

As Ryzhik promises in the introduction, the comparison between the two poets should not be unidirectional, and in some cases bringing them together illuminates one of the pair in particular. Thus, Patrick Cheney's discussion of both poets' *artes poeticae* is primarily an argument about Donne that reads him as a counter-Spenserian poet, while Anne Fogarty and Jane Grogan's reassessment of the presence of early modern texts in the works of Eliot, Yeats, and Joyce is more revealing about Spenser. (The latter is also valuable for situating Spenser politically in Ireland in a way that's largely missing from the other essays.) Both these chapters demonstrate how comparison of the two authors may provide a fresh perspective on one of them. By setting up a comparison between the two poets, though, the volume creates a certain expectation, and some of the articles that balance their argument more equally between the two poets offer excellent close readings of Spenser followed by excellent close readings of Donne (or vice versa) which nonetheless can feel somewhat disconnected from each other. A notable exception to this is Elizabeth Harvey's contribution, which moves backward and forward between Donne's "A Valediction: Of My Name in the Window" and Spenser's Busirane in the *Faerie Queene* to weave a fascinating reflection on writing and the body/the self, focused on both poets' play with the word *character*.

Anne Lake Prescott's comparison of the ways Spenser and Donne relate to the Continent also manages to place both poets on the same page, so to speak, establishing them as living through the same world events and reading the same writers, while acknowledging their differences. In the introduction, Ryzhik observes that when Spenser and Donne have been considered together, they have traditionally been treated in terms of "contrast rather than comparison" (1). Moving the discussion more in the direction of "comparison" is one of the aims of this volume, and the introduction repeatedly insists that it's only a "starting point" (8), a "nascent conversation" (5). The contrast is not totally done away with—we don't lose sight of the differences between Spenser and Donne as we work our way through these articles—but we're left with an impression of two poets ripe for further comparison, subject as they were to the same societal and literary influences.

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Comic Spenser: Faith, Folly, and "The Faerie Queene." Victoria Coldham-Fussell. The Manchester Spenser. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020. xvi + 236 pp. £80.

The long-standing need for this book on Spenser and humor is attested by the neglect of comedy in *The Spenser Encyclopedia* (1990), in which the topic receives no separate article, just an entry in the index. There, one is referred to the articles on books 2 and 3,

despite so many laughable moments in book 1, with Red Crosse's clownish bravado, Duessa's femme-fatale, slimy Archimago's unhorsing and unmasking, and the whole parodic episode of Lucifera's court. Brooks-Davies's long article on book 1 in the *Encyclopedia* shows only ankle-deep awareness of humor. So *Comic Spenser*, with its richly detailed explorations of book 1, is a new resource for fresh and interesting ideas on this most-taught (if taught at all) part of *The F.Q.*

Victoria Coldham-Fussell courageously undertakes both comedy (the easy part) and the theory of humor—why people laugh. Study of this question leads her to enumerate three principles of comedy guiding her approach: reduction (e.g., bathos, error, rudeness), ambiguity (tonal inconsistency, incongruity), and play (nonsense, exaggeration, affirmation). The eternally vexing theory of humor eventually gives way, in the introductory section called “Spenserian Humour,” to Spenser. Chapter 1, “Spenser and the Comic Renaissance,” defines the Renaissance as an age of gravitas alternating with comic masterpieces and works of wit. Humanists played humorists in epistolary collections and, for a while, in jestbooks. The Fox and Ape in *Mother Hubbard's Tale* resemble jestbook rogues like Howleglas and, in *The F.Q.*, characters like Braggadocchio, the Squire of Dames, and Malbecco. Punning and wordplay in Spenser, first memorably explored decades ago by Martha Craig, receive renewed attention, notably when Coldham-Fussell unpacks the meanings of *pride* both in the sexual sense and in that of Christian morality. Spenser enlivens this wordplay with imagery of hidden caves, towers, swords, and deep dungeons—which in the Duessa-Orgoglio episode “hints not at intercourse so much as masturbation” (132). This attention to repressed desire supports the larger contention that the chief symptom of Red Crosse's spiritual erring throughout book 1 is shame, as he proves unable to give himself in any loving relationship. In the past, terms like *character* and *personality* have met with resistance in Spenser criticism (139), but in this reading the Knight takes on more humanity than does a mere vehicle for symbolism.

Characterization is more palpable, of course, in books 3 and 4. In the chapter “Laughing at Love,” everyone, even Arthur, is seen as snared in the folly of romantic love at one time or another—the Prince in his pursuits of Gloriana and Florimel or his struggle to avoid scandal after spending the night with Amoret and Amelyia following their rescue from Lust. More conventional laughter at love attends the comments by (and on) Britomart's nurse, Glauce, the comical stereotype pretending to be her “aged squire” (3.1.4). The twosome of young maiden and old nurse derives from both page and stage in Spenser's time, serving a theatrical pattern consummated in the pageant of Cupid's masque (3.12). Coldham-Fussell in fact observes that Spenser's whole poem is “something of a chivalric pageant in itself” (184). Underlying the wide range of lovers' activities in these two books is the concept of love as the performative essence of life, whose actors play roles, wear costumes, and even follow scripts.

In a book so cognizant of sources—contemporary, classical, and medieval—an oversight is the neglect of Shakespeare's favorite ancient comedian, Plautus. Besides E.K.'s

word that Spenser wrote “nine comedies” modeled on Ariosto, there is the evidence of *Tears of the Muses*, where, in summoning Thalia, Spenser reveals a Sidnean concern regarding the current state of comedy. She laments that “ugly Barbarisme” and “brutish Ignorance” have “ycrept of late” onto the comic stage, and “with vaine toyes the vulgar entertaine.” This possibly alludes to the contemporary quarrels between the comedic followers of Plautus and Terence—though Terence doesn’t get noticed either in *Comic Spenser*. The author’s discussion of Merlin’s mirror as a metaphor for the whole of Spenser’s poem might usefully be enhanced with reference to the ancient, well-known concept of comedy as a mirror of life.

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Immateriality and Early Modern English Literature: Shakespeare, Donne, Herbert.
James A. Knapp.
Edinburgh Critical Studies in Shakespeare and Philosophy. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020. xiv + 434 pp. £90.

A few generations ago, James Knapp’s new monograph on early modern immateriality may not have registered as an intervention. Surely, immateriality is central to the culture of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England, framed by a Protestant Christianity suffused with Aristotelian and Platonic philosophy. The dominance of materialist methodologies in recent literary scholarship, however, has led to a dismissal of immateriality, which Knapp smartly redresses not by pitting immateriality against its foil but by illustrating how immateriality supplements materialism. Such an approach is especially suited to literature from the 1590s to the 1630s because, as Knapp argues in his introduction, this half century constitutes a “messy period of transition” between “an era in which the intertwining of the natural and spiritual worlds was taken for granted” and one where natural and spiritual worlds represented “distinct objects for reflection” (8). To bridge the immaterial and material, Knapp utilizes the methodology of historical phenomenology.

Immateriality and Early Modern English Literature has three sections (“Being,” “Believing,” “Thinking”), each comprised of three chapters: an introductory chapter expounding the section’s core concept, followed by two literature chapters. The one exception is the first chapter, which discusses *Othello* to illustrate the material and immaterial senses of the word *thing*, as used by Emilia to describe Desdemona’s handkerchief. In the span of seven lines, *thing* transforms from a material object (the handkerchief itself) into a material-immaterial hybrid (the *no-thing* of Emilia’s vagina) before settling into an immaterial entity (Iago’s misogynistic idea that men have foolish wives). Readings of the handkerchief are plentiful, but Knapp’s is a worthy addition.