire [see Waters, *Duessa*].)

Daphnaïda's satire, which I will discuss in detail in the next chapter, can be seen as intermediate, in that it was composed after the first installment of *The Faerie Queene* but before the censorship of *Complaints* (Weiss, "Watermark"). As a private satire of an acquaintance, this work presumably posed no real risk to Spenser, but his inventiveness in the

poem—using genre and readers’ generic expectations themselves to create indirect satirical meanings—indicates a further step in Spenser’s development of the possibilities of indirect forms of satirical meaning-making. Similarly, Spenser avoids major risks with the satirical moments in *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe*, dedicated December 27, 1591, though not published until 1595. The criticisms of court life in *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe*, even though the court he targets clearly figures the English one, are much more cautious than the preceding *Complaints* poems or the 1596 *Faerie Queene* books.

Continuing this speculation on Spenser as satirist, we can imagine that, with the 1596 installment of *The Faerie Queene*, Spenser found a balance between the caution of *The Shepheardes Calender* and the rashness of *Complaints*, a balance that Aristotle might describe as true courage. He intervenes into court politics with his allegorical defense of Walter Raleigh against the displeasure of the Queen at his secret marriage. He offers multiple opinions on European political and religious struggles with his allegorizations of the situations in France and the Netherlands. Most famously, he supports the justice of executing Mary, Queen of Scots, by allegorizing her as Duessa and putting her on trial. This passage motivated King James VI of Scotland, who of course dearly hoped to become King James I of England, to attempt to influence Elizabeth to punish, not the book, but Spenser himself. A November 1596 letter from Robert Bowes to Burghley states:

The K[ing] hath conceived of great offence against Edward [sic] Spenser publishing in prynte in the second book p[ar]t of the Fairy Queene and ixth chapter some dishonorable effects (as the k. demeth therof) against himself and his mother deceased ... he still desyreth that Edward Spenser for his faulte, may be dewly tryed & punished. (qtd. in Goldberg, *James I*, 1)⁶

Fortunately for Spenser, the queen declined to follow up on James’s request. Spenser died just over two years later, so he was spared from finding out if James was able to hold a grudge for as long as Burghley could, and we missed out on the chance to learn how Spenser, fully mature as both a poet and a satirist, would have responded to King James I of England.

Yes, Spenser built his career in an arc leading to the highest poetic genre, so that he could claim the status of an epic poet. Over the centuries, as he became a specimen for anthologies and survey courses, he often became *only* an epic poet, or sometimes a pastoral poet as well. But

6 For additional discussion of this passage, see McCabe, “Masks,” for an analysis of James’s response, and Ashworth-King, *Ethics of Satire*, chapter 3, for a discussion of its meaning within the overall context of Spenser’s satirical meanings in the Mercilla episode.

in his time, and for his contemporaries, his inventive muse led him to a larger array of genres, of experiments, of poetic stances, than he was to be remembered for. His satirical works were an important part of who he was, both for his contemporaries and for his own poetic self-image, and although too much time has passed, and not enough documentation exists, for us to understand fully everything that Spenser attempted to say, or that his contemporaries heard, in his satirical poetry, this book attempts to begin filling in some of the gaps in the story of Spenser as satirist.