The Slow Progress of Arthur’s Quest: 
The Apocalyptic Anxiety in *The Faerie Queene*

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1. Introduction

*The Faerie Queene* narrates Spenser’s version of Arthur’s story, which focuses on Arthur’s quest for his beloved Faerie Queene. Since she is an allegory of glory, the reader expects that Arthur’s journey will reach a happy ending in celebration of their reunion. However, Arthur is still on his way even in the final Book of the extant text except the fragmentary Cantos of Book VII, and it seems that his quest progresses slowly. This essay examines the slow progress of Arthur’s quest from the standpoint of apocalyptic anxiety in *The Faerie Queene*.

2. A Happy Variant of Arthurian Apocalypse

*Briton moniments*, which Prince Arthur reads in Alma’s castle, describes British history from its mythical dawn, but the book ends abruptly just after referring to Arthur’s father, Uther Pendragon: “After him [Hengist] Vhier, which Pendragon hight, / Succedding There abruptly it did end, / Without full point, or other Cesure right, . . .” (*FQ* II.x.68.1-3). As caesuras are the recommended tropes used in verses to signal an ending or a pause, the lack of an appropriate caesura indicates that it is not the right place to stop the description. The narrator-poet tries to present the reasons behind this "vntimely breach" (II.x.68.6), but does so uncertainly, and critics vary in their opinion on this: some have looked for other reasons, while others have justified the abrupt ending. While *Briton moniments* ends the chronicle just before Arthur’s birth, Merlin’s prophecy, given to Brtini, suggests Arthur’s demise, for it foretells that Artegall and Britomart’s son recovers the crown from Constantine, who succeeds to Arthur’s throne. The gap in time between the book and the prophecy corresponds to the "vntimely breach" noted above. As A. C. Hamilton says, “the chronicle breaks here because history does: time is now the present” (II.x.68.fn.). The “breach” means the present in the world of *The Faerie Queene*, so that Arthur’s adventures are narrated as the present events. However, the story of Arthur’s adventures as narrated in the poem is different from the familiar version.

The consistent theme in both *Briton moniments* and Merlin’s prophecy is the “entire monarchy of Britain” (“totius insulae monarchiam” [*Historia Regum Britanniae* 9.1]). The history narrated in the book is underpinned by the idea that a consecutive, stable royal line supports the wholeness of the kingdom. As David Lee Miller points out, interregnums are described along with the

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2 Harper demonstrates in *The Sources of the British Chronicle History in Spenser’s Faerie Queene* that historical description in *Briton moniments* basically follows Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia Regnum Britanniae* and other contemporary chronicles.

3 Hereafter, *FQ* is omitted in parentheses.

4 For detail, see *The Arte of English Poesie* 61.

5 For example, one reason for the “vntimely breach” is ascribed to the ravages of time, which damage books by making wormholes in them. See Debra Fried, "Spenser’s Caesura" 262; as for the physical fragility of texts, which impedes knowledge of history, see Andrew Escobedo, *Nationalism and Historical Loss in Renaissance England: Foe, Dee, Spenser, Milton* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2004), ch. 2. On the other hand, the *Variorum* suggests to Ralph Church that the abrupt end is a “great Propriety” on grounds of Arthur’s ignorance of his parentage (2: 334); and Harper thinks that, since Arthur’s action immediately before his accession to the throne is told in *FQ*, “the reign of Arthur was therefore naturally omitted” in *The Sources of the British Chronicle History in Spenser’s Faerie Queene* 2.

6 Hereafter, *Historia*. 

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image of the “sunderings of a bodily wholeness” (202); for example, “Whereof great trouble in the kingdom grew, / That did her selfe in sondry parts diuide” (II. x.54.2-3). Peaceful wholeness and turbulent disruption are sharply contrasted. The unification of Britain by Brutus “to the utmost shore” (10.2) is highly praised, whereas the discord caused by the extinction of his lineage is much regretted: “Thenceforth this Realme was into factions rent” (36.6). Donwaro is celebrated for unifying the country “which earst were many” (38.9) by gathering “the Princes of the people loose” (37.6); similarly, Arthur stands out in the contemporary chronicles as the restorer and defender of “the entire monarchy of Britain,” checking the repeated invasions by the Saxons. According to Ernst Kantorowicz’s theory of the King’s Two Bodies, the body natural is inevitably subject to imperfection caused by the mortal defects of kings. Such imperfection results in disunity of the country, but great kings such as Brutus, Donwaro, and Arthur will restore and realize the wholeness of the country, reuniting the disrupted monarchy to its ideal form.7

Henry Tudor and his successors claimed that their ancestry was traceable to Arthur.8 In accordance with this, the narrator-poet addresses the Queen, saying that he intends to “blazon” (3.9) her illustrious race derived from “this renowned Prince [Arthur]... / Who mightily vpheld that royall mace” (4.2-3). Therefore, telling Arthur’s story in The Faerie Queene suits the narrator-poet’s purpose of praising the Queen. Arthurian narratives initially had local variety, but they were gradually integrated with one another, and the tragic version typically found in Sir Thomas Malory’s Le Morte Darthur (1470) became the standard version. However, Arthur’s story as narrated in The Faerie Queene is different from this standard version. In order to examine the characteristics of the version rendered in The Faerie Queene, first it is necessary to clarify the reason why the tragic version became the standard one.

Arthur’s life is not all glorious, but accompanied with a catastrophic fall that eventually leads the Britons to the loss of rulership. His fall may result immediately from the consanguineous war with Mordred, but it is Arthur’s secret sin of incest that is regarded as the distant but true cause. Just after describing Mordred’s revolt, Geoffrey of Monmouth makes an address to the dedicatee of his book: “About this particular matter, most noble Duke, Geoffrey of Monmouth prefers to say nothing” (Historia 11.1).9 M. Victoria Guerin thinks that the “particular matter” signifies Mordred’s being Arthur’s incestuous son. Since Mordred’s illicit birth was well known to contemporary readers, Geoffrey’s implicit reference to it is undoubtedly intentional. Guerin argues that by this silence Geoffrey hints at the theme of tradux peccati (16), or the transmission of sin,10 which urges the reader to think that Arthur’s incest was inevitable due to the “recurring pattern” that originated in his parents’ initial fault (9). This understanding renders Arthur a tragic hero, who, in spite of his great reputation and good fortune, is undeservedly driven to painful death by pitiable and fearful incidents.11 Arthur’s tragic death easily evokes sympathetic mourning and hope of his return to rule.

In the hope of restoration of the “entire monarchy of Britain,” Arthur’s tragic death and the absence of his governance were much lamented, as in Le Morte Darthur, because as Ingham suggests, such intense mourning served to foster a communitarian bond among the people in Britain (69). Like Israelite lamentation, the communal grief for Arthur’s death was a powerful expression of the people’s shared hope and anticipated joy in the restoration of the “entire monarchy of Britain,” which was, in a sense, fulfilled with Henry Tudor’s accession to the throne. Merlin’s prophecy in The Faerie Queene also follows the pattern of mourning and hope. Description of painful days in “thraldom” (III.iii.42.3) precedes Merlin’s celebration: “a spake of fire” (48.2), by which he means Henry Tudor, shall be “freshly kindled” (48.4); then “shall the Briton blood their crowne agayn reclame” (48.9) and “... eternall unyon shall be made” (49.1). The restoration heralds the advent of “a royall Virgin” (49.6), Queen Elizabeth.

7 For further argument on this point, see Miller and Ingham.
8 See Ingham 53 for the Tudor propaganda.
9 Griscom 496. Manuscripts vary on the form of the beginning phrase: “De hoc quidem, ...”. In some versions, the De is replaced with Ne, so that Neil Wright, for example, translates it as: “Geoffrey of Monmouth will not be silent even about this...”. See Geoffrey of Monmouth: The History of the Kings of Britain, ed. Michael D. Reeve (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2007) 248 and bxxiii.
10 The tradux peccati is a familiar subject in Arthurian studies. See, for example, Rosemary Morris, Arthurian Studies in the Character of King Arthur in Medieval Literature (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer and Rowman & Littlefield, 1982), ch. 2.
11 See Aristotle, Poetics, chs. 6 and 14.
Thus the version of Arthur’s story based on lamentation was useful while the recovery of the rule of the Britons was waited for, but in the days of the publication of The Faerie Queene, when the Tudor dynasty was facing the looming threat of discontinuation because the Virgin Queen, then in the latter half of her fifties, was very likely past her child-bearing-age, reference to her withering youth was restricted. A typical example is the policy of “the Mask of Youth” (Strong 147-48). A 1596 warrant commanded to seek out and deface any portraits presenting the queen as aging and subject to mortality. Under such circumstances, the traditional inclination to mourn the Arthurian catastrophe was not appropriate because it would possibly have aroused further apprehension about the loss of the “entire monarchy of Britain.”

Therefore, Spenser preferred to contrive a different story of Arthur’s life. Projected as a personification of “magnificence” (Letter 38), Arthur is depicted as the perfection of all virtues (39), totally unrelated to sin and fall. Though he does not know it in the course of the poem, he is questing for glory represented by the Faerie Queene, and is to be conferred with that glory when he sees her again. The “breach” in Briton monuments thus embraces a happy variant of Arthur’s story: instead of telling his sin and tragic death, it turns the catastrophe into glory. Readers, picking up his story intermittently narrated in The Faerie Queene, would replace the standard, tragic version with this happy variant, which would distract them from the loss of Arthurian glorious rule, and simultaneously from the approaching extinction of the reign of Queen Elizabeth I.

3. Arthur’s Quest for the “Just Time”

In Spenser’s variant, Arthur is brought to Faerylond in his infancy. As in many chivalric romances, Arthur’s quest is inspired by love. Since he meets the Faerie Queene in his dream, he keeps on seeking her restlessly, but even in the final reference to his quest (Arthur “went onward still / On his first quest” [VI.viii.30.7-8]), he does not seem to know where she is. In the light of Spenser’s original intention to write a poem composed of at least “twelue bookes” (Letter 20), The Faerie Queene is unfinished. Some scholars find unity or conclusion in the extant Books, while many others understand that the plan claims the author’s “grand paradigms for the poem” (Heale 9). There is no knowing what the end of the whole twelve Books would be like. The author might have planned to let Arthur see his lady soon after Book VI; however, taking the narrative structure of the poem into consideration, that is, a combination of the stories of the knights’ adventures narrated in respective books and Arthur’s quest interlaced through Books I to VI, it is generally agreed that the reunion and marriage of Arthur and Gloriana would be the most probably intended conclusion of the poem. Consequently, Arthur’s quest is just halfway through the original plan.

However, despite general accord on the probable ending of the poem, many scholars are suspicious of its fulfilment. Jonathan Goldberg argues that The Faerie Queene is typically prone to the nature of narrative in general, such as deferral, distraction, and delay in ending, so that it is an “endlesse worke” (26); accordingly, Arthur’s quest would be endless. Andrew Hadfield points out the “self-referentiality” (125) of The Faerie Queene. As the story proceeds, earlier events are qualified in the light of later ones and come to present some different meanings, so that it is difficult to complete the story. Elizabeth Heale, arguing that each book has a similar pattern of incomplete conclusion with the next book taking over where its predecessor left off, writes that “Arthur’s, too, is a quest never finally completed in the poem. . . .” (14). Also, Patricia Parker thinks Spenser’s “sense of an end as elusive and distant” (88), from the standpoint of Christian theology that a perfection can never fully be achieved in the world of time and matter subject to mutability, but only in God’s eternity can rest and perfection be achieved.

Apart from the arguments above, it is noteworthy that in the course of Arthur’s quest, the sense of passing time

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12 One well-known example of the queen’s portrait in “the Mask of Youth” is the Ditchley Portrait of Elizabeth I (c.1592) by Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger (the National Portrait Gallery).


14 See Ronald Arthur Horton, The Unity of The Faerie Queene (Athens: U of Georgia P, 1978), 3-12, for precedent arguments. Also, according to Richard Neuse, The Faerie Queene actually tells the poet’s own quest for chivalric ideals, but when threatened by the reality allegorized as the Blatant Beast, the poet gives up and concludes his epic enterprise (388).
comes to be felt more and more faintly. In the first two Books, how long Arthur has been engaged in his quest is clearly presented. Telling Una about his quest, Arthur says, "Nyne monethes I seek [her] in vain" (I.ix.15.9), and then in Book II, Arthur tells Guyon that he has been seeking his lady for one year ("Now hath" \(^{15}\) the Sunne with his lamp-buring light, / Walkt round about the world, and I no lesse, / Sith that of Goddesse I haue sought the sight" [ix.7.5-7, 1596]). However, in the latter books, little reference is made to the time he has spent questing his lady. In Book III, he happens to pursue a wrong lady, Florimel, hoping that she would be his Faerie Queene (iv.47-54). When he learns Florimel's hardship, he shows no hesitancy in offering her help (v.11). Similarly, in Books IV to VI, he appears, helps those in distress, and goes away to resume his original quest (IV. ix.17, V.xi.35, VI.viii.30). In this way, Arthur’s quest does not proceed straightly toward his lady, but again and again, he diverts from and then returns to his original quest. Recurrence of a similar pattern without any reference to the passage of time makes readers sense of successive time rather faint, and the progress of the quest is recognized less clearly. As a result of this, Arthur’s quest is felt to be quite slow in progress.

Nevertheless, the Faerie Queene promises that her love is to be Arthur’s "As when iust time expired should appeare" (I.ix.14.4; italics mine). This means that he will surely find her only when "the just time" is fulfilled. Likewise, Arthur cannot know his lineage until this "just time" expires. Arthur’s birth and lineage are concealed from him; beseeched by Una to tell his name and nation (I.ix.2.6-7), Arthur does not know the answer: "For both the lineance and the certein Sire, / From which I sprong, from mee are hidden yitt" (3.3-4). He repeatedly asks Merlin about his lineage (5.5), but Merlin just says, "... time in her iust term the truth to light should bring" (5.9; italics mine). Gloriana’s promise and Merlin’s prophecy suggest that Arthur certainly will see his lady again, and eventually discover his true self. Consequently, Arthur’s story is narrated according to the premise that the "just time" will surely come, though the time of its arrival is unpredictable. The "just time" will bring Arthur a long-hoped-for end, but, as the narrator-poet sympathizes, "that most noble Briton Prince so long / Sought [for the Faerie Queene] through the world, and suffered so much ill, / That I must rue his undeserved wrong" (I. Poem 2.6-8), the end may come very slowly. In this way Arthur’s quest may seem antinomic: it surely reaches the end, while at the same time, it seems to be endlessly delayed.

Contemplation tells the Redcrosse Knight about the delay in the course of the Christian life: "[The way to the New Jerusalem] neuer leads the traeweller astray" and will bring one to "joyous rest and endless bleis," but only "after labors long, and sad delay" (I.ix.52.4-6). Despite this delay, the right way prepared by God’s providence eventually reaches the right end. In the light of Contemplation’s teachings, Arthur’s journey to Cleopolis "never leads him astray" because Cleopolis is the only counterpart of the New Jerusalem on earth, so that Arthur’s journey striving for Gloriana is definitely right.

In Christian theology, time runs exactly according to God’s will, from the creation to the end and ultimate renewal of the world, and everything is to take place "at a divinely appointed and ordered time" (Thiselson 232). The narrator-poet’s words, "though from earth it [i.e. British genealogy] be derived right, / Yet doth it selfe stretch forth to heuens hight" (II.x.2.4-5), suggest that the cyclical glory and fall of his history of Britain is under providential guidance: God displaces the Britons "for their sinnes dew punishment" (III.iii.41.8), while He raises them again to rule if they will persevere until "the iust revolution measured" (44.3; italics mine). The "just time" for Arthur is not simply the time when his love is fulfilled, or when he learns his lineage; it is the time when he comes to understand the glorious role he has to play: that is, to defend "the entire monarchy of Britain." Thus, the "just time" for Arthur is when his personal narrative is incorporated into the grand design of British history, which is within God’s divine plan.

Notwithstanding, Arthur’s journey will be prolonged with "labors long, and sad delay." The "vn timely breach" in Briton moniments is being filled and ever-expands as Arthur’s happy story is told in The Faerie Queene.
4. The Restrainer of Evil

As is generally pointed out, the whole story of *The Faerie Queene* is often epitomized as "the battle between Good and Evil." Presided over by the godly Faerie Queene, the good knights of the Order of Maydenhead keep on beating the evil ones. Nevertheless, the inveterate evil forces lurk within the apparent peace of Faery-lond. In addition, the terrible war "Twixt that great faery Queene and Paynim king" foretold by the narrator-poet (I.xi.7.4) makes the peace even more precarious.

The war is first mentioned in the narrator-poet's plea to his Muse not to awake the sleeping Mars with the sound of her "dreadfull trompe" (6.6), but to come gently to help him sing of the Redcrosse Knight's battle against the Dragon (7.9). The instrument is also given special mention at the very beginning of *The Faerie Queene*. The narrator-poet is commanded by his Muse to replace his humbler "Shephards weeds" (I. Proem 1.2) with "trumpets sterne" (1.4). The former rustic instrument is for *The Shephearde Calender* (1579), while the "trumpets sterne" are for *The Faerie Queene*, which sings of the gentle deeds of knights and ladies (1.5) in the presence of Venus, Cupid, and the milder Mars in "loues and gentle iollities arraid" (3.8), hence, the sound of the "trumpets sterne" is much gentler than that of Muse's "dreadfull trompe." Now the narrator-poet asks his Muse to loosen the high pitch of her "dreadfull trompe" and tune to this milder tone.

The two songs—the song of the Redcrosse Knight's battle and that of the terrible war between the Faerie Queene and her enemy king—are similarly associated with the theme of apocalypse. The iconology of the Redcrosse Knight fighting against the Dragon resembles that of the Archangel Michael defeating "the great dragon" in Revelation (12.7-9). The terrible war is even more closely associated with the apocalyptic theme in its catastrophic tone. Mars, awoken by the "dreadfull trompe" blown with "mightie rage" (1.xi.6.2) and "furious fitt" (7.1), is no longer the gentle lover, but the horrible god of war and destruction whose wrath "scared nations doest with horror sterne astownd" (6.9), so that even the "heuen and earth did ring" (7.5). This trumpet reminds the reader of the angels' trumpets blown on the day of the Lord (Rev. 8, 9). The six years during which the Redcrosse Knight is to serve Gloriana "in warlike wize, / Gainst that proud Paynim king, that works her teene" (I.xii.18.7-8) can represent the traditional six thousand years counted in Christian theology from the creation of the world to its end.\(^{16}\) This gives the war an implication of the eschatological battle between the host of God and the Antichrist's camp.

The sudden relocation of the battlefield, from Faery-lond to Britain, in the line "Bryton fieldes with Sarazin blood bedyde" (I.xi.7.3), is intentional. A battlefield dyed with Saracen blood is a reminder of the field of Roncevaux sung in *The Song of Roland*, where the paladins and many Christian knights fight to the death. Charlemagne returns to find the field covered with corpses both of the Saracens and of the Franks: "There was no path nor passage anywhere / Nor of waste ground no ell nor foot to spare / Without a Frank or pagan lying there" (*The Song of Roland* II.167). Thus Roncevaux is a metaphor of a catastrophic war between Christians and God's enemy, embodied by the Saracens. The sound of the oliphant whistle, which Roland blows too late, is finally answered by the horns blown in response from Charlemagne's camp, which signal a relentless vengeance to be meted by Christians upon Saracens; in a sense, the oliphant and the horns play the role of the trumpets in Revelation. With this, the war between Charlemagne and Marsile, the Saracen king of Saragossa, comes to represent an apocalyptic war between the Christian British and the Spanish king. This may reinforce the traditional interpretation that the war between the Faerie Queene and the "Paynim king" is projected as an allegory of Elizabeth's conflict with the Catholic Philip II of Spain (*Variorum* 1: 296). However, with apocalyptic implications noted above, the war signifies more than a historical allegory; it means a war between the Christian British and the Antichrist.

Arthur tells Guyon that he is ready to offer his life in serving the Faerie Queene: ". . . sufficient were that hire / For losse of thousand liues, to die at her desire" (II. ix.5.8-9). His wish will not be fulfilled, however, until he meets her again at the "just time." It is not told whether he really fights for her in the war described above; but it is quite incomprehensible if Arthur does not help her when she needs his martial service most, even though there is no clear sign that the war bursts out

\(^{16}\) See Psalms 90.4, 2 Peter 3.8, and the Epistle of Barnabas 15.4.
after the "just time." Like the day of the Lord, the war may erupt very soon (Rev. 1.3), while there is no knowing when it takes place (Matt. 24.36). This total unpredictability may instill in readers a fear that the apocalyptic war will begin at any time before the arrival of Arthur, whereas the same unpredictability gives a hope that the war will not break out until the "just time" has been fulfilled, and that Gloriana's side will win the battle by the help of Arthur.

Apocalyptic anxiety is a repeated theme throughout human spiritual history, and tells of the imminent end of history and catastrophic events it entails. In the Western world it took place in Judaism in the Hellenistic period, and was carried on in Christianity. The Hebrew prophecy is considered to be at the root of Jewish and Christian apocalypticism, but it can be traced back to the ancient mythologies of the Near East, known today through the Akkadian and Ugaritic literatures. The common elements are some sort of crisis, caused by God's wrath in response to human impiety; the last judgment; the perdition of the evil-doers and the relief of the good; and the renewal of the world in bliss. Each time, the apocalyptic theme is told as being a once-and-for-all event, but its recurrence suggests that "The emphasis is not on the uniqueness of historical events but on recurring patterns, which assimilate the particular crisis to some event of the past whether historical or mythical" (Collins 51). "Some event of the past" means, for example, the Diaspora in the Jewish apocalypse, described in the First Book of Enoch, and the persecution of the early Christians by Roman emperors told in the apocalyptic scriptures in the New Testament, such as Revelation and the Epistles to the Thessalonians. Apocalyptic topics arouse in people a pressing fear of the destruction of the world, which is at the same time soothed by hope of help through heavenly grace.

In the sixteenth century, Britain faced turbulent days with the Catholic threat both from within and without. Also, natural disasters, such as the great earthquake in 1580, were considered the plain signs of God's wrath, and greatly horrified the people. The Renaissance-Reformation age was the climactic period of apocalyptic expectancy, characterized by "powerful underlying strains of mixed fear and hope" (Barnes 324). Preachers admonished people to be thankful for God's grace, which was so abundant as to have saved them from the corruption of the Roman Catholic Church, and which delivered to them instead the one true Church; the preachers also fervently exhorted them to make speedy repentance, because in their eyes the British people were like the Israelites, the "most favored, most obligated, most negligent" (Collinson 28).

At the same time, preachers insisted on the God-chosen holiness of the Anglican Church, and designated Elizabeth "a lamb [kept] from the slaughter," or "a most glorious star" that rises "in the depth of discomfort and darkness" (Hooker 428). The Queen also represented herself as God's "instrument to maintain His truth and glory, and to defend this kingdom from dishonor, damage, tyranny, and oppression" (Collected Works 342). These discourses presented her as a "godly prince," who "might save off . . . God's heavy judgments" (Collinson 35).

The years of domestic peace and overt exploits in Queen Elizabeth's reign were much praised as God-given "halcyon days" after stormy years. Merlin's prophecy presents a special celebration of the glorious days when the "royall Virgin" (III.iii.49.6) comes to rule in peace, stretching "her white rod over the Belgicke shore" (7) and smirring "the great Castle . . . so sore . . . ! That it shall make him shake, and shortly learn to fall" (8-9). The royal Virgin's activities are interpreted as demonstrating Elizabeth's support of the Protestants in the Netherlands and the defeat of Philip II, as he is called "the Castilian king" in the eighth of the Dedicatory Sonnets of The Faerie Queene.

"Of Ciull Magistrates," the thirty-seventh in the 39 Articles of 1562, sets out an explanation which was not included in the corresponding article in the Edwardian Articles of 1552: the "chiefe government of all estates of this Realme, whether they be Ecclesiastical or not," was attributed to the Queen, and she was counted one of the "godly Princes in holy scriptures," whose charge commissioned by God was to rule the realm and to "restraine with the ciull sword, the stubborne and eyll doers".

18 See chs. 83-90.
19 Quoted from the copy of the Golden Speech, delivered on November 30, 1601, from the papers of Sir Thomas Egerton.
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(Burnet 508; italics mine). While the Queen was not allowed “the ministering eyther of Gods worde, or of Sacramentes,” she was given the prerogative to suppress impiety and iniquity in her realm by wielding secular power.

The Queen’s prerogative, noted above, is represented as Queen Mercilla’s “Scepter” and “sword” (V.i.30.2.6) in *The Faerie Queene*. The former is given by God to keep the land in peace and clemency and “Maugre so many foes, which did withstand” (5); as for the latter, though it is not used for a long time, “Yet when as foes enfoist, or friends sought ayde, / She could it sternely draw, that all the world dismayde” (8-9). In this way she holds peace and justice, and checks the uprising of the evil power. Arthur, with Artegall, serves her in defeating the wicked Soulidan and his cruel wife Adicia, who try to subvert Mercilla’s sovereignty (V.viii). This episode can be interpreted as a type for the war between the Faerie Queene and the “Paynim king.” Like Gloriana’s “soveraigne powre, and scepter shene” with which she “All Faery lond does peacably sustene” (II.i.40.4-5), Mercilla’s “Scepter” and “sword” foreground the aspect of Queen Elizabeth as a godly prince who restrains evil by secular power.

However, the glorious “royall Virgin” was in reality aging, and the fear of her demise without leaving an heir was growing. Merlin’s final vision, the “ghastly spectacle . . . / That secretly he saw” (III.iii.50.3-4) suggests, as critics generally think, something lamentable or disastrous that might follow the Virgin Queen’s death. The evil camp, having been suppressed by the Queen’s “ciuill sword,” might strengthen its power, and some catastrophe might burst out, destroying the “halcyon days” and the glorious “entire monarchy of Britane.” The peace of Faerielond, and of Britain as well, was thus getting more and more precarious, and the threat of the future war in *The Faerie Queene* mirrors the Elizabethan fear of ending.

5. Conclusion

The prayer for Gloriana’s long reign, “Long mayst thou Glorian lie, in glory and great powre” (II.x.76.9) at the conclusion of the *Antiquitee of Faery lond* (II.ix. 60.2), which Guion reads at Alma’s castle, means undoubtedly more than mere compliments. The prayer represents the desperate contemporary wish that the peace and the wholeness of kingdom, in reality quite frail, could be maintained as long as possible. In *The Faerie Queene* the prayer is granted while Arthur is engaged in his journey, for Gloriana surely lives and rules at least until they do meet. Arthur’s slow journey on one hand prevents the advent of the great joy given at the “just time,” but on the other hand, the delay of the “just time” hinders the breaking out of the catastrophic war in Faerielond, and also in Britain; for, while Gloriana reigns, she restrains the evil one’s upheaval of the stable order.

Because mortals are not allowed to know the predestined judgment by God, they are relentlessly urged to hold faith in God’s grace and to perform duties assiduously. The Christian life is thus filled with uneasiness and tedious hardworking, so, in a sense, human beings “hunger for ends and for crises” (Kermode 55), and welcome renewal. In times of tribulations, the end and renewal are more keenly starved for, whereas in peaceful days fear of catastrophic end may be stronger. The sense of ending, or apocalyptic anxiety, gives a frame of reference on which people base their judgment of things or their attitude toward life and the world.

The poet intentionally prolongs the happy variant of Arthur’s story, for Arthur’s slow progress reflects contemporary attitude toward the final period of Tudor dynasty and prayer for duration of peace and “entire monarchy of Britaine” that Elizabeth’s reign maintains. The “untimely breach” between Briton monuments and Merlin’s prophecy, which is at once being filled and ever-expands by the prolonged story of Arthur’s quest, is a metaphor of the contemporary apocalyptic expectancy in mixed fear and hope, which was felt ever more intensely with the aging of the last royal virgin of Arthur’s genealogy. The “just time” is predestined and surely approaching, but its advent is ever protracted in *The Faerie Queene*.

Works Cited


