Preface

In this book, I attempt a new reading of Spenser's literary career. My reading weaves together three strands of thought that could form three separate studies but that repeatedly resisted any attempt to unravel them: the generic structure of Spenser's literary career, its *telos*, and what I believe to be its premier device of literary representation. The generic structure I posit to be a culturally significant Christianization of the famous Virgilian model of pastoral and epic; the *telos*, an intimate relation between poetic fame and Christian glory; and the representation, avian flight. I argue that Spenser relies on images of flight to represent a Christianized Virgilian career that aims to demonstrate to English culture – and to Western culture past, present, and future – the utility of poetic fame to Christian glory. Spenser's self-reflexive imping of art and salvation I take to be the very centre of his project.

It is not the centre of his project alone. The trinal nexus of *literary career*, *fame/glory*, and *flight* is as important to Hesiod as it is to Henry Vaughan, who can be seen to end the Renaissance with the following genesis of the poet's art, communicated to his cousin John Aubrey:

> I was told by a very sober & knowing person (now dead) that in his time, there was a young lad father & motherless, & soe very poor that he was forced to beg; butt att last was taken up by a rich man, that kept a great stock of sheep upon the mountains not far from the place where I now dwell. who cloathed him & sent him into the mountains to keep his sheep. There in Summer time following the sheep & looking to their lambs, he fell into a deep sleep; In w^{ch} he dreamt, that he saw a beautifull young man with a garland of green leafs upon his head, & an hawk upon his fist: with a quiver full of Arrows att his back, coming towards him (whistling several measures

or tunes all the way) & att last lett the hawk fly att him, w^{ch} (he dreamt) gott into his mouth & inward parts, & suddenly awaked in a great fear & consternation: butt possessed with such a vein, or gift of poetrie, that he left the sheep & went about the Countrey, making songs upon all occasions, and came to be the most famous Bard in all the Countrey in his time. (696: *Letter* VII, 'To Aubrey,' 9 October 1694)

Vaughan's representation of the avian origin of a Welsh poet's famous career merits pause here because it incorporates in primitive form all of the representational elements discussed in the following study: the larger system of patronage in which the poet works (the 'rich man' taking up the 'poor' orphan artist); the divine spirit of eros gracing the poet's art (the 'beautifull young man' with a laurel garland and quiver of arrows who sings 'measures or tunes'); the avian agency of artistic genesis, metamorphosis, and inheritance or imitation (the 'hawk' who flies into the poet's 'mouth'); the generic turn from pastoral to epic (the young man who 'left the sheep & went about the Countrey'); and even the providential quest for fame (the dream vision of a divine visitation that makes the youth a 'famous Bard'). The central element in this story is the only startling one: the divine visitor 'lett the hawk fly at him, w^{ch} (he dreamt) gott into his mouth & inward parts.' This element represents the point of touch between divine and human, the imitative inheritance of one poet from another (for Vaughan, the inheritance of George Herbert [Post xv–xvi]), and the transition from dream to waking, vision to action, thinking to writing – essentially, amateur play to laureate career. Vaughan's interest in this story may derive from his recognition that it localizes a broad European myth of the poet that his poetry reveals he understood very well – a myth tracing to Hesiod's *Works and Days* and the one I aim to articulate in this book. Like Hesiod, Vaughan clearly took the myth very seriously. My assumption is that many of my readers may not. In part, then, my intent is to recuperate the significance of the avian myth of a famous literary career by focusing on a sixteenth-century poet whose works reveal a unique archaeology of that significance.

This study turned out to be longer than projected, in part because the three strands of my thesis remain largely separate discourses in contemporary criticism; in part because each of these discourses proved to be insufficient for a study of Spenser. We have a 'career' discourse, but as yet we have no detailed study of Spenser's literary career or, even more remarkably, its prerequisite, the Virgilian model, with its complex permutations extending from Horace, Propertius, and Ovid to St

Augustine, Dante, Chaucer, Petrarch, and Petrarch's sixteenth-century heirs. Similarly, we have a 'fame' discourse, but we have no detailed study of Spenser's idea of fame. Finally, we have a 'flight' discourse, but we have no study of the avian myth of the poet. Of the three strands, I can claim originality of thesis only with respect to the first and third; my thesis about fame and glory in Spenser has been stated before (albeit with controversy), but never investigated and never assimilated to the larger argument I weave.

The interdisciplinary and comparatist topics here traversed have often led me into terrain that I have found to be alien, difficult, and at times nearly impassable. Along the way, I have received direction, support, and care from reliable colleagues, faithful friends, and loving family.

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The origins of this book trace to four mentors who rescued me at decisive phases of my education. In the late sixties, at the University of Montana, the poet Edward Leahy rescued me from the woods – quite literally, for I was majoring in forestry! – with the tragic intensity of his

wonderfully Romantic voice. The late Walter N. King in turn rescued me from the Romantics with his stunning classes on Renaissance drama, Shakespeare, Milton, and especially Spenser, and he alone is responsible for returning me to the woods – the woods of faerie. The learned Miltonist Robert B. Johnstone kindly rescued me from the pastoral retreat of Montana and sent me to the city with the blessing of his faith: RBJ introduced me to the criticism of Northrop Frye (and later Kenneth Burke), and he directed me to graduate school at the University of Toronto. There, James A. Carscallen relied on learning and compassion to rescue me from professional adolescence, and he secured for me a sojourn atop the hymnic hill of Acidale, where in such discourses we together spent, as fit occasion forth us led.

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My parents, Marion I. Cheney and Thomas M. Cheney, gave me a genesis of earth, breath, and much more, including my brother, Jack, and my sister, Anne, both of whom have contributed essential warmth and lasting direction. My mother has also given me the gift of love and the enactment of faith; she continues to brood near the wellhead of the spring. My father was a geologist and a business executive, but he gave me my first typewriter and generously sent me on my way, down the path of poor poesy. Later, he and Marguerite gave birth to my little brother, Damien. A man of enormous energy, powerful resilience, and, to the end, undaunted courage, my father lived only long enough to see me complete my manuscript; it remains for me a treasured legacy that during his last days he took a father's pride in that accomplishment.

As I worked on the final form of the manuscript, I derived special meaning from watching my son, Evan Gerard, grow into life and consciousness. Evan keeps me away from Spenser with his boyish humour, challenging wit, inventive verbal architectonics, and fast feet. He empowers me to return.

As both the first and last rite of passage to publication, I dedicate this book to my wife, Debora. A gifted librarian, she has made countless

contributions to my research. But for over twenty years she has inspired and directed my energy. The mystery of our original meeting continues to return me to two special moments of marital miracle in *The Faerie Queene*. You pressed the grass, Debora, and helped me vow never to unbind the vow; you are the lovely face who long since in that enchanted glass I saw.

Patrick Cheney