Spenser as Prometheus:
The Monstrous and the Idea of Poetic Creation[*1]

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1. Introduction

Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, one of the richest, most ambitious and complex poems in the English language, develops the early modern concept of the poet as creator. Sir Philip Sidney, the most prominent of Spenser's contemporary writer-critics, explains in his *Defence of Poesy* that the word "poet" derives from the Old Greek verb ποιεῖν, "to make."[2] Poets, according to this widely current definition, are makers fashioning characters and incidents for their grand creative designs. Spenser's own literary *aventure*, which joins epic and romance traditions to create a heroic master text to "fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline,"[3] documents its author's creative ambitiousness: the poem relates innumerable quests and stories of a vast cast of characters set mostly in Faeryland, a realm of Spenser's own invention. It also presents a plethora of monsters such as dragons and human-animal composites. As this cast is interspersed with a great number of dragons and human-animal composites, the monstrous becomes an integral part of poetic creation. Spenser thus confronts a major contemporary tradition that reprimanded monsters and grotesque beings as the unwholesome outgrowth of a self-indulgent imagination.[4] Drawing on Spenser's version of the Prometheus myth, which narrates how the Greek god created Elfe, the ancestor of the Faeries, this article assesses Spenser's making of monsters for *The Faerie Queene*, and relates it both to Sid-

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ney's definition of the poet's creation as an "other nature" and to the early modern concept of the imagination. The analysis brings to light that, for Spenser, poetic making, even that of monsters, is essentially a Promethean act.

2. The Context: Second Nature and the Imagination

Before I turn to the examination of Spenser's take on the Prometheus myth and analyse its conceptual relevance for the poem, I shall briefly introduce the famous tenet of the *natura altera*, which Sidney explains in his *Defence of Poesy* (published in 1595, nine years after Sidney's death). In this treatise, which S. K. Heninger sees as a "sophisticated apology for the human imagination,"[5] Sidney eulogises the poet's creative powers, and, significantly, includes mythical monsters in his appraisal of the poet. The poet, Sidney writes,

> lifted up with the vigour of his own invention, doth grow in effect another nature, in making things either better than nature bringeth forth, or, quite anew, forms such as never were in nature, as the Heroes, Demigods, Cyclops, Chimeras, Furies, and such like: so as he goeth hand in hand with nature, not enclosed within the narrow warrant of her gifts, but freely ranging only within the zodiac of his own wit. Nature never set forth the earth in so rich tapestry as diverse poets have done [...][6]

Following J. C. Scaliger's famous argument that the poet is a secondary god creating a secondary world, Sidney here fervently praises poets as creators bringing to life a superior "second nature,"[7] which they fashion either through improving on post-lapsarian nature or through inventing beings "quite anew." The creatures Sidney gives as examples of such new forms (after citing the heroes and demigods of mythology) are not random choices but form what appears to be a deliberately composed triad: the "Cyclops, Chimeras, Furies" provide a miniature taxonomy of possible monstrous beings, with the one-eyed Cyclops representing giants and strange races, Chimeras epitomising composite monsters, and Furies exemplifying human-animal

composites. Sidney thus shows his awareness of the teratological possibilities informing the making of mythological creatures, as well as their usefulness for making exciting poetry. Quite surprisingly, Sidney not only refrains from stigmatising fantastic creatures *a priori*, but values them as expressing the poet's creation of an imaginative world, thus making monsters, not only the half-divine but also the significantly hideous like the Chimera, examples of poetic achievement. This theory also suggests that poetry, by dint of the imagination, is a privileged art form that can shape beings "quite anew" on its own while drawing on perceived reality,[8] a tension made manifest in Sidney's conflicting statements that the poet goes "hand in hand with nature" but is "not enclosed within the narrow warrant of her gifts."

The fullness of the new poetic world, which Sidney here describes as a "rich tapestry," originates from the poet's power of "invention" and "wit,"[9] two terms that are closely associated with the workings of the human imagination, the source of the poet's creative work.[10] In his treatise, Sidney explicitly establishes the imagination as an independent faculty in which the idea is located[11] and which furnishes the poet with the divine potency to effect a second creation by turning ideas, i.e. ideal images, into fore-conceits, and finally into proper conceits.[12] These give an ideal nature to the fictional world which surpasses factual reality:[13] in the writer's creative faculty, the ideal image becomes an image in his mind, which is then reified as an image or representation in his poem.[14] The poet therefore figures as a maker endowed with the ability to act at his own command within the expanse of his own imagination.

However, if monsters for Sidney exemplify the beneficial use of the imagination (he never returns to the topic again in his treatise), in *The Faerie Queene* Spenser expands the monstrous into a central poetic concept. Seeing the workings of the imagination as the *sine qua non* of poetic creation, he personifies it in the Castle of Alma episode (II.ix-xi), which allegorises the human body as a castle under siege. In this passage, the brain is anatomised as a tripartite turret, the individual compartments of which represent the three main faculties of the soul:

Phantastes, the personification of fantasy, resides in the first chamber; an unspecified agent that might represent judgement in the second;[15] and Eumnestes, i.e. memory, in the third.[16] While Phantastes inhabits a fly-infested chamber, the walls of which are covered with paintings depicting strange beings and romance characters (thus evoking Sidney's "rich tapestry"), the room of the second sage is painted with the deeds of authorities, political institutions, and the *artes*. Quite differently, Eumnestes's chamber is devoid of wall-paintings; instead, it is hung with parchment scrolls and books recording past history.[17] Spenser's allegorical anatomy of the human psyche hence also presents the interplay between the individual faculties of the soul. It is in Eumnestes's chamber that Spenser presents his version of the Prometheus myth, to which I shall now turn, before I will eventually return to Phantastes's chamber at the end of this article.

3. Prometheus's Creation

As is the case with every other classical myth, literary accounts of the Prometheus myth sometimes differ substantially from one author to another. The standardised version narrates how Prometheus, whose name means "forethought" (from Old Greek προ– + μηθ– or μαθ–, *to think*, as in προ-μηθής),[18] creates Man from clay, modelling him on the form of the Olympian gods,[19] and animates him either with fire stolen from heaven,[20] or with his own divine breath or spirit.[21] As punishment for stealing fire from the gods, Zeus has Prometheus chained to mount Caucasus, where an eagle eats away his ever re-growing liver.[22] According to this myth, Prometheus's act of creating Man is akin to an artisan manufacturing a clay sculpture.[23] Prometheus thus emerges as a *deus artifex*, i.e. a divine artificer, a role that is also emphasised by the many versions that depict his creation of the beasts.[24]

Spenser's version of the Prometheus myth is recorded in one of the scrolls stored in Eumnestes's chamber. While young Arthur, not yet King of Britain, reads the *Chronicle of Briton Kings* to acquaint himself

with the history of his people and his own destiny, Guyon, a knight of Elfin extraction, devotes his attention to a volume called the "*Antiquity* of *Faery* lond," which begins the history of the Faeries with the tale of their origin:

> It told, how first *Prometheus* did create
> A man, of many parts from beasts deryu'd,
> And then stole fire from heuen, to animate
> His worke, for which he was by *Ioue* depryu'd
> Of life him self, and hart-strings of an Aegle ryu'd.
>
> That man so made, he called *Elfe*, to weet
> Quick, the first author of all Elfin kynd:
> Who wandring through the world with wearie feet,
> Did in the gardins of *Adonis* fynd
> A goodly creature, whom he deemd in mynd
> To be no earthly wight, but either Spright,
> Or Angell, th'author of all woman kynd;
> Therefore a *Fay* he her according hight,
> Of whom all *Faryes* spring, and fetch their lignage right.   (II.x.70.5-71)

Spenser here invents a Promethean myth of his own to explain the creation of the Elves. The narrative of a deity manufacturing a man who finds his mate in a garden, where both become the *authors* of the Faery race, presents a procreational pattern substantially based on the Edenic narrative in the Book of Genesis. In his revision, Spenser substitutes God the Maker with the pagan deity Prometheus, who creates the ancestor of all Faeries or Elves in *The Faerie Queene* as "[a] man, of many parts from beasts deryu'd" (70.6). As Prometheus created "[a] man" and not "Man" as such, the passage clearly identifies the Greek god as the founding father of the Elves, a particular race in Spenser's literary cosmos that closely resemble humans. Moreover, as neither the characters in Faeryland nor the narrator can distinguish consistently between human beings and Faeries, Spenser implies that there are no physical markers that help tell the Elves from the Britons, despite their different origins.[25] This renders the analogy between humans and Faeries more complete.

Spenser is very specific about the raw material Prometheus uses in the creation of Elfe: as the latter is "of many parts from beasts deryu'd," Spenser makes clear that Prometheus patterns Elfe entirely on animal parts. Spenser's omission of any other ingredient creates a version of the Prometheus myth that differs from most traditional ones, in which Prometheus creates Man from clay in the likeness of the gods. By emphasising Elfe's animal origin and nature, Spenser elaborates on the concept of the animal human, which is an important strand in the history of early modern ideas.[26] Spenser's use of Prometheus to elaborate on what Jürgen R. Meyer has recently termed the "Renaissance humanimal,"[27] is not without precedent. Lotspeich traces the influences for this passage to Horace and to Natale Conti, one of Spenser's chief sources for mythological material.[28] Horace relates that the primal mud from which Prometheus created Man was insufficient to complete his creation, so that he had to gather additional material to finish his work. Among other things, he placed the lion's anger into Man's stomach.[29] In the early modern period, the Italian mythographer Natale Conti elaborates on Horace's version, explaining that Prometheus furnished Man with the fear of the hare, the astuteness of the wolf, the boastfulness of the peacock, the fierceness of the tiger, the wrath of the lion and the magnitude of the soul.[30] If anything, Conti's version is therefore designed to give a mythological explanation for the beastly qualities of human behaviour.[31]

Conti's mythographical entry is significant, because it helps to emphasise the chief characteristics of Spenser's version. Like Conti, Spenser accentuates the animal heritage of Prometheus's creation, but applies the aetiology to his fictional invention, and thereby recontextualises it into his own referential system. The most important deviation is Spenser's literalisation of Conti's version: where Conti uses the Prometheus myth to explain the animal characteristics of human behaviour, Spenser emphasises that Elfe was literally manufactured out of the "parts" of animals, and hence turns Conti's quasi-psychological explications, where characteristic traits are referred back to different animals, into a narrative about the body.

Matthew Woodcock, who has devoted an entire book to the idea of *Elf-Fashioning*, points out quite rightly that Spenser's brief tale of Prometheus is replete with "references to artifice and 'making.'"[32] But while Woodcock states that the Elves are "manufactured," he offers no sustained analysis of the creation myth. Yet, the myth pertains to the very core of "making" in *The Faerie Queene* and, against the backdrop of Sidney's definition of the poet's nature, also to the very essence of poetic creation. The circumstance that Spenser's take on the Prometheus myth focuses on making Elfe from animal material and bringing him to life with the fire stolen from Jove allows for the deduction that the poet deliberately emphasises the transgressive act of animating parts derived from animals to create a new species, a latent composite that looks like "[a] man." That transgression is involved becomes all the more plausible as it is not explicitly clear which of Prometheus's acts caused Jove's anger in Spenser's version: the creation, the theft of the fire, or, indeed, both. Hence, it could be argued that Prometheus's transgression is constituted by the pursuit of his own creative designs.[33]

Spenser is not the only early modern writer resorting to the Prometheus myth in a poetological context. In his "Hymnus in Noctem," the first of two poems constituting *The Shadow of Night* (1594), George Chapman explicitly identifies poets with Prometheus. Half-way through the poem, Chapman gives an account of human beings with degenerate and hence monstrous souls, an observation that he uses as an introduction to a discussion of more general poetic issues, namely the nature of the poet and the *telos* of poetry. In the following passage, which emphasises the poet's didactic duty, he makes his readers aware of Man's possible monstrosity:

> *Therefore Promethean Poets with the coles*
> *Of their most geniale, more-then-humane soules*
> *In liuing verse, created men like these,*
> *With shapes of Centaurs, Harpies, Lapithes,*
> *That they in prime of erudition,*
> *When almost sauage vulgar men were growne,*

> *Seeing them selues in those Pierean founts,*
> *Might mend their mindes, asham'd of such accounts.* [34]

This passage characterises poets as Promethean beings, whose quasi-divine souls can create monsters, ranging from hybrid races like Centaurs and the gigantic Lapithians to infernal creatures such as the Harpies, and animate them with the force of "liuing verse."[35] The notion that "verse"—which refers to the individual members and "organic units" of poetry and here metonymically applies to poetry at large—[36] is a "liuing" entity that in turn bestows life on the beings created by the poet opens a channel to Spenser's Promethean myth. To be more precise, the notion of *living* verse recalls the name which Spenser's Prometheus chose for his creation, namely *Elfe*, which, according to Spenser (*FQ* II.x.71.1-2), means "quick" or "living." Spenser's explanation elevates the Prometheus myth to a metapoetical level, because poetry emerges as an art form that animates. In the allegorical world of the poem, Prometheus could be deemed the fictional cipher for the real creator of the Faeries, namely Spenser the poet, who brings to life a new race, as well as a cast of new characters, deities, and monsters. The qualities that define Prometheus are therefore equally applicable to the poet. Spenser describes Prometheus as a godhead that can create a new organic being through the process of physical derivation. This makes Prometheus a "maker" and, thus, the poet's kin. In his version of the Prometheus myth, Spenser hence elaborates on the notion of the creator-poet, and thereby resorts to and "images forth" Sidney's idea of the poet as a maker developing a secondary nature, which here is exemplified by Prometheus's creating a secondary Man through creative derivation.

4. Spenser's Creations

If one takes Spenser's revision of the Prometheus myth seriously, Faeryland is populated with the descendants of Elfe, a "humanimal" created as an emulated version of the animals. In addition, however,

Spenser's version of the Prometheus myth may also be read as an allegory of the poet's creative process. In fact, the scrutiny of overtly monstrous creatures in *The Faerie Queene* reveals that Spenser fashions a large number of composite beings by using a method analogous to the one used by Prometheus in the Faerie chronicle. I will take a closer look at two of these notorious creatures, namely Duessa and Geryoneo's dragon, in order to show that, on a more abstract level, Spenser emerges as a Promethean poet who creates new monsters as physical and intertextual beings through the process of calculated derivation.

Like other beings, monstrosities are communicated to the readers by means of descriptions that mirror the process of creation and place the monster into the overall framework of the poem.[37] Spenser's description of Duessa is a case in point.[38] The chief temptress and deceitrix of *The Faerie Queene,* she allures many a character with her dazzling beauty. When she is stripped bare her ugly body is revealed under her richly ornamented "roiall robes" (*FQ* I.viii.46.2).[39] Her upper half is that of a "loathly, wrinckled hag" (46.8). Her bald head is covered in scabs and scall, her "rotten gummes" (47.4) lack teeth, and her breath is odorous. Her breasts are described as "dried dugs" that hang down "lyke bladders lacking wind," emanating filthy matter (47.6-7), while her scabby skin is wrinkled "as maple rind" (47.8). Spenser is, of course, eager to evoke his readers' disgust through the graphic depiction of disease and deformity. The description of Duessa's bottom half in the next stanza is even more repulsive:

> Her neather parts, the shame of all her kind,
> My chaster Muse for shame doth blush to write;
> But at her rompe she growing had behind
> A foxes taile, with dong all fowly dight;
> And eke her feete most monstrous were in sight;
> For one of them was like an Eagles claw,
> With griping talaunts armd to greedy fight,
> The other like a beares vneuen paw:
> More vgly shape yet neuer liuing creature saw.   (*FQ* I.viii.48)

That Duessa's stunning beauty drew attention away from this kind of corruption underlines that Spenser conceives of her as the "embodiment of falsehood."[40] Her name, which is traditionally interpreted as a reference to her double-dealing deception or "duplicity,"[41] might also encode her bi-natural appearance as half woman, half animal: Duessa is a compound whose physical features make manifest her sinful nature, a circumstance stressed by Spenser's use of scatological detail.[42] Her deformed physique is determined by the complete absence of symmetry, which is emphasised by the pun on the adjective "vneuen." In this context, the term "rompe" takes on special significance, for it indicates that Duessa is created by uniting various disparate parts of predatory animals, which is also stressed when her breasts are likened to mammal teats in the previous stanza. In other words, the poet's penchant for new combinations ("More vgly shape yet neuer liuing creature saw") points to the method of fashioning grotesque novelties from existing animal parts. Fox's tail, eagle's claw and bear's paw are, of course, mutually exclusive limbs, a circumstance that is emphasised by the fact that these animals belong to different habitats. In order to connect these disparate *membra*, Spenser utilises rhyme as rhetorical glue, thus combining the "Eagles claw" (fully anatomised with talons) with the "beares […] paw." In this description, Spenser strictly adheres to form to depict the deformed: he works his way directly from the upper to the lower half of her face before turning to her breasts and skin, her tail, and, finally, her feet. Thus, the entire passage parodies the arrangement of the Petrarchan beauty catalogue.[43] This strategy brings her ugliness and her deprivation into clear focus. Truly "abhominable," she is—in the etymological sense—*ab homine*,[44] more monster than beast, blending animal deformity with human heinousness. Hence, Duessa exemplifies how Spenser creates beings from reconfigured body parts. Like Prometheus's Elfe, Duessa is "of many parts from beasts deryu'd," but combined into an overtly monstrous hybrid. In effect, Horace's and Conti's metaphors for the beastly aspects of human

behaviour are embodied in the physicality of Spenser's (admittedly allegorical) figure of Duessa.

If composite beings like Elfe and Duessa bring into palpable relief the combinatory possibilities of the Promethean poet, so do dragons, a type of creature which is particularly important for *The Faerie Queene*. Although Book I is usually at the centre of dragon criticism, as it features no less than three specimens,[45] I will instead turn to Book V, Canto x. In it Prince Arthur battles and vanquishes the composite female dragon owned by the triple-bodied giant Geryoneo, a cruel tyrant who forces Belge, mother of seventeen children, to sacrifice her offspring and people to this "dreadfull Monster" (*FQ* V.x.13.7). Dragons will of course be dragons—and so the monster greedily devours their carcasses, "both flesh and bone" (29.7).[46] Geryoneo's dragon is a composite deformity, exceeding, the narrator tells his readers, any other monstrosity seen by those who lived to tell.[47] This female monstrosity has the face of a maiden to hide her terrifying features and to beguile her victims,[48] as well as the ability to utter blasphemous speech.[49] Her body is a combination of animal parts:

> Thereto [i.e. her face] the body of a dog she had,
>   Full of fell rauin and fierce greedinesse;
>   A Lions clawes, with powre and rigour clad,
>   To rend and teare, what so she can oppresse;
>   A Dragons taile, whose sting without redresse
>   Full deadly wounds, where so it is empight;
>   And Eagles wings, for scope and speedinesse,
>   That nothing may escape her reaching might,
> Whereto she euer list to make her hardy flight.   (*FQ* V.xi.24)

Spenser's catalogue of attributes is more than a mere enumeration of body parts, as he meticulously anatomises and explains the significance of the she-monster's canine torso, leonine claws, eagle's wings, and dragon's tail and sting.

Since Spenser resorts to a rhetorical description-*cum*-explication to bring the monster in full view, the extended syntactical parallelism enacts his creation of the monster's body on the stylistic level of the

text as well: hence, physical creation and poetic fashioning work along similar parameters. As Spenser's 'formalist' stance adds shape to the deformed monster, Geryoneo's beast is as much a paradoxical product as Duessa, because Spenser creates a disfigured monster through "well-wrought" poetry.[50] The creation of the monster on the stylistic level is done through the assembling of various intertextual parts. A telling example is when he likens Geryoneo's dragon to the Sphinx (V.xi.25). Spenser largely buttresses the physique of the dragon on Natale Conti's description of the Sphinx, which Conti assigns "the head and handes of a mayden, the bodie of a dogge, wynges lyke a byrde, nayles like a lyon, a tayle like a dragon, the voyce of a man."[51] The incompatible physical features of the Sphinx correspond to those of Geryoneo's monster in such a way that they form the basic design, or blueprint on which Spenser models his emulated creature. The horrifying physique of Geryoneo's dragon is thus largely an intertextual creation. This supposition is also borne out by the name of its owner, which derives from the triple-bodied giant Geryon,[52] and from Dante's Gerïon, the serpentine image of Fraud,[53] on whose back Dante and Virgil descend to the eighth circle of hell. Textually, Spenser, when creating a monster serving Geryoneo, seems to have taken his cues from (1) Dante's transferring the giant's name to a dragon, and (2) from Natale Conti's remarking that Geryon owned a dragon.[54]

   Geryoneo's dragon is thus not only of "many parts from beasts deryu'd," but also 'of many parts from texts deryu'd.' Spenser starts out with a number of descriptive sources (notably the references in Conti), then by combining them he rebuilds his own version, among others, through the rhetorical or stylistic means such as mentioned above, and finally animates his creation in the context of his—and here I would like to hark back to Chapman's text—"liuing verse." The idea of derivation put forward in the Prometheus passage is thus also applicable to Spenser's textual practices, for even in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the verb "to derive" could be applied to the construction of texts and the formation of words.[55] The anatomical

analyses of Duessa and Geryoneo's dragon hence reveal Spenser to be a Promethean poet, who creates new monsters as physical and inter-textual beings through the process of calculated derivation and poetic animation.

5. Prometheus, Spenser, and the Imagination

Monstrous beings like the ones treated in the previous section make manifest Spenser's, as it were, 'constructionist' agenda; they also put the spotlight firmly on the human agency that ultimately constructs them, namely the poet's active and creative imagination. The discussion of Spenser's poetic making as exemplified by his monstrous creatures brings the argument back full circle to the context in which Spenser embeds his tale of Prometheus: the Castle of Alma. Prometheus dwells, as it were, in a scroll stored in Eumnestes's chamber of memories, and is hence the memorial token of a divine and autonomous creative process which, as has been shown, tells of the animation of a new living being made from different parts. By embedding the version of Prometheus's tale into his allegory of the tripartite brain turret, Spenser implicitly relates the creational myth to the larger issue of the imagination.[56] Phantastes, Spenser's allegory of fantasy, whose fly-infested chamber is painted with the types of monsters and romance characters that also appear in *The Faerie Queene*,[57] has surprising similarities with Prometheus. The imagination is usually assigned the capacity to put together disparate material into newly fashioned beings. Huarte, among others, emphasises that the imagination "hath force not onely to compound a figure *possible* with another, but doth ioyne also (after the order of nature) those which are *vnpossible*."[58] This brings out an important similarity with Prometheus's compounding Elfe. In his anatomy of the brain cells, Spenser emphasises that Phantastes is endowed with "fore-sight," as well as with "quick pre[–]iudize," a word, as A. C. Hamilton informs us, that means "prejudgment," but also "fore-thought."[59] Phantastes thus has

the ability to look into the future, and to create with premeditation, a quality that is also emphasised by his ponderous melancholy. Phantastes's creative ability connects readily with Prometheus's nature, because his name (Greek Προ-μήθευς) defines him through his ability to "fore-think."[60] It is exactly the ability of "forethought" in both Phantastes and Prometheus that stresses deliberation as the defining quality of fashioning, and characterises poetic creation—even that of monstrous or human composites—as intentional. This correlation between the names and natures of Prometheus and Phantastes are hardly coincidental in a work where names form such complex patterns of meaning, and which draws so heavily on contemporary poetical issues.[61]

As fantasy has access to memory and can create new combinations from what it has stored, Good Memory (Eumnestes) is the decisive tool for the visualisation of new beings, since this faculty provides the matter, or raw material for creating these new combinations from physical and textual data. Making poetry is therefore an act of creation based on the combination and animation of physical and textual material, which—to use the central term from Spenser's Prometheus myth—is "deryu'd" from memory, a process which is at work in Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, and parallels Prometheus's fashioning Elfe from the parts of animals.[62] In the context of this theory, the poet is not merely the vessel of divine inspiration; rather, he emerges as a Promethean maker in his own right. It thus becomes apparent that Spenser's fashioning, literally com-posing a poem, full of extraordinary characters, strange bodies, and topographical details, is just as much an act of making as Prometheus's fashioning Elfe: Prometheus, like Spenser, is a poet in the etymological sense of the word.[63] In the words of Theseus in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, one could say that both Prometheus and Spenser indulge in "bod[ying] forth […] things unknown" by giving shape to their "airy nothing[s]," i.e. their very own ideas and imaginings.[64] Like Prometheus, Spenser gives these beings names; the poet, however, transcends the god by designing for them a "local habitation," namely Faeryland and its

adjacent textual realms, which is very much a compound of topographical referents, animated within the confines of his poem. In his treatment of the Prometheus myth, Spenser hence reflects on his own critical awareness of the poet as a maker who brings to life a second nature in which he also places different types of new monsters as defining and consciously fashioned parts of his "rich tapestry."

6. Concluding Remarks

Prometheus's alleged deeds have earned him various epithets. On the one hand, the theft of fire and the creation of Man marked him as an antagonist of the gods, and stigmatised him as a lawbreaker driven by excessive vanity and curiosity.[65] The myth also lent itself to positive allegorical readings, turning Prometheus into the hero of civilisation, as the bringer of culture, i.e. of philosophy, letters and learning,[66] characteristics that are in no small part influenced by the etymology of his name. In his *Genealogie deorum*, Boccaccio stresses the necessity to read myths allegorically, and sets up the concept of the "duplex Prometheus": while the first is the syncretistic cipher for God, the maker of man, the second is a wise teacher that turns ignorant, and unruly men into a civilised people. As Prometheus's educational programme is basically a second creation that turns human beings from physical into cultural beings, Man likewise has a "double nature."[67] In a recent article, Susanna Barsella interprets Boccaccio's use of the Prometheus myth as a strategy to reclaim for himself "the lofty role of 'civilizator.'"[68] In a more critical move, Spenser, who acknowledges the tension between the poet's creativity and its dangers throughout his work (in figures like Bonfont/Malfont, and Archimago), emphasises that the poet must act transgressively by creating something new and living from disparate parts in order to create a work that likewise helps civilise, i.e. fashion "a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline."[69] This observation renders more profound the conceptual link between the creator of Elfe and the maker of *The Faerie*

Queene, precisely because both employ analogous methods. Since the monsters and monstrous beings in and outside of Faeryland consist of reconfigured and animated body parts, which are also frequently derived from preexisting textual material, the poet of Faeryland establishes the Promethean discourse as the sub-textual matrix on which he patterns the poet's office. The paradigm of Prometheus thus ultimately accounts for the "liuing verse" of *The Faerie Queene*, which is very much a coagulation derived from different texts and genres amalgamated into a unified whole by Spenser the poet. Construction and animation permeate the different aspects of his work, and constitute the basis of his craft.

If contextualised in the discourse of poetic fantasy in the early modern period, *The Faerie Queene*, as the manifest outcome of Spenser's deliberate use of the imagination, can be read as its author's engagement with the tenets Sidney voiced in the *Defence*. Like Sidney's poet, Spenser, a likewise forethinking artist, brings to life a secondary creation by reifying his abstract ideas, and by placing them in a secondary world. But Spenser's use of the monstrous as an integral part of his poem goes one decisive step further, because Spenser expands the monstrous into a central poetic concept. As the monsters and monstrous beings in the poem "image forth" aberrations, corruption and vices within in the framework of an "extended allegory," they become the textual manifestation of the *deus alter*'s calculated making. Spenser, as an early modern Prometheus, seeks to reassess the task of the poet as an act in which the creator becomes a rightful secondary god if foresight and forethought guide his steps.

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NOTES

Imagination: Permutations of the Monstrous in Edmund Spenser's The Faerie Queene*,* supervised by Luuk Houwen. All quotations from *The Faerie Queene* are taken from A. C. Hamilton's edition.

[2]See Sidney, *Defence* 77: "The Greeks called him a 'poet,' which name hath, as the most excellent, gone through other languages. It cometh of this word ποιεῖν, which is, to make: wherein, I know not whether by luck or wisdom, we Englishmen have met with the Greeks in calling him a maker […]." Spenser must have been aware of this, as E. K.'s gloss to the "April Eclogue" (19) suggests.

[3]"Letter to Raleigh" 8. Line references of the "Letter" are to Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, ed. Hamilton, 714-18.

[4]The tradition goes back to Horace's *Ars Poetica* 1-5, where the poet describes a disproportionate creature made up of a human head and a female torso, a horse's neck, bird's feathers, and a fish's tail. In the sixteenth century, Tasso advises strongly against the use of monstrous creatures in poetry (527). The monster also encroaches on early modern poetic discourse: while Pellegrino criticizes the romance as a monster with many heads and diverse limbs (cited in Javitch 107), Ascham claims that readers became marvellous monsters under the impact of a poetry that transforms them into animals (Ascham 228); Gosson goes so far as to accuse poets as 'monsters of nature' (Gosson 67).—For early modern views on the imagination as the suspicious locus of monstrous creation, see Bright 106 and Burton 1: 159-60. These views are thoroughly discussed by Rossky 49-73.

[5]Heninger, "Aesthetic Experience" 85.

[6]Sidney 78.

[7]J. C. Scaliger states in his *Poetices libri* (1561) that the poet is a *deus alter* creating a *natura altera*, for he does not retell events like historians, but creates new lives and matters like a second god. Although Scaliger does not postulate the creation of entirely new realms, his poetical statement contains the germ of what Sidney later turns into his fully-fledged *Defence*; see Scaliger 1: 70-72.

[8]This is the classical history vs. poetry argument; see Leimberg 103-04. Lobsien characterises the transforming power of the imagination as a key quality of poetic making (22-26).

[9]On the significance of *inventio*, see Pierre de Ronsard, *Abbregé de l'Art poétique françois* (in *Œuvres complètes* 2: 1178), and Gascoigne, *Certayne Notes of Instruction Concerning the Making of Verse or Ryme in English* (in Smith 1: 47-48); these texts are treated in Wels 66-67, and Heninger, *Touches* 294.—In the *Naugerius*, Fracastoro uses similar terms when emphasising the importance of *inventio*, whereby poets "add sublimity and wonder to discourse" ("hęc tum magnitudinem, tū admiratiōne affere sermoni solēt"; see Fracastoro 128 and 41).

[10]This view is stated in Juan Huarte's widely-read *Examen de Ingenios* (103): "From a good imagination, spring all the Arts and Sciences, which consist in figure, correspondence, harmonie and proportion: such are Poetrie, Eloquence, Musicke, and the skill of preaching: the practise of Phisicke, the Mathematicals, Astrologie and the gouerning of a Common-wealth, the art of Warfare, Paynting,

drawing, writing, reading, to be a man gratious, pleasant, neat, wittie in manag-
ing, & all the engins & deuises which artificers make […]."

[11]Also noted by Herman 66-67.

[12]See Sidney 79. Wood 95 gives a good explanation of the three stages of poetic
creation in Sidney's *Defence*.

[13]On the idealness of the poetic image see Herman 66-67, and Wels 79.

[14]Cf. Theseus's speech in Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream* 5.1.14-17:
"And as imagination bodies forth/ The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen/
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing/ A local habitation and a name."
Plett offers an exhaustive discussion of Theseus's speech (*Midsummer Night's
Dream* 5.1.4-22).

[15]See Miller 185-86 and 255-56, as well as Healy 100. Hamilton eschews to dis-
close the sage's identity, but argues that the sage's tasks of receiving and
processing sense perceptions are rather similar to those of the poet (note to *FQ*
II.ix.53.2-5).

[16]According to early modern science, the brain consisted of three faculties,
namely: (1) common sense, which receives the information transmitted from the
five senses; (2) the imagination, which can penetrate the nature of things; (3) and
memory, the repository that stores these perceptions, and from which the imagi-
nation can call forth things. See the discussion in section 5.

[17]See *FQ* II.ix.47-60.

[18]For the etymology of the word "Prometheus," see the entry on "προμηθής" in
Frisk 2: 599, and "Prometheus" in *Der Neue Pauly* 10: 402.

[19]See Apollodor, *Library* 1.7.1, Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 1.69-88, and Lucian, "Pro-
metheus," 12.

[20]See Hesiod, *Works* 50-52.

[21]Boccaccio relates that Prometheus breathed life into Man (*Genealogie*, IV.xlii
[47C]).

[22]The major possible transgressions are: bringing fire to Man, and tricking Jove
of the sacrificial offerings; see Hesiod, *Theogony* 507-616, esp. 521-25, *Works* 42-105,
and Apollodor, *Library* 1.7.1.

[23]Lactantius severely criticises Prometheus, emphasising that the novelty and
subtlety of Prometheus's art stirred his witnesses into wonder (*Epitome* 20.12-13).

[24]Aesop explains in fable 240 ("Prometheus and the Human Beings"; Perry 3:
415) that Zeus ordered Prometheus to create Man and the animals. As he had
formed more animals than human beings, Zeus told him to destroy some of the
animals and to forge men from their material. These beings had a human form,
but animal characteristics. The epimythion states that the fable explains the
existence of "beastly" humans. In other versions of the myth, all beings are
created by Prometheus's brother Epimetheus. As Plato writes in the *Protagoras*
(320C-322A), Epimetheus used up all the material and qualities for the animals,
leaving Man a naked and vulnerable being. Prometheus, however, stole fire from

heaven and gave it to Man, and with it the intelligence to survive through cultural means. For Prometheus as a bringer of culture, see note 66.

[25]See the respective entries in Osgood's *Concordance*. Hume 145-61 emphasises the differences between Britons and Elves.

[26]On the use of "to derive" in the context of source and origin see *OED*, "derive, v." 6.c. In fact, Bacon marks Man as being with the highest degree of composition, because Prometheus created him by mixing clay and animal parts (*Works* 6: 747).

[27]For the full discussion see Meyer 25-37.

[28]Lotspeich 102-03. The influence of Conti on *The Faerie Queene* is generally agreed upon. Nelson in fact calls Conti "Spenser's favorite mythographer" (263).

[29]See Horace, *Odes* 1.16.13-6: "fertur Prometheus addere principi/ limo coactus particulam undique/ desectam et insani leonis/ uim stomacho apposuisse nostro." West translates the stanza thus: "They say Prometheus had to add to the primeval slime/ a particle cut from every animal [MG: *undique* actually means 'from all over the place']/ and grafted the violence of a rabid lion/ on to our stomach."

[30]See Conti, *Mythologiae* 4.6.

[31]It thus stands in the tradition that originates from Aesop's fable 240.

[32]Woodcock 130.

[33]Spenser might have culled the idea that Jove's eagle ate away Prometheus's heart from Cooper 1565.

[34]The quotation is taken from the poem's first edition.

[35]The marginalia of the first edition explain this passage at some length: "He [i.e. the poet] cals them Promethean Poets in this high conceipt, by a figuratiue comparison betwixt thē, that as Pro[metheus] with fire fetcht frō heauen, made men: so Poets with the fire of their soules are sayd to create those Harpies, and Centaures, and thereof he calls their soules Geniale." Such an exhaustive marginal note would only be warranted if Chapman's "figuratiue comparison" was un-usual and needed explaining.

[36]This topos also figures in Shakespeare's *Sonnets* (e.g. in Sonnet 18).

[37]This conceptual overlay is similarly argued in Hanafi 25: "Description not only describes, it also creates, orders, sets the object in a context of rhetorical meaning and institutional forces."

[38]The ensuing discussion of Duessa is culled from Goth 164-67.

[39]The entire passage covers *FQ* I.viii.46-48.—Cf. also the end of Fradubio's tale for a first rendering of Duessa's ugliness, here, however, *sans* lower body parts, which are hid in water (*FQ* I.ii.38-41).

[40]Hough 132. Cf. also Alpers 147.

[41]Craig 455 identifies her thus.

[42]See Hankins 101-02 for a discussion of possible influences.

[43]Krier 134 makes a similar observation, but does not bring her findings to bear on the discourse of the monstrous.

[44]The etymology is also explained by Hamilton, note to *FQ* I.viii.47.5.

[45]Namely: Errour, Orgoglio's dragon, and the Dragon terrorising Eden. For a discussion of these creatures see Goth 161-64 (Errour), and 143-47 (the Dragon of Eden and Orgoglio's dragon).

[46]Geryoneo and his monster are first mentioned in *FQ* V.x.6-13; Arthur's encounter with the dragon covers stanzas 21-32 of the ensuing Canto.

[47]Belge explains that the dragon's "vgly shape none euer saw, nor kend,/ That euer scap'd" (*FQ* V.xi.20.5-6).

[48]See *FQ* V.xi.23.7-9: "For of a Mayd she had the outward face,/ To hide the horrour, which did lurke behinde,/ The better to beguile, whom she so fond did finde." The image calls to mind representations of the maiden-faced Satanic serpent in medieval and early modern art.

[49]See *FQ* V.xi.20.6-9: "[…] for of a man they say/ It has the voice, that speaches forth doth send,/ Euen blasphemous words, which she doth bray/ Out of her poysnous entrails, fraught with dire decay."

[50]That Spenser's *descriptio monstri* is overtly symmetrical becomes apparent when Geryoneo's monster is compared to the Sphinx in Boiardo's *Orlando Innamorato* I.v.69-75, and to Gerïon in Dante's *Inferno* XVII.10-15, which are both described less formalistically.

[51]In Conti's original: "caput & manus puellae, corpus canis, vocem hominis, caudam draconis, leonis vngues, alas auis" (*Mythologiae* 9.18; see also Lotspeich 108). The translation is taken from Thomas Cooper's famous sixteenth-century *Thesaurus*.

[52]The giant first appears in *Theogony* 287-94 and 979-83, where Hesiod draws his lineage from Chryasor and Kallirhoe. Spenser might have acquired his information from Natale Conti, *Mythologiae* 6.1, as Lotspeich 63 observes.

[53]Dante names the beast "quella sozza imagine di froda" ("that filthy image of Fraud"; *Inferno* XVII.7). For the full episode see XVI.127-XVII.136.

[54]Conti, *Mythologiae* 7.1. The dragon was born of the notorious monsters, Typhaon and Echidna (see also Lotspeich 63).

[55]See the respective entries in the *OED*, "derive, *v.*" 6.a., 9.b., 10.b.

[56]See note 16 on the general setup of the brain chambers. In this triangle of forces, the task of fashioning things anew falls to the imagination, which, however, needs to be kept in check lest the irrational takes control over Man's governing ratio. See Bright 39-67 and 100-07, and Burton 1: 130-77, as well as Rossky.

[57]See *FQ* II.ix.50. In ll. 8-9, Spenser lists "Infernall Hags, *Centaurs*, feendes, *Hippodames*,/ Apes, Lyons, Aegles, Owles, fooles, louers, children, Dames."

[58]Juan Huarte, *Examen de Ingenios* 132 (emphases added). John Davies of Hereford notes that "Fantacie,/ […] doth so forme reforme, and it deformes,/ As

pleaseth hir fantasticke faculty" (*Works* 9). It is through this mechanism that the imagination creates "things vnlikely" from "things likely." LaPrimaudaye 155 also underlines the imagination's ability to reassemble received data. For a similar view, see Rossky 58-59.

[59]The explanation is Hamilton's (note to *FQ* II.ix.49.7).

[60]Thus, as late as Bacon, the god was interpreted as a kind of Providence; see Bacon 6: 747.

[61]The link between Prometheus and the imagination is also pointed out in a different context in the notes of the "May Eclogue," where E. K. records that Prometheus "did first fynd out the hidden courses of the stares, by an excellent imagination" (*Variorum* 7: 57).

[62]The verb "to derive" can also describe mental processes, as it means "to obtain by some process of reasoning, inference or deduction; to gather, deduce" (*OED*, "derive, *v.*" 7. gives evidence from the 1500s and 1600s).

[63]See for example Sidney 84, and Puttenham 3.

[64]See Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* 5.1.14-17.

[65]Isidore of Seville, in fact, marked him as the inventor of idolatry, because he first created humans in effigy (see *Etymologiae* VIII.xi). See also Lactantius, *Epitome* 20.12-13, and the entry in Cooper's *Thesaurus* (Prometheus "first inuented makynge of ymages").

[66]First put forward by Theophrast (Fragment 50). Bremer (35-38) discusses Prometheus's role and function as the bringer of human culture and self-responsibility in the classical age.

[67]See Boccaccio, *Genealogie* IV.xliv [47C]. In the early seventeenth century, Bacon thus assesses Prometheus "not as the founder only but also as the amplifier and enlarger of the human race," and hence the driving force behind any cultural progress (see *De sapientia veterum* in Bacon 6: 745). Bacon argues that Prometheus's giving fire to man is the origin of science and craftsmanship. Truly Promethean human beings are characterised by wisdom and thoughtfulness (Bacon 6: 751).

[68]This is argued in Barsella 120-41.

[69]Spenser, "Letter" 8.

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