

Naming and Unnaming in Spenser's *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe**

MAURICE HUNT

Both Petrarch and Boccaccio who, according to Walter W. Greg, “founded the Renaissance eclogue, [were] keenly aware of the value of pastoral for ‘covert reference to men and the events of the day, since it is characteristic of the form to let its meaning only partially appear’” (18). And so Spenser, following the example of French and Italian pastoral poets, to say nothing of Virgil, in both *The Shepheardes Calender* and *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe* referred to “shepherds” and “shepherdesses,” with a few exceptions, not by the actual names of contemporaries they represented but by mostly Greek-sounding pseudonyms. These pseudonyms are often stereotypic, and so sometimes far from clear in their contemporary reference. My argument extends the uncertainty of the reference of names and naming in *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe*, to a degree beyond that noted by other commentators on this poem, into non-pastoral sections of it.¹

Compounding this uncertainty of reference in the poem is the unrelated phenomenon of the loss of name. Paradoxically, however, rather than ending in loss, what amounts to an indistinct name establishes itself at the mathematical center of the poem through the sheer beauty of the heart-felt poetry forming it. A reader attuned to my subject understands why, given the sixteenth-century commonness of the name Elizabeth, only such an indistinct, private name expresses the singular character of the Elizabeth Boyle loved by Spenser. This is the heart—mathematically and qualitatively—of *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe*. Spenser's unorthodox naming of Elizabeth Boyle gains value

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generally from the relative permanence of the printed life of Spenser's poem, and specifically from the forgettable catalogues of pastoral names framing it. This central process of successful naming in *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe* complements a traditional doctrine of nominal essentiality that applies to names in *The Faerie Queene* as well as to the author's own surname.

1. Colin Clout and Raleigh's Loss of Name

The word "name" appears eighteen times in Spenser's *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe*, independent of the catalogues of pastoral names for twelve English poets and twelve court ladies. The first verses name Spenser without naming him:

The shepherds boy (best knowen by that name),
That after *Tityrus* first sung his lay,
Laies of sweet love without rebuke or blame,
Sate (as his custome was) upon a day,
Charming his oaten pipe unto his peres (1-5)²

Elizabethan readers would have understood that, in reading these lines, they might disregard the appearance of Spenser's name—"Ed. *Spencer*"—on the title page of the poem published by William Ponsonby. They could have done so because they were aware of the pseudonymic dimension of pastoral, the initial mode of *Colin Clout*.³ They would have been inclined to identify the "shepherdes boy" as the *Colin Clout* of the *The Shepherdes Calender* (1579), which had spread through four editions over sixteen years. Spenser's name never appears in this earlier poem.⁴ Spenser twice removes himself from his name in the first verse of *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe*. The poem's second verse suggests that "Colin Clout" might have appeared in verse one, for it records "*Tityrus*," the pastoral name of Virgil, whose eclogues were an ultimate model of Renaissance pastoralists such as Spenser in *The Shepherdes Calender*. Spenser's pseudonym would have been especially apt here since, by 1595, astute readers knew that he,

like Virgil, had written pastoral eclogues apparently as preparation and advertisement for a later epic poem. Even after Spenser identifies the boy as Colin Clout he continues at times to obliquely name himself.⁵ When the shepherdess Alexis, hearing the boy praise himself indirectly in Cynthia's delight in his song sung for her (*The Faerie Queene*), asks him why so great a shepherdess, surrounded by so many shepherd poets, should listen to him, "a simple silly Elfe" (371), her name for him further diminishes—de-names—Spenser.

The loss of name becomes the subject of the lay that the shepherd boy sang in his musical competition with the "straunge shepheard" (60) who joined him keeping his sheep at the foot of the mountain Mole. This companion names himself "[t]he Shepheard of the Ocean" (66), and it soon becomes apparent that the name represents Sir Walter Raleigh, Spenser's neighbor and conductor to England, where he apparently recommended *The Faerie Queene* to Queen Elizabeth. Commentators on Spenser's *Colin Clout* invariably remark that Raleigh was the preeminent English naval authority, that he was Elizabeth's Admiral of the West until the revelation of his secret marriage to the queen's lady-in-waiting Elizabeth Throckmorton—a son was born in March 1592—resulted in his temporary imprisonment in June 1592, that Elizabeth's pet name for him had been "Water" (for "Walter"), and that the "lamentable lay" (164) of the

[...] great unkindnesse, and of usage hard,
Of *Cynthia* the Ladie of the sea,
Which from her presence faultlesse him debard (165-67)

refers to Raleigh's poetic fragment *The 11th: and the last booke of the Ocean to Scinthia*, by which he apparently had planned to try to win back the queen's favor. (Throughout *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe* "Cynthia"—the name of the moon goddess that pushes and draws water—aptly stands, given Walter Raleigh's stagnation, for that of never-named Elizabeth.)⁶ A contradiction appears when the Shepherd of the Ocean sings his lay in which he complains that Cynthia, unhappy with his behavior, has barred him from her presence (167) and

then urges the shepherd boy to sail with him to England “his *Cynthia* to see: / Whose grace was great, and bounty most rewardfull” (186-87). Patrick Cheney, Jerome Dees, and others have argued that different parts of *Colin Clout* were written at different times between 1591 and 1595 and, like heterogeneous strata, remained unreconciled by revision when the poem was published.⁷

Raleigh and his ill-fated marriage becomes the preferred allegorical interpretation of the topographical myth that Colin recites in his singing match with the Shepherd of the Ocean (88-155). The myth’s moral, encapsulated in its final verse, involves the loss of name entailed in achieving a forbidden love. Colin’s tale concerns the love that the river Bregog bore for the shiny river Mulla. Spenser refers to the former stream as “my river *Bregog*” because it courses through his Kilcolmen property, eventually flowing into the Awbeg—here named the Mulla, which also runs through his plantation. The former stream sinks into limestone and reappears two miles lower down, just before its confluence with the Awbeg. Name figures early in this lay when the shepherd’s boy reveals that Mulla’s father, her source, old father Mole, was so fond of his daughter that he embedded her name—“*Armulla*”—in the name for the north wall of the Awbeg (the Mulla) valley (104-09). Name figures again in Spenser’s landscape when Colin asserts that the Mulla,

springing out of *Mole*, doth run downe right
To *Buttevant*, where springing forth at large,
It giveth name unto that auncient Citty,
Which *Kilnemullah* cleped is of old.⁸ (110-13)

Mulla loved the Bregog “[f]ull faine [...] and was belov’d full faine, / Of her own brother river, *Bregog* hight” (116-17). Colin explains that “Bregog” means “deceitful” “[so] hight [named] because” he sought to win Mulla “by a deceitful traine [stratagem]” (118). Here we have an early rare instance of a name that appears aptly to express an essence. But even then the loss of this name occurs just after it registers essentialist meaning. Obsessed with patriarchal power, old Mole

intends to give his daughter, complete with a rich dowry, to the neighboring Arlo, into whose stream he can apparently divert Mulla's flow. Loving the Bregog, she resists this topographical marriage, angering her father, who has jealously seen the Bregog bending his course toward his daughter. Bregog's realization of his name ironically involves the loss of it. The following passage illustrates Bregog's essential deceitfulness.⁹

First into many parts his streame he shar'd,
 That whilst the one was watcht, the other might
 Passe unespide to meete her by the way;
 And then besides, those little streames so broken
 He under ground so closely did convay,
 That of their passage doth appeare no token,
 Till they into the *Mullaes* water slide.
 So secretly did he his love enjoy:
 Yet not so secret, but it was descried,
 And told her father by a shepherds boy. (138-47)

Bregog's description of his self-dispersal fancifully explains the partial disappearance of this river over its course through Spenser's property. Bregog permanently loses his name when old father Mole

In great avenge did roll downe from his hill
 Huge mightie stones, the which encumber might
 His passage, and his water-courses spill [destroy].
 So of a River, which he was of old,
 He none was made, but scattered all to nought,
 And lost emong those rocks into him rold,
 Did lose his name: so deare his love he bought.¹⁰ (149-55)

Rather than being an image of the Neoplatonic One becoming the Many, as some commentators argue, the branching of Bregog's stream into progressively smaller rivulets replicates a genealogical tree in which name exfoliates and dissolves into the tiniest of runs (fibrous roots). "Bregog," Thomas Edwards asserts, "shows"—despite some sympathy that Colin feels for Bregog—"the impropriety of deceitfully pursuing what's above your worth, and it is hard not to connect [the

river's] punishment, loss of 'name,' with Colin's failure to make a name for himself at court, not to mention Spenser's bitter fascination with the idea of the anonymous poet, the Immeritó of *The Shepheardes Calender* whose fame even in the early 1590s was less than satisfying, as the first line of *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe* hints (57)."¹¹

But for John Bernard, William Oram, J. Christopher Warren, Jerome Dees, and Bart van Es,¹² Spenser's lay is mainly about Sir Walter Raleigh's loss of his reputation (his court identity) in his failed attempt to deceive Queen Elizabeth about his secret love and "confluence" with Elizabeth Throckmorton. That deprivation is equivalent to the erasure of his name. In this reading, Elizabeth, who regularly referred to herself with a masculine pronoun, or the word "prince," or even "king," is Mole, and Raleigh's rough punishment represents her patriarchal power, notably the regulation of court marriage and her dependence upon informers to do so. No one, to my knowledge, has suggested that the shepherd boy who informs on Bregog is the singer of this lay. The shepherd's boy—Colin—has emphasized that his lay is no "leasing [lie, fiction] new" or "fable stale," but "auncient truth, confirm'd with credence [belief] old" (102, 103). The ancient truth that Raleigh's demise and imprisonment in 1592 illustrate involves the inevitability of the patriarchal policing of upper-class marriage and the punishment of transgressors. The suggestion that Spenser, who himself had a secret love who had displaced the queen in his devotion, would focus on Raleigh's dangerous marriage is, of course, outrageous. But that is what Spenser has done, in effect, by deciding to include it, thinly allegorized, in *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe*. Spenser's calling attention to Raleigh's indiscretion is consistent with the persistent strength of Spenser's cold treatment of Raleigh that competed with his expressions of friendship for this courtier. In fact, Elizabeth Throckmorton Raleigh indicated later that "Raleigh's relationship with Spenser was not a friendship of much substance or longevity" (Hadfield 232-35, esp. 232).¹³

Spenser likely added the myth of Bregog and Mulla to his poem in summer or fall of 1592, or shortly thereafter, and almost certainly was

not the original discloser of Raleigh's marriage to Elizabeth and the literate world. Instead, he was probably hoping—at least part of him was—for the queen's reacceptance of her courtier. But by adding the myth, Spenser was treading on treacherous ground, since he was equating the queen with love-thwarting old Mountain Mole. By doing so, Spenser indirectly risked the loss of his name, his own reputation and standing, with the queen (see Koller).

Spenser widens his focus on the loss of identity in his depiction of the sea during Colin Clout's and the Shepherd of the Ocean's journey to London as

A world of waters heaped up on hie,
Rolling like mountaines in wide wilderness,
Horrible, hideous, roaring with hoarse crie. (197-99)

So described, this watery chaos threatens drowning, the obliteration of any identity venturing unnaturally upon it. In this respect, heaping water becomes analogous to the obliterating rocks cast down by Mole upon Bregog. Spenser's later portrayal of abuses at court constitutes a land equivalent of the sea anarchy earlier described, a land chaos which—Spenser suggests—threatens the loss of name (680-730). In the English court,

each one seeks with malice and with strife,
To thrust downe other into foule disgrace,
Himselfe to raise: and he doth soonest rise
That best can handle his deceitfull wit,
In subtil shifts, and finest slightes devise,
Either by slaundring his well deemed name,
Through leasing lewd and fained forgerie. (690-96)

A double loss of name occurs here, not just for the slandered courtier but also for the slanderer himself. Spenser underscores this general loss of name at court by having Hobbinol protest that a few "gentle wit[s] of name," such as Lobbin, possibly Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, can be found at court (731-36, esp. 733). Hobbinol protests that many more worthy persons inhabit the court than Colin admits, but, tellingly, their "names [he] cannot readily now ghesse" (740).

Colin agrees that quite a few learned professors of the arts and sciences, including medicine, dwell in court, but, like Hobbinol, he does not name any, either literally or pseudonymically (741-67). Amorous courtiers abuse Love and remain unknown in the poem, appropriately so since

with lewd speeches and licentious deeds,
His mightie mysteries they do prophane,
And use his ydle name to other needs,
But as a complement for courting vaine. (787-90)

Misusing love, these sensual courtiers make “ydle” (“useless”/“unused”) Love’s name, and so, aptly, are themselves never named, never recorded in poetry as honorable, ideal lovers.

2. The Name of the Queen

Spenser never explicitly names Queen Elizabeth in his poem. She is called Cynthia, the moon goddess, presumably because Spenser would have her, like the moon, draw “Wa[l]ter” Raleigh to her again (Montrose 98). A. Leigh DeNeef has shown the degree to which Colin’s poetic literal-mindedness in *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe* precludes the understanding and use of metaphoric thinking and language to liberate the poet’s mind (41-43, 50-61, 62-63). “Foolish faultfinders’ or wrong readers,” DeNeef claims, “fail repeatedly to understand the metaphoric nature of the literary vehicles they use and they therefore commit themselves to narrowly conceived and literal-minded ethical options” (41). Thus Colin, according to DeNeef, thinks in a “literal metaphoric” way about court and country, never realizing that they are not either/or but components of a greater metaphoric unity: “nation” (53). This critic could have noted that Colin’s misuse of metaphor informs his repeated attempts, finally unsuccessful, to name a singular queen. This much becomes apparent in Spenser’s remarkably drawn out attempt to name her. The insufficiency of

simile to define—to name—Elizabeth can be detected in the tension—the gap—between various circles by which Colin hopes to describe the queen and the yet unnamed essence of her being:

I would her lyken to a crowne of lillies,
 Upon a virgin brydes adorned head,
 With Roses dight and Goolds and Daffadillies;
 Or like the circlet of a Turtle true,
 In which all colours of the rainbow bee;
 Or like faire *Phebes* garlond shining new,
 In which all pure perfection one may see. (337-43)

“But vaine it is to thinke by paragone / Of earthly things, to judge of things divine” (344-45), Colin concludes. His frustration with the failure of metaphoric naming to produce the queen’s name surfaces in this passage:

For when I thinke of her, as oft I ought,
 Then want I words to speake it fitly forth:
 And when I speake of her what I have thought,
 I cannot thinke according to her worth.
 Yet will I thinke of her, yet will I speake,
 So long as life my limbs doth hold together,
 And when as death these vitall bands shall breake,
 Her *name* recorded will I leave for ever.
 Her *name* in every tree I will endosse,
 That as the trees do grow, her *name* may grow:
 And in the ground each where will it engrosse,
 And fill with stones, that all men may it know.
 The speaking woods and murmuring waters fall,
 Her *name* Ile teach in knowen termes to frame:
 And eke my lambs when for their dams they call,
 Ile teach to call for *Cynthia* by *name*.
 And long while after I am dead and rotten:
 Amongst the shepheards daughters dancing rownd,
 My layes made of her shall not be forgotten,
 But sung by them with flowry gyrlonds crownd. (624-43; my italics)

Five times Colin names the never-named name of the queen, which is Elizabeth—not Cynthia. (If Cynthia were in fact the queen’s name, Colin—Spenser—would not in this passage express such frustration about naming her. He would have named her five or six times, not

simply once as Cynthia). Elizabeth is not Cynthia—that is, a mythic pseudonym that serves socio-political aims and ends. As the moon goddess, she draws “Water” Raleigh and all her courtiers toward her in a spiral, a vortex, of Petrarchan love, painful and finally futile because Cynthia is also the goddess of chastity who cannot reciprocate and fulfill this love. Chaste Cynthia precludes the dynamic of the etymology of the name Elizabeth, making it difficult for her and her courtier lovers to keep their affectionate vows and promises to lords, citizens, and the nation itself. (That etymology—as I show below—involves the making and keeping of vows). Stones cast by Mole obliterated Bregog’s name; stones, carefully arranged, will spell out Elizabeth’s name. Or so Spenser says. He claims that he can teach the “murmuring waters fall” to speak her name. If so, it would amount to a rectifying of the story of Bregog and Mulla, wherein the former’s name is lost in the water’s flow. In the first part of the passage quoted in the previous paragraph, Spenser—Colin—admits he cannot find metaphoric language sufficiently exact and superlative to spell out Elizabeth’s name. And when he does speak of her metaphorically, as he has imagined her, he finds this language incommensurate with her worth. And so he is left with a silent, natural medium to utter Elizabeth’s unspoken name. Like Duke Senior in Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*, who believes he can find in the Forest of Arden “tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, [and] sermons in stones” (2.1.16-17), Colin implies that in Nature he can find an adequate language for his purpose. And like Rosalind’s lover Orlando in the same play, who resolves that his verse recording his beloved’s name shall hang instead of leaves from the branches of trees, and that

[...] these trees shall be my books,
 And in their barks my thoughts I’ll character
 That every eye which in this forest looks
 Shall see thy virtue expressed everywhere, (3.2.1-8)

so Colin, by his own account, intends “[t]hat as the trees do grow, her name may grow.”¹⁴ An ironic overtone of Orlando’s speech in this

respect conveys the futility of Colin's inscriptions: "Run, run, Orlando; carve on every tree / The fair, the chaste, and unexpressive she" (2.3.9-10). The gloss on this verse in *The Norton Shakespeare* suggests that "unexpressive" means "inexpressible." That word indeed could also describe the result of Colin's natural naming of the queen, for the reader of his poem cannot see her name in the leaf of its page, and the tree wherein Colin says that it will appear will eventually die and so will the record of the name. In fact, that unnamed name will perish in every one of its organic vehicles, for all will one day die. Only the stones may record it, but only if they remain uncovered and undisturbed. And the shepherds' daughters who sing Colin's lays in the queen's praise, even if they explicitly include the name "Elizabeth," will each one in successive generations pass away like the leaves of trees and finally the trees themselves. Only Spenser's published poem remains, and it never registers her true name.

3. Identifying Names

Against this remarkably sustained emphasis upon the indistinctiveness or loss of name in *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe*, Spenser evokes a precious name in the heart of the poem. It is focused by adjacent catalogues of names in which, while some are indistinct, others are not—specifying in fact individual Elizabethans. Paradoxically, among the court poets uncertainly named in the first catalogue are those laboring the queen's "name to glorify." Only two of the poets in Spenser's catalogue are actually named. In fact, the majority of them are never certainly identified since they all have pastoral pseudonyms such as "Harpalus," "Corydon," "Palin," "Alcon," and "Palemon." Respectively identified are possibly George Turberville, Edward Dyer, George Peele, Thomas Lodge, and Thomas Churchyard, but a spate of scholarly articles and notes on other likely authors makes the issue unresolved.¹⁵ *Action* is probably—but not at all certainly—Michael

Drayton. Eric Sams believes this shepherd to have been Shakespeare (85). Colin says a shepherd “gentler” than *Aetion*

[...] may no where be found:
Whose *Muse* full of high thoughts invention,
Doth like himselfe Heroically sound. (445-47)

The name “Shake-spear,” taken as a phrase, sounds heroic, just as Shakespeare’s English hero Talbot does in the resounding poetry of his speeches of *1 Henry VI*, which Spenser may have seen in London.¹⁶ And a “gentler” man would be hard to find, according to Ben Jonson who praised Shakespeare’s gentleness. The point is not whether *Aetion* is Michael Drayton, or William Shakespeare, or someone else, but that knowing who he represents died with Spenser and those court readers in the know, so to say.

Sir Philip Sidney, near the end of *An Apology for Poetry* (c. 1579; publ. 1595), asks his readers to believe poets “when they tell you they will make you immortal by their verses [...]. Thus doing, your name shall flourish in the printers’ shops [...]. Thus doing, your soul shall be placed with Dante’s Beatrix, or Virgil’s Anchises” (142). Spenser, however, in *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe*, could scarcely claim that the poets he names will be known *in* printers’ shops, let alone beyond them.¹⁷ If Spenser believed that by enshrining these poets in a poem they would survive generations of readers, he resembles the sonneteer Shakespeare who claims that the young man he never names will live forever in his poems (Kunin). In each case, readers do not know the name of a person they should praise or admire. Only the Shepherd of the Ocean (Raleigh), *Alcyon* (Sir Arthur Gorges), *Astrofell* (Sir Philip Sidney), and *Amyntas* (Ferdinando Stanley, Lord Strange) are, according to the editors of *The Yale Edition of the Shorter Poems of Edmund Spenser*, identified for a modern audience “with complete certainty” (540n). The Yale editors, on the other hand, identify certainly all but four of the court ladies bearing pastoral names (542-48n).¹⁸ The exceptions are *Marian* (possibly Margaret Countess of Cumberland), *Galathea* (possibly Frances Howard, widow of William Parr and wife of Sir Thomas Gorges), and *Flavia* and *Candida*. The Yale editors suggest that these latter two could be any court lady: “It is possible that

Flavia and Candida are thus introduced to obviate injured feelings among the ladies: a maiden might wish to recognize herself in Flavia, a matron in Candida, or a blonde in Candida and a brunette in Flavia" (547). If this is so, Spenser's strategy of naming ironically made explicit a possibility unintended in the inherent ambiguity of the referents of the pastoral names soon to be gone from the earth, like Spenser himself, within a generation. A particular lady who imagined she was Flavia or Candida could have thought that Spenser intended to mask her name with one of these, even though the likelihood that he had done is very remote. A fifth shepherdess—*Stella*—the beloved of Astrofell is clearly the woman Sidney addressed in his sonnet sequence *Astrophil and Stella*. And while she is probably Penelope Devereux, later Penelope Rich, Spenser's Dedication of *Astrophel* indicates that he believes she is Sidney's widow, Frances Walsingham.

At this point, someone might claim that the convention of assigning Greek-sounding names to personages in Renaissance pastoral poetry based on Classical models necessarily committed poets such as Spenser to using pseudonyms. The objection might be telling had not Spenser in his catalogue twice identified contemporary poets by their actual names: *Alabaster* (William Alabaster) and *Daniell* (Samuel Daniel). (None of the court shepherdesses is called by her actual name.) "Daniel" is hardly a pastoral name. If he identified these two poets by their actual names, why did Spenser not identify the others by their names as well?¹⁹ If Spenser named Daniel because he "doth all [poets] afore him farre surpasse" (417), the same cannot be said of Alabaster, who Spenser says had completed only the first book of his now obscure Latin epic on the trials of Queen Elizabeth titled *Elisaeis*.²⁰ Alabaster never would complete the epic. Does Spenser introduce this poet's actual name into *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe* out of sympathy, out of identification, because he realized that he too was the author of what was going to be an incomplete epic (cf. Pugh 194)? Such speculation however would not explain why he names Samuel Daniel, who was a widely known author who finished the works he started.²¹

4. Nameless at the Center: Elizabeth Boyle

By enclosing Spenser's poetically exquisite naming of his beloved, the imperfect naming of the shepherds' and shepherdesses' in framing catalogues accentuates its intrinsic value. This heightening also occurs because the poetry composing these catalogues, for whatever reason, appears pedestrian by contrast. Some commentators on *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe* believe that Spenser's beloved, alluded to in the poem, is the Rosalind of *The Shepheardes Calender*.²² Still others believe that she is his second wife Elizabeth Boyle, or that she is the queen herself. Spenser's beloved, described in *Colin Clout*, is not Rosalind. David Burchmore has shown that Spenser's verses create a symmetrical balance throughout *Colin Clout*, a symmetry analogous to that of the three Graces surrounded by the circle of one-hundred maidens dancing to Colin's pipe on Mt. Acidale in Book 6 of *The Faerie Queene*. Just as a fourth Grace, Spenser's beloved second wife, Elizabeth Boyle, appears in the midst of the three Graces in Spenser's epic poem, so his beloved, framed by the catalogues of twelve poets and twelve court ladies, appears at the mathematical center of *Colin Clouts Come Home Again*.²³ Between the two catalogues, Spenser professes to be the vassal of a "gentle mayd" whom he serves. She is

The beame of beautie sparkled from above,
 The floure of vertue and pure chastitie,
 The blossome of sweet joy and perfect love,
 The pearle of peerlesse grace and modestie:
 To her my thoughts I daily dedicate,
 To her my heart I nightly martyrize:
 To her my love I lowly do prostrate,
 To her my life I wholly sacrifice:
 My thought, my heart, my love, my life is shee,
 And I hers ever onely, ever one:
 One ever I all vowed hers to bee,
 One ever I, and others never none. (468-79)

Burchmore has shown structural, numerological, and stanzaic similarities between Spenser's *Amoretti* and *Epithalamion* and *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe* (see 396-98). Given Spenser's calling his beloved a maid, Burchmore believes that the quoted verses refer to Elizabeth Boyle during Spenser's 1594 courtship of her and that he wrote this part of *Colin Clout* then. In this reading of the poem, one should not conflate the "gentle mayd" with Rosalind, who most likely represents the woman Spenser loved in *The Shepheardes Calender* (and who remains possibly in a latter part of *Colin Clout* composed at a time different from the writing of the poetry under analysis).²⁴

The exact numerological center of *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe* consists of these haunting chiasmic verses:

And I hers ever onely, ever one:
 One ever I all vowed hers to bee,
 One ever I, and others never none.²⁵

In the tender sentiment expressed, the plain pronouns and verbs possess a remarkable eloquence. The chiasmus created by "I hers ever [...] ever one / One ever [...] hers to bee" forms a tight knot of love, one which makes Elizabeth and Edmund "ever one, One ever." Carefully, beautifully, Spenser never names his beloved, but intimately, privately, names her forever in his heart in the twelve-verse passage quoted above. These verses, taken collectively in their power, exquisitely name Elizabeth Boyle namelessly, so that she and Edmund never risk the compromise of a mutual affection often entailed by public awareness of a rare love and judgments on social class and individual ambition. She, too, will one day die, but she will remain alive as long as printers reproduce *Colin Clout* and readers exist who can infer her name. And even if—as is likely—a large majority do not know how she was called (because they lack knowledge of Spenser's biography), they cherish the beloved for the same reason that Shakespeare's readers do the unnamed young man of the sonnets: that the beloved must truly have been special because she/he inspired such unforgettable poetry.

5. Essential Names: Elizabeth and the Poet

In the *Amoretti*, Spenser writes of “that happy name” by which the most important women in his life were known, his mother, his wife, and his queen. “Ye three Elizabeths, for ever live,” Spenser concludes sonnet LXXIV, “that three such graces did unto me give” (13-14; *Yale Edition* 644-45). These are the graces of body (given by his mother), of his [material] wealth (given by his queen), and of his mind (given [stimulated] by his wife) (see 4-5). Readers must be aware of this sonnet in order to understand why Spenser cannot conventionally name his betrothed, Elizabeth, at the very center of his poem. Were he to do so, she could be confused with his queen, as some commentators have done anyway. Paradoxically, his rare spouse and his queen have one of the most common, perhaps the *most* common, of *Elizabethan* women’s names (my italics). The only Elizabeth in the Bible is the wife of Zacharias and the mother of John the Baptist. She is a Levite, the cousin of Mary, the mother of Jesus (Luke 1:5, 36). Essentially, her name is a Greek transliteration of a Hebrew name, which consists of two parts, the first a common abbreviation of “Elohim,” the genus God, and the second the equivalent of “Sheba,” meaning either “oath” or “seven.” The name Elizabeth signifies “God is an oath,” “God’s oath,” or “God hath sworn” (see Arthur 293; Kolatch 320). The etymology implies that Elizabeth’s vows or promises are divinely kept. That is her essence, her essential name. Spenser’s bride assures her betrothed that she will always keep her vows. And that is what Spenser, even though he may not have been aware of this Hebrew etymology, assures her that he will do when he promises “One ever I all vowed her to bee, / One ever I, and others never none.”

Among Renaissance writers, Spenser especially depended upon the essentialist theory of names: that only one—and one only name—(*verbum*) conveys the essence of a thing (*res*). Names, according to this doctrine, are not relative, not divorced from the object they name. Plato in the *Cratylus* explored this choice for the ancient world, preferring the belief that only one name exists to convey the special thing-

ness of objects. Sir Thomas Elyot, in *The Boke Named the Governour* (1531), remarks that Plato in this dialogue argues that “the name of euery thyng is none other but the vertue or effecte on the same thinge” (2: 227). For Spenser’s culture, essentialist naming mainly derived from Genesis 2:19-20: “So the Lord God formed of the earth euerie beast of the field, and euerie foule of the heauen, & broght *them* vnto [Adam] to se how he wolde call *them*: for howsoeuer the man named the liuing creature, so was the name thereof. The man therefore gaue names vnto all cattel, and to the foule of the heauen, and to euerie beast of the field” (*Geneva Bible*). Renaissance commentators such as Richard Mulcaster (1582) and Joshua Silvester (1592), among others, extrapolated from Genesis the idea that Adam’s naming the creatures instantaneously conferred upon him the knowledge of their essences (see Carroll 12-13; Mulcaster 188; Ferry 29-31, 73-74). By saying “tiger,” Adam intuited the essence of tigerness. Spenser depended upon the essentialist theory of naming in the allegorical *Faerie Queene*, in which characters’ names often indicate their inner essence; i.e., Duessa (duplicitous), Timias (“timid”), Turpine (“turpitude”), Una (Oneness), Serena (“serene,” to the point of passivity), Mercilla (Mercy), Malecasta (“lacking in chastity”), and so on (see Vink 322, 324, 332).

One might object, however, that people’s names are accidental, and that all three of Spenser’s Elizabeths cannot express the same etymological meaning of “Elizabeth.” That surnames could express essences in Shakespeare’s time manifests itself in the dramatist’s coat of arms, where a raven shakes a spear, the equivalent of his mighty pen. In a play such as *Twelfth Night*, Shakespeare reflects the assumption that given names could reflect essences in giving suddenly savage Orsino the Italian name of “bear,” harmonious Viola the name of a musical instrument, and Olivia, to whom Viola figuratively offers an olive branch, the name of “peace.”²⁶ Anne Ferry has explained that Spenser’s contemporaries drew on the Classical opinion that accidents clung to substances—so as to make them knowable to the senses—to justify their belief that adjectives and names often fused as one, and

that they considered modifying adjective(s) to be part of the name (cf. 59-61).²⁷ In this respect, Spenser's phrase "gentle Mayd," considered within the context of his twelve-verse paeon, could have constituted for him a single name for Elizabeth Boyle, one separating her from other Elizabeths. Nevertheless, Spenser multiplies that name's force in Melissa's reaction to Colin's praise of his gentle maiden:

Thrise happie Mayd,
Whom thou doest so enforce to deifie:
That woods, and hills, and valleyes thou hast made
Her name to eccho unto heaven hie. (480-83)

Spenser in *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe* never achieves for his own name anything as eloquent as his naming of his beloved. Still, by 1595 he had expressed the essence of his surname. And he did so in spite of his pseudonym, which had always had a second-hand quality. The pseudonym appearing in *The Shepheardes Calender* was used by the early Tudor satirist John Skelton as his persona in a poem titled "Collyn Clout" (1522). John Scattergood explains that "'Collyn' derives from Latin *colonus* 'farmer' and was used as early as the reign of Edward II to indicate a person of humble birth. 'Clout' meant 'rag' or 'patch' and emphasizes the rural fellow's poverty" (Skelton 466). Such a name did not convey Skelton's social status at the time he composed this poem: the King's Orator (appointed 1512), Skelton had attended both Oxford and Cambridge, having been made "poet laureate" at both universities in late 1488 and in 1493 respectively. Robert S. Kinsman argues that Skelton's pseudonym suits the traditional conceit of "Vox Populi," the voice of the people that rises in condemnation of abuses committed by the clergy and nobility.²⁸ Stanley Fish, in his analysis of the poem, singles out Cardinal Wolsey as the unnamed one man described in it most responsible for injustice (180).²⁹ Given the verbal aggressiveness of Skelton's *Colin Clout*, a reader understands that his surname's Medieval meaning of "to cuff heavily" is also appropriate.³⁰ Skelton likely created this pseudonym to shroud his identity and protect himself from prosecution. Spenser may have

adopted Skelton's name for the poet of *The Shepheardes Calender* for the same reason, for some ecclesiastical satires appear in the volume.³¹ But they are not many (notably *Maye*, *Julye*, and *September*), and for Spenser to continue to use the name for this reason in mixed-genre *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe* makes little sense. Only a small section of the poem could be called satirical (e. g., 680-730), and its content is not dangerous, in that it might provoke retaliation by individual Elizabethan courtiers. Richard Mallette notes—as I do—that Spenser in *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe* neither actually nor symbolically names the debased poets, or poet apes, that he says also populate the court (37-38).

Thus the humble, cloddish, impoverished connotations of the name "Colin Clout" seem inappropriate to the intellectual poet lifted up to divine intellection in Neoplatonic poetic rapture whose voice resounds in the latter part of *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe*. Essentially, Spenser's name signifies someone who "dispenses," a steward—especially of provisions. Robert le Dispenser is listed in the Domesday Book of 1086; he was likely William the Conqueror's Royal "Dispencier"—King's Steward. Whatever the case, Spenser wanted to claim kinship with the aristocrat Spencers of Althorp. He names (but does not actually name) the three daughters of Sir John Spencer of Althorp in *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe: Phyllis, Charillis, and Amaryllis* (Elizabeth, Anne, and Alice Spencer; 540-42). These sisters constitute the "honor of the noble familie: / Of which [the] meanest [Spenser] boast[s] [him] selfe to be" (537-38). The oxymoronic poetic phrase "meanest boast" reflects the oxymoronic composite made up of "Colin Clout," the rustic of humble birth associated with rags, and of "Spenser," the educated poet/plantation gentleman who could be said to deserve relationship with an ancient noble family now made up of a father and three sisters. Still, despite the dubiousness of Spenser's claim to nobility, he could argue that he was a "Dispenser," a spender of his talents, by wonderfully dispensing through his poetry, especially that of *The Faerie Queene*, the knowledge of how readers might

perfect themselves in several virtues. In this respect, he could live out an essential name, if only he could—or would—record it *in* his poetry.

* * *

Spenser's emphasis in *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe* upon naming and unnamng, upon the allusiveness—and the elusiveness—of names and their essential power, amounts to a paradox difficult to interpret. It reflects other central paradoxes of the poem such as the ambiguity of home. Is it in England, where Spenser was born and educated, where he had lived; or is it in Ireland, where he had founded a plantation and set himself up as a gentleman? The teasing quality of names in the poem also reflects the paradoxical combination of virtues and faults that Spenser finds in both the London court and provincial Ireland. These paradoxes suggest that Spenser's rather obsessive ambivalence about names in *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe* derives from his belief that he has and has not made a name for himself. He had never been well received by Queen Elizabeth's inner circle of ministers. Moreover, the Althorp Spensers never did recognize Spenser as their kin. On the other hand, Spenser had made a name for himself as an epic poet, as the many poets who gathered in Westminster Abbey for his burial demonstrated by throwing pens in his grave and publishing elegiac poems afterward. The focus upon naming and unnamng in *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe* reinforces the impression, then, that it indeed qualifies to be judged Spenser's most personal poem.

Baylor University
Waco, Texas

NOTES

¹Some of this uncertainty may derive from the mixtures of poetic kinds making up *Colin Clout*. William Oram argues that “the incorporation of genres” in *Colin Clout* includes “satire, songs of praise, a mythic river marriage, and [...] a mythological hymn in which Colin celebrates the God of Love” (*Edmund Spenser* 161). To this medley can be added the topographical poem, even the chorographic (mapping) poem. For *Colin Clout* as a chorographic poem, see van Es (66-74).

²Quotations of *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe* and the *Amoretti* are taken from the text in *The Yale Edition of the Shorter Poems of Edmund Spenser*, ed. Oram 518-62 and 598-658.

³For contemporary readers’ suspension of authorial belief in *The Faerie Queene*, see Bellamy 22.

⁴In *Three Proper, and wittie, familiar Letters* (1580), Gabriel Harvey had identified Spenser as the Colin Clout of the 1579 *Shepheardes Calender* (see Montrose 86).

⁵It is only in verse 83 that *Cuddy* identifies the shepherd’s boy as Colin Clout, part way through the boy’s telling the story of Bregog and Mulla.

⁶See the gloss on verses 164-71 of *Colin Clout* in the Oram edition.

⁷Cheney notes that “Spenser wrote a draft of *Colin Clout* four years before publishing it. We do not know the cause of the delay, but several events alluded to occurred after 1591 [...]. Notably, in 1592 Elizabeth banished Raleigh from court for marrying Elizabeth Throckmorton” (240, 244). Dees remarks that “[a]t some time before the publication of *Colin Clout* in 1595, Spenser added two substantial passages that allude to issues brought on by Raleigh’s disgrace, the Mole-Mulla-Bregog myth at 104-55 and the Neoplatonic cosmology at 835-94” (186).

⁸W. R. Renwick notes that “Buttevant is on the Cork-Limerick road, about three miles from Kilcolman” (*The Yale Edition* 531).

⁹Spenser accentuates Bregog’s and Mulla’s deception of her father through the pun on “feign” latent in the repeated phrase for the eagerness of their love: “full faine.” Edwards explicates this particular pun in *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe* (51).

¹⁰Some might object that Bregog never does lose his name. Colin begins his lay by declaring “But of my river *Bregogs* love I soong, / Which to the shiny *Mulla* he did beare, / And yet doth beare, and ever will, so long / As water doth within his banks appeare” (92-95). But to celebrate Bregog’s love, one must celebrate its union in a river named Mulla that has absorbed the Bregog. The four quoted verses may be unrevised residue from an earlier version of *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe*, a section never removed after Spenser had rewritten the myth to reflect Raleigh’s loss of name and his demotion.

¹¹Edwards notes that “[e]ven the introductory letter [to *Colin Clout*], with its imposing salutation—“To the Right worthy and noble Knight Sir *Walter Raleigh*, Captaine of her Maiestes Guard, Lord Wardein of the Stanneries, and Lieutenant of

the County of Cornwall—dwindling down to the signature ‘Yours euer humbly. Ed. Sp.’ makes its wry point about [the loss of] names” (57).

¹²See Bernard 127-28; Oram, “Spenser’s Raleghs” 360-62; Warren 380-81; Dees 194-95; van Es 67-68. For a general moral reading of the river myth as a warning about patriarchal power’s ability to thwart unapproved love and marriage, see Meyer 180-81.

¹³Hadfield notes that the dedicatory epistle to Raleigh dated 27 December 1591 intended for the publication of *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe* is more abrupt than the tone of the letter to Raleigh appended to *The Faerie Queene*, “the first line being familiar, even rude, in reminding Raleigh that [Spenser] has, despite all appearances to the contrary, been hard at work in [Raleigh’s] interests” (239).

¹⁴The similarity of these speeches of Orlando and Colin is also noted by Vink 342.

¹⁵Gaffney provides the most thorough analysis of the probable identities of poets not literally identified along with the likely candidates for each (31-87). Also see McNeir. Oram’s list in *The Yale Edition* of probable but still not certain identities appears to have been taken from Gaffney’s unpublished dissertation, since it matches hers.

¹⁶Concerning the death of Shakespeare’s soldier hero, fellow playwright Thomas Nashe remarked: “How would it haue ioyed braue *Talbot* (the terror of the French) to thinke that after he hade lyne two hundred yeares in his Tombe, hee should triumphe againe on the Stage, and haue his bones newe embalmed with the teares of ten thousand spectators at least (at seuerall times) who, in the Tragedian that represents his person, imagine they behold him bleeding” (Nashe 212). Interestingly, Nashe does not name Shakespeare, but he is certainly the tragedian specified.

¹⁷Meyer notes that “[n]o key to the identity of veiled persons in *Colin Clout* is known to have circulated, as they apparently did for the *Arcadia*, Sidney’s prose romance first published in 1590, which was generally regarded as a *roman à clef*” (162).

¹⁸Oram’s listing of certain and uncertain identities of court ladies again matches Gaffney’s in her dissertation (143-44).

¹⁹Oram claims that “Alabaster and Daniel are sufficiently unknown to the court that Colin uses their actual names” (*Edmund Spenser* 161).

²⁰Alabaster’s name signifies a translucent white color, especially in a stone such as marble or gypsum. Othello speaks of Desdemona as not wanting to scar “that whiter skin of hers than snow, and smooth as monumental alabaster” (5.2.4-5).

²¹The etymology of Daniel’s name—“God is my judge”—originates in his clever saving of Susannah from the evil judges slandering her.

²²For representative commentators and the linkages, see Hadfield 144-46, 311-12.

²³Both catalogues compose a single passage of 52 quatrains with 93 quatrains preceding it and following it (see Burchmore 395).

²⁴Hadfield persuasively identifies the Rosalind of *The Shepheardes Calender* as Machabyas Chylde, Spenser's first wife, who he either was courting or had married in 1579 (145-46). While this biographer of Spenser claims that the Rosalind of *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe* is also Elizabeth Boyle, I suggest that she remains Machabyas Chylde, idealized in death in Spenser's memory, and yet someone who does not displace the "gentle mayd" of Colin's rapturous poetry.

²⁵These are lines 477-79 in the 955-verse poem.

²⁶For more on the etymological essences of Shakespeare's characters' names, see Leimberg; and Maguire.

²⁷Thus when Spenser in *The Faerie Queene* calls a "cave" "hollow," the phrase "hollow cave," rather than amounting to an artless redundancy instead fuses into a single name (60). The same might be said for sixteenth-century poetic phrases such as "darke night" and "wearie woe."

²⁸Kinsman provided the groundwork for Scattergood's etymology by citing several examples from Medieval and early Renaissance literature wherein the names "Colin" and "Clout" possess the meanings Scattergood attributes to them (20-21).

²⁹Fish notes that Skelton's Colin Clout identifies himself from time to time as a cleric who writes and reports (180).

³⁰See *OED*, "clout" v. II.7.: "c1410 *Sir Cleges* 246, I schall the[e] clowght. 1551 *Bible* (Matthew's) 2 *Sam.* xxii. 39 (R.), I wasted them and so clouted them that they coulde not aryse." Also see definition III.7.a. of "clout" n.¹, cited as early as 1400: "A heavy blow, esp. with the hand; a cuff."

³¹Spenser's name did not appear on the title page of the 1579 quarto edition of *The Shepheardes Calender*. Someone had written in ink "by E. K." underneath the title on the title page of the copy used by the editors of *The Yale Edition of the Shorter Poems of Edmund Spenser*.

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