Spenserian Moments. Gordon Teskey.
Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2019. xvi + 530 pp. $45.

That Gordon Teskey's introduction to *Spenserian Moments* refers to the book's chapters and that the table of contents assigns the chapters to four sections ("On Spenser," "On Allegory," "On Thinking," "On Change") suggests a linearity that the author readily denies: "It would not be faithful to the complexity of Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, to its polysemous energies opening up so many interpretive fields, to advance an entirely consistent argument in which every part efficiently contributes to the whole—in other words, an argument that exists out of time, which is to say, at only one arrested moment in time" (2). Teskey's approach to Spenser's *Faerie Queene* resists critical approaches that contain Spenser's art within structural, historicist, or aesthetic boundaries. It is somewhat misleading to refer to *Spenserian Moments* as an "essay collection," as the press does, since the whole, which is greater than the parts, is governed by Teskey's unifying premise that *The Faerie Queene*'s poetry participates, and engages the reader, in improvised or "open" thinking: "Open thinking does not, so to speak, look back at what already exists and strive to represent it in thought. Instead it goes forward seeing those thoughts that are not yet in the world because they lie in the future of thinking, as coming moments of poetic truth" (1).

Teskey associates "moments" with romance's episodic structure, which, despite apparent digressions, conventionally advances a linear narrative. In Spenser, however, "moments" intrude upon the episode to potentially alter the narrative and to astonish the reader: "The moments of the Faerie Queene constitute not a plot but an array" (267). Teskey illustrates this with Florimell's sudden appearance in book 3. Guyon (book 2's knight of temperance), King Arthur, Britomart, and their squires are slowly meandering through "a forest wyde." "All suddenly" Florimell (not yet named) rushes out of the "thickest" brush pursued by "a griesly Foster. . . . Breathing out beastly lust her to defile" (3.1.16–17). Teskey says "the instant, or the moment" of Florimell's intrusion ("the appearance of beauty on the road") both astonishes the reader and scatters the knights. It constitutes "a rupture, and once it occurs, everything is changed" (269). Such moments simultaneously have momentum (the ability to move the action) and *kinestatis* where the instant is held up for the reader's contemplation. To read *The Faerie Queene* for Teskey is to read "moment by moment" (279). A moment draws the reader into a "local and contained moment of thought," but "every moment in the poem is also incomplete . . . it draws the reader forward and beyond it" (279). In the moment the reader courteously enters into the poem's thinking, not by grasping an idea or penetrating the text, but by being receptive to Spenser's strangeness. To read *The Faerie Queene* requires openness to Spenser who "thinks in subtle, allusive, indirect, and intuitive

ways about problems too complex to be dealt with in the isolating, linear fashion with which human problems are usually met" (314).

Spenserian Moments teaches us how to read *The Faerie Queene* by opening ourselves to its strangeness, by allowing its improvisation to invite us into "the poet's open enterprise of creative thought" (12), and by exulting in its beauty and intelligence. For me this is entirely satisfactory. Indeed, I find critical studies of *The Faerie Queene* somewhat disappointing, not because they lack insight, but because they rarely approach my sheer pleasure in reading Spenser's poetry. That said, having spent a career immersed in Elizabethan poetics, politics, religion, and the writers Spenser read, including the English chroniclers, I am probably more open to the poem's strangeness than I once was. What is compelling about *Spenserian Moments* is that it does not neglect a reader less familiar with Spenser's world. Essays in the first part, "On Spenser," remind readers about Spenser's life, literature, and Irish experiences, and survey *The Faerie Queene*'s plan and publication history. This enables courteous readers to be open to the momentary and the momentous in Spenser's poetics, which Teskey explores in "On Allegory" and "On Thinking" (parts 2 and 3). In part 4's essays, "On Change," Teskey reflects more personally on how time affects how we experience *The Faerie Queene*'s allegorical fixity and fluidity.

Rather than teaching what we should know about *The Faerie Queene*, *Spenserian Moments* offers ways to think about its bounty. Professor Teskey's richly allusive writing, his command of literary theory and philosophy from Plato to Derrida, and his keen intellect and wit invite us to revisit Spenser's brilliant poem with leisurely indulgence.

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The Origins of English Revenge Tragedy. George Oppitz-Trotman.
Edinburgh Critical Studies in Renaissance Culture. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019. xiv + 258 pp. £80.

George Oppitz-Trotman begins his book *The Origins of English Revenge Tragedy* by highlighting one of the central tensions facing most critics of Renaissance drama: the temptation to treat characters as people, and the opposing impossibility of separating characters from the idea of their embodiment on stage. This tension is only heightened by the context of revenge tragedy, famous for its attention to memory and memorial. Characters within these plays question how they will be remembered after the close of the play's events, demanding that the audience imagine their lives and afterlives. The arguments are deeply engaged with criticism of metatheater and the figuration of characters on the Renaissance stage. Oppitz-Trotman explores how the revenge context