

“THE STREIGHT COURSE OF HEAVENLY DESTINY”:

The Tudor Genealogical Myth of *The Faerie Queene*

The problem of mutability is central to the books of the second half of *The Faerie Queene*, in which Edmund Spenser takes great pains to examine the consequences of mutability in the interpersonal and social virtues of friendship, justice, and courtesy. While the tension between the desire for constancy and the seemingly inescapable presence of mutability is one of the major underlying questions of the 1596 edition, what is less obvious is the way in which Spenser is already grappling with the problem of mutability in the books of the 1590 edition. At the center of Spenser’s poetic myth, as it appears predominantly in Book III, is the development of the genealogical line of the British monarchy until the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. This genealogy, and subsequently the line of political rule, undergoes a substantial shift from the line of Arthur to the line of Britomart and Arthegall. While this shift appears to be an instance of mutability and rupture in the lines of authority, Spenser crafts the myth surrounding the shift to herald the constancy of providentially ordered political rule, even when that order is not readily apparent. At stake in such a myth is not only the inception of the royal lineage that leads to Queen Elizabeth I, but also the cultural identity that lineage creates for the Tudor line. Spenser’s genealogical project seeks to present a justification for the transference of political and religious authority to the Tudor line in the wake of the English reformation, and to substantiate Elizabeth’s claims to the headship of both the church and the state of England. In doing so, Spenser creates new national identity for the Tudor line that provides solutions to the problems ingrained in the Arthurian legends as an inheritance for Queen Elizabeth I. Ultimately, Spenser’s vision of the transference of power as ordained by providence seems to call into question the role of the royal lineage, suggesting that there are additional qualifications for political and religious rule that are not the result of pedigree, but of predestination.

Andrew King has attempted to reconcile what he sees to be flaws in Spenser's portrayal of the royal genealogy with the idea of a myth that presents "a rhythmic continuity that opposes and defeats mutability."¹ King's stance is that "Spenser's intellectually honest work admits and explores the problematic nature of the genealogical narrative" by exposing the "difficulty inherent in all political and human institutions that seek to represent themselves as constant and grounded in objective authority."² He argues that Spenser intentionally ingrains mutability into the royal genealogy through a dramatic break in the established line of political authority from the line of Arthur to that of Britomart and Arthegall. King concludes that the "royal genealogy fails to provide [a cosmic] response to mutability" and that instead Spenser creates a myth that "[elevates] the ineluctable mutability of even the most resonant and enshrined of human constructs."³ King fails, however, to see in Spenser's genealogical project the underlying force of providence as a weapon against mutability that substantiates Queen Elizabeth I's political and religious claims to authority.

Genealogy, Providence, and the Transference of Political Rule

The royal genealogy of Britain as a literary device is a common genre in English literature dating from before the eighth century works of the Venerable Bede. Genealogies typically trace the lineage of the ruling family through the great historical and mythological kings, and ultimately through the scriptural genealogies of Jesus to the patriarchs of the Old Testament. In the 16th century, such a composite understanding of the historical, mythological, and spiritual foundations of the royal line is key to understanding the British national identity. The burden of creating, manipulating, and promulgating these royal genealogies falls equally on historians, poets, and preachers.⁴ The royal genealogy is often figured in sermons of the time as a tool for solidifying the spiritual authority of the Crown as inseparable from its political authority. Such a dual affirmation is necessary for the Tudor line, as both their political and religious authority is called into question at the time of Queen Elizabeth

I. By implementing the genre of genealogy, Spenser couches the Tudor line in the traditions of both the historical and the religious writers of the time. Ultimately, the particulars of the genealogy Spenser crafts, including both the characters and the circumstances of the transference of authority, create a narrative in which the apparently mutable shifting of political power is in reality governed by providence, which guides and directs all matters according to divine prescription.

Although the narrative of the incident is relatively brief, the shifting of political power from the line of Arthur to the line of his half-brother Arthegall is vital to understanding Spenser's vision of a providentially ordered rule of authority. This transference is described in the prophecy given by Merlin to Britomart, in which Merlin foretells her marriage to Arthegall. Merlin tells Britomart that her son shall succeed his cousin Constantius, who had inherited the throne from their uncle Arthur. Spenser gives no specific context for Constantius' ascendance to rule in Merlin's prophecy, nor is it mentioned in the Briton Moniments episode in Book II which ceases just before the advent of Arthur, though the pseudo-historical character does appear as Arthur's heir and nephew in the genealogical accounts of Geoffrey of Monmouth, Spenser's main source for matters historical and genealogical. A. C. Hamilton identifies Arthegall's son as Aurelius Conanus, or Conan, who is described by Monmouth as unworthy of the crown as he delighted in civil war and usurping power unjustly.⁵ However, because Spenser specifically does not name Arthegall's son, whereas all other characters in the lineage directly surrounding the shift in political power are named, the poet distances the royal heir from the inherited tradition, creating instead a clean transition from the Arthurian line to the lineage of Britomart and Arthegall. King, however, argues that the introduction of Arthegall in the place of Arthur in the line of succession jeopardizes the integrity of the new genealogical myth: "Despite his name, Arthegall is not 'equal to Arthur,' and ... Arthegall merely covers another point at which the lines of authority break."⁶ King's strictly linear approach to the succession of the line of political authority fails to recognize the intricacy of the mechanisms by which the transference of

authority is undertaken.

The transition itself, as described in Merlin's prophecy, is indicative of the providentially ordered line of authority that Spenser offers as an explanation for the apparent rule of mutability in temporal matters. Merlin foretells that Arthegall's son "shall take the crowne that was his fathers right."⁷ The language of the crown, and therefore the supreme political authority, as belonging to a person by "right" is a strong indication of an underlying governance in political matters. This governing force implies that there exists a rightful monarch who takes authority in a rightly ordered manner. The subsequent line of Merlin's prophesy offers insight into the nature of the governing force: "and therewith crowne himselfe in the others stead."⁸ The movements of the rulers are not dictated by the governing force to the exclusion of the will and action of the individual; rather it is by the son's own hand that he brings about the restoration of rule in accordance with right governance. Spenser, in presenting the transference of power under a shroud of ambiguity, presents a facade of mutability that when lifted reveals the intricacy of a providential ordering of temporal matters through the agency of human action. In doing so, the poet presents the constancy of providence as a force counter to the apparently mutable circumstances of temporal affairs, particularly in the shifting of political authority. Providence, therefore, does not guide only the mechanics of the transference of political power, it also ordains the origins of the very lines of authority which lie at the heart of Spenser's genealogical project of the marriage and subsequent lineage of Britomart and Arthegall.

Merlin's prophecy of Britomart's marriage to Arthegall is steeped in the language of divine planning and providence. Merlin declares that the very marital union between Britomart and Arthegall is a divine appointment: "The man whom heuens haue ordaynd to bee / The spouse of Britomart, is Arthegall."⁹ Furthermore, Merlin explicitly refers to the providential ordering of the marriage in assuring Britomart of her affection for her intended: "...the streight course of heauenly destiny, / Led with eternal providence...has / Guyded thy glauce."¹⁰ Merlin articulates both the constancy of providence, as it is described

as a “steight course,” and its guidance in the particulars of human action. Providence does not force Britomart to crave Arthegall against her will, but rather directs her gaze to the enchanted looking glass in which Arthegall’s reflection is cast, stirring within her the desire to pursue her future husband. Britomart is free, therefore, to act according to this rightly ordered desire for Arthegall because the desire to do so is the result of providence. Merlin continues his prophecy by momentarily expanding the scope of his vision of providence to a more universal scale, in which all human action is directed by a heavenly order. The “fates” of men, Merlin says, “fare firme, / And may not shrinck, though all the world do shake: / Yet ought mens good endeouours them confirme, / And guide the heavenly causes to their constant terme.”¹¹ Merlin offers this fuller understanding of the reciprocal relationship between the ordering power of providence and man’s ability to bring divine plans to fruition, which is also present though less immediately evident in the passage describing the transference of the throne from Arthur to Arthegall’s son. The complexity of this stance is striking, as it holds that the eternal plan remains constant in the midst of a changing world, and that the wills and actions of men enact and guide the providential plan into such constancy.

The relationship between the ordering power of providence and the tension between constancy and mutability that begins to develop in the first edition of *The Faerie Queene* is explored more thoroughly in the second edition and expressed most completely in the Mutability Cantos. Mutability proves to be a nearly insurmountable problem in Books V and VI, as the heroes of those books struggle to remain constant in the carrying out of their virtuous and practical quests. The Cantos of Mutability, however, expand the scope of the question of constancy to a cosmological context in which the personified character of Mutability is scrutinized. The solution to mutability that Spenser provides in the Mutability Cantos is placed in the allegorical context of the legal trial of the Titan Mutability in the court of Dame Nature. Mutability’s claim to overtaking the authority of the Olympian gods rests on a dynastic claim and the evidence of changing earthly and celestial phenomena. Dame

Nature, however, rejects Mutability's plea with the following proclamation:

I well consider all that ye haue sayd,
And find that all things stedfastnes doe hate
And changed be: yet being rightly wayd
They are not changed from their first estate;
But by their change their being doe dilate:
And turning to themselues at length againe,
Doe worke their owne perfection so by fate:
Then ouer them Change doth not rule and raigne;
But they raigne ouer change, and doe their states
maintaine.¹²

The response to Mutability that Dame Nature provides is one that takes into account the eternal nature of the cosmos, not just the temporal changes that are manifest in everyday life. This view is similar to the solution offered by the generative power of the Garden of Adonis, in which the constant essence of nature prevails over the fading and changeable physical matter through cyclical generation.¹³ Also present in Nature's solution is the interaction between action and fate, by which the constant and eternal order is made manifest in temporal reality. These similarities between the solution to mutability as offered in the earlier books and that offered by the Cantos of Mutability suggest consistency in Spenser's understanding of the dynamic relationship between constancy and mutability. Spenser sees that there is a natural order that prevails in the face of change, and that this order is governed by a force that is itself unchanging. This cosmological order is the same as is revealed in Spenser's providentially ordered genealogical line of Britomart and Arthegall.

The interaction between human will and action, and the governance of a higher order is in keeping with the doctrine of both free will and of predestination as set out in the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion of 1563. These articles, which were revised under the supervision of Queen Elizabeth I in an effort to create a sound foundation for the emerging English church in the wake of the bloody religious conflicts under Mary Tudor, are a manifestation of Elizabeth's religious authority as the head

of the English church. Man's free will, according to the Articles, is hampered such that he has "no power to do good workes pleasaunt and acceptable to God, without the grace of God by Christ preuentyng [him]," meaning that a man is capable of acting rightly only when directed by divine grace.¹⁴ Similarly, predestination is articulated as the force by which God has, by his "euer lastyng purpose" and "before the foundations of the world were layed" decreed the salvation and damnation of all people. However, predestination is also considered to be the governing force of divine will in temporal matters, as Article XVII continues: "and in our doynge that wyl of God is to be folowed."¹⁵ According to the theological teaching of the English church at Spenser's time, all human action is rightly ordered when it manifests the divine will. This providential understanding of the unfolding of temporal events is at the heart of both the lines describing the transference of political authority from the line of Arthur to that of Arthegall, and in Merlin's prophecy concerning the bringing together of Britomart and Arthegall and the inception of their royal lineage. By incorporating the theology prescribed in documents sanctioned directly by his monarch and patron, Spenser aligns his narrative on the justification of shifting political power with the spiritual authority of Queen Elizabeth I, confirming the origins of both her political and religious authority as divinely appointed.

As a whole, Spenser's genealogical project is a vehicle in which the poet seeks to justify the shifts in lines of political and religious authority surrounding the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, and expose the constancy of providence in the face of apparent temporal mutability. In crafting a narrative in which the transference of political power in a nonlinear fashion is governed by providential ordering, Spenser creates an allegory for his own Queen. Elizabeth I's authority, according to Spenser, is preserved by providence despite the complicated circumstances of its origin. The shift in political power from the House of York to the House of Lancaster and the Tudor line is reflected in the shift from the line of Arthur to that of Britomart and Arthegall. The justifying power of providence that is at work in the fictional line of succession, therefore, is at work

too in his own time in the Tudor line. The work of providence is not relegated to the political realm only, but also pervades the religious sphere. Following the English reformation, in equating the headship of the state of England with its religious headship, Queen Elizabeth I's legitimacy in both areas must be absolute. According to Spenser's narrative, however, there appears to be no contradiction in terms between the providential ordering of political power and of religious authority. Elizabeth's authority, therefore, in matters of both church and state, is derived not merely from the Tudor line of succession, but directly from the eternally ordained plan of providence. Furthermore, the divine guidance of temporal political and religious matters reveals the profound constancy that lies just below the seemingly unending mutability of human affairs. In coupling the origins of political and religious authority with constancy as the greatest weapon against mutability, Spenser creates a myth in which the very lines of authority that lead directly to his monarch and patron Queen Elizabeth I are not only divinely ordained, but are vital to the very execution of the divine will on Earth. Spenser's new myth, however, because it deviates from the inherited traditions of Arthurian legend and the accepted histories of Monmouth and others, generates an alternative history which has far reaching ramifications for the national identity of the Britons.

A New Tudor Identity

In crafting the new myth of the history of the Britons beginning with Britomart and Arthegall and continuing to the time of Queen Elizabeth I, Spenser addresses both the origins of the Tudor line and the traits that its original parents pass on as the royal inheritance. Roger Cotton, a contemporary of Spenser, argues, "The founder of a nation determines...the national destiny."¹⁶ By placing Britomart and Arthegall in the role of the progenitors of the Tudor line, Spenser establishes the identity of the Britons as the inheritance they receive from the virtues and character of their parents. However, in creating this new national myth and alternative history, Spenser deviates from the myths long established and widely accepted as literary and historical cannon, primarily the legends of Arthur. This deviation is intentional on Spenser's part, as it allows him to overwrite the

issues of the Arthurian traditions and to create an inheritance for Queen Elizabeth I that is free from the taint of Arthur's failings. The three main issues in the legends of Arthur that find their remedies in Spenser's new national myth are the potential illegitimacy of his birth, his alleged unchastity, and his heirless state at the time of his death. Each of these issues, and the ramifications they bear on the collective identity of the Britons and specifically of the Tudor line, are resolved in Spenser's new myth by the individual persons of Britomart and Arthegall, and by their union and subsequent offspring.

The first Arthurian problem, that of illegitimacy, is a profound problem not only for the literary genre of genealogy, but also for the particular lineage that leads to Queen Elizabeth I. With the line of succession heavily contested in the years previous to her accession to the throne and the issue and repeal of the three Acts of Succession between 1533 and 1543, the legitimacy of Elizabeth's birth remains a topic of no small importance at the time of Spenser's writing. A child, particularly one who is the heir apparent to a great kingdom, who is born outside of the legal, natural, and spiritual confines of marriage, destabilizes the dynastic structure of royal succession. Arthur is one such child. He is the product of the extramarital affair between Uther Pendragon and the Lady Igraine, the wife of Gorlois, Duke of Cornwall. According to Monmouth, there is great ambiguity in whether Arthur's conception took place before or after the death of Gorlois, which had been orchestrated by Uther: "And upon that same night was the most renowned Arthur conceived...In the meantime...when [the army of Cornwall and that of Uther] met face to face in battle, Gorlois was amongst the first that were slain."¹⁷ The ambiguity of legitimacy is undesirable for Spenser's project of establishing an authoritative genealogy for Queen Elizabeth I. If Spenser were to give Arthur a generative place in the royal genealogy, he would substantiate a precedent for illegitimacy in the royal line, and draw attention to the claims against Elizabeth rather than dispel them.

Spenser's solution is to have the line transfer from Arthur to the line of Arthegall for reasons that are not directly related to Arthur's potential illegitimacy. Rather than attempting to explain

away Arthur's illegitimacy or justify his right to the throne and thereby drawing a strong parallel between Arthur and Queen Elizabeth I, Spenser instead fashions a line of succession that is free from the taint of illegitimacy, which in turn removes the stain of a long line of bastard heirs from Queen Elizabeth I's heritage and personal past. Queen Elizabeth I, therefore, is placed at the pinnacle of a lineage that has its roots in a legitimate birthright to political rule. The origins of the legitimacy of the line of succession lie in the character and role of Arthegall as the rightful heir to the throne. Arthegall plays the key role in the genealogical project of *The Faerie Queene* of providing political and dynastic legitimacy to the royal line. According to Spenser's Merlin, Arthegall is "the sonne of Gorlois / And brother vnto Cador Cornish king," placing him directly in line to the Cornish throne and giving him legitimate claim to a royal heritage.¹⁸ Arthegall's heirs, therefore, are doubly legitimized in their rule of the Britons: they are the rightful heirs of the throne of Cornwall by their father's birth, and the divinely appointed heirs of the kingdom of Britain at the end of the line of Uther Pendragon. Furthermore, the circumstances of Arthegall's birth do not allow for any ambiguity as to his own legitimacy. Despite his upbringing in Faerieland under the false pretense of being the son of an elf and a fairy, the deception surrounding Arthegall's childhood is dispelled by Merlin's vision and prophecy, in which the truth of his lineage is spoken plainly and directly: "But sooth he is the sonne of Goloris."¹⁹ The lineage that stems from Arthegall, therefore, is unambiguously legitimate in both birth and right of rule. Consequently, Queen Elizabeth I inherits the purity of birth and of authority that is ingrained in Arthegall's lineage, rather than the dubious legitimacy inherent in the Arthurian traditions.

The second Arthurian problem Spenser addresses in the dynastic shift to the lineage of Britomart and Arthegall is the inherited tradition of Arthur's unchastity. Although this issue is not raised in Monmouth's account, other sources of Arthurian myth include an episode of incest between Arthur and his estranged half-sister Morgause, which produces the child Mordred. Not only does this tradition again raise the question of

the illegitimacy of heirs, it constitutes a major breach of chastity. Some traditions, such as the Vulgate Cycle *Mort Artu*, address this problem by developing Mordred as Arthur's archenemy whom he kills in battle but not before he himself suffers a fatal wound. This mutual expunging of the Arthurian line cuts off both the tainted progeny and the transgressor of chastity. Monmouth's *Historia* portrays Mordred as Arthur's final and greatest enemy, but maintains that he is the rightful son of Morgause and her husband the King of Orkney, and Arthur's nephew rather than the product of an incestuous relationship. Spenser follows Monmouth's tradition, giving no indication that Arthur sires a son with his half-sister. However, Spenser is not free from the tradition of an unchaste Arthur. Just as the problem for the potential of illegitimacy is solved by the intervention of the pure-blooded Arthegall, the problem for the potential of unchastity is solved by the intervention of the sexually pure Britomart.

As the knight of Chastity, Britomart's virtue is directed toward the specifically procreative sexuality of marriage. Her chastity is directly related to her marriage to Arthegall and the prophecy of their combined line. It is not Britomart's "wandering eye, Glauncing vnwares in charmed looking glas" that drew her to Arthegall, indicating that her desire for Arthegall and the children produced by that desire are not of a lascivious nature.²⁰ Rather, the quest upon which Britomart embarks as a result of hearing Merlin's prophecy is for the purpose of finding Arthegall, her future husband, and it is on and through this quest that she manifests her superior chastity. By transposing the genealogical line from the potentially unchaste Arthur to the champion of chastity Britomart, Spenser establishes a line that is not only legitimate but also virtuous. Recalling Cotton's claim that the virtue of a nation's founder is indicative of the character of the nation, it is evident that a foundation in chastity will produce a nation that is more virtuous than a nation rooted in a line of dubious virtue. Therefore, Britomart provides a virtuous foundation for the royal lineage, an inheritance that is highly relevant to the virtue of Queen Elizabeth I. Additionally, the virtue of chastity as exemplified by Britomart and inherited by Queen Elizabeth I bears a spiritual dimension in the light of

the Queen's role of the restorer of the pure faith in the English church. Unchaste Arthur, corrupted by lechery and sexual depravity, recalls the reformation figuring of the Roman Church as the "great whore" of Babylon from the book of Revelation.²¹ Britomart, as the beacon of chastity, uproots the corruption of Arthur's line replacing it with a lineage that is pure. So, too, does Queen Elizabeth I's reformation efforts affect the restoration of an unblemished faith to the church in England. In this allegorical manner, Elizabeth inherits from Britomart the literal virtue of chastity and a spiritual purity, both of which restore the unchastity figured by Arthur.

The final Arthurian problem Spenser addresses is both the most monumental and the most easily overcome, and its solution is the natural result of the solutions to the first two problems. Arthegall solves the problem of Arthur's potential illegitimacy, Britomart solves the problem of his potential unchastity, and the marriage of Britomart and Arthegall solves the problem of his heirless death. Monmouth is not alone in his affirmation of Arthur's childless state at the time of his death; Layamon's early thirteenth century work *Brut* is emphatic on the subject: "he had none heire of his body bigeten: and grete harme was hit that soche a noble Kyng, and so doughty, had none childe of his body bigeten."²² However, the desire to ground the royal line in the lineage of Arthur causes some other historians of Spenser's time, such as Arthur Kelton in his *A Chronycle with a Genealogie*, to systematically overlook the problem of an heirless king, choosing instead to portray Queen Elizabeth I as the direct descendent of Arthur. Spenser instead addresses Arthur's heirless death and presents an elegant yet simple solution to the problem of the apparent termination of the royal line through the introduction of a new and fruitful royal couple in the place of the heirless king. In the Briton Moniments episode of Book II, Spenser is clear that the direct genealogical line from which Arthur descends is interrupted by his heirless status. He addresses the cutting off of Arthur's line poetically: "Succeeding There abruptly it did end, / Without full point, or other Cesure right... To finish it."²³ King points to the pun on the word "Cesure" as indicating that in Arthur's line there exists neither a proper

ceasing to end it, nor a proper Caesar to continue it. Rather, the ceasing comes abruptly, and the proper Caesar comes instead from the marriage of Britomart and Arthegall. The heirless king is replaced by a couple whose union produces a royal lineage.

The implications of this union when considered in light of Queen Elizabeth I's heirless state, however, raise more questions than appear to be resolved by drawing a parallel between the Queen and her fictional ancestors. Rather than creating an explanation for the Queen's childlessness or providing a way for her lineage to continue as it had from Britomart until Elizabeth I's birth, Spenser crafts the genealogical project of the new national myth to provide an open-ended line of succession after Elizabeth's reign. Because there is no universally acknowledged successor to the Tudor throne in 1590, Spenser is left in the position of needing to tread lightly so as to remain in the good graces of the next monarch, whoever he or she may be. Inherent in the myth he has crafted, however, is a reading that would allow Spenser to do just that. Spenser has presented political authority as granted by divine will and the transference of political power as ordered according to providence by virtue of the very nature of the position of monarch. Accordingly, any successor to Elizabeth's throne is the divinely appointed ruler, and whatever means are used to acquire the power of the monarchy are sanctioned by providence.

On the one hand, such a stance appears to place Spenser in the role of the reactionary Tudor apologist, justifying Queen Elizabeth I's reign and her Tudor successors, whomever they may be, for the sake of his own safety and reputation. In such a role, Spenser would appear to be creating a precedent for the justification of rule by virtue of providence, thereby presenting any ruler as ordained by the heavens, regardless of his or her dynastic claims. This stance is not only affirmative of the current monarch's legitimacy, but also creates the opportunity for Spenser to welcome an usurping monarch by affirming the inherent legitimacy of the transference of political power from Arthur to Britomart and Arthegall. Because Spenser crafts a myth in which such horizontal shifts of power are ordered by providence, he is free to support any deviation from

the current line of succession as equally divinely appointed. Thus, Spenser is in a position of supporting Elizabeth's successor, regardless of whether he or she is the next in line in the rightful Britomart-Arthegall lineage or the providentially appointed usurper of power.

When considered in the extreme, however, this stance of radical acceptance of political authority as providentially ordered regardless of dynastic lineage presents an unforeseen possibility for another level at which Spenser's myth changes the nature of the British monarchy. If the true justification of political power lies in divine appointment there may be no justifiable reason for succession according to dynastic lines and royal blood may cease to carry any inherent authority. Furthermore, if the justification for rule is derived from the virtue and the divine appointment of the monarch, traits which are entirely interior rather than ostensible in pedigree, it is possible that no political authority can be verifiable by human means. However, because Spenser couches the transference of power and the continuation of the royal lineage by means of familial procreation, it is evident that authority that is granted and preserved by providence is promulgated by the creative power of genealogy. Ultimately, the generative force of genealogy acts, as Nature in the Garden of Adonis, as the weapon of constancy against mutability.

Spenser, in crafting the genealogy of the Tudor line as stemming from Britomart and Arthegall rather than from Arthur, presents a providentially ordered line of succession that preserves the rule of constancy in the face of circumstances that appear thoroughly mutable. In doing so, he creates a new national identity for the British monarchy that instills in the royal lineage the very traits and virtues that justify Queen Elizabeth I's claim to political and religious authority. Elizabeth I bears Arthegall's unsullied royal heritage and Britomart's uncompromised virtue. Deriving her right to political rule from the providentially ordered line of succession, Elizabeth takes on also the divinely appointed role of head of the English church. In the uncertain political and religious climate at the close of the 16th century, Spenser's royal genealogy, and the myth that surrounds it, seeks to justify both the rule of Elizabeth, and of

her successor. Such an undertaking as the means of justification of rule echoes through the political writings of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries as the re-emergent theory of the divine right of kings.

As it would happen, however, Spenser himself would not live to see Elizabeth's successor crowned. For him, the royal Tudor lineage that was prophesied ceases with the Virgin Queen, Elizabeth I. James VI of Scotland and I of England, himself a proponent of the divine right of kings, would ascend the throne, and the royal line would undergo a shift remarkably similar to the shift from the line of Arthur to that of Britomart and Arthegall. Such a transference of power, according to a Spenserian understanding, exemplifies the constancy of providence as the directing force behind apparently mutable human institutions and preserves the virtue and legitimacy of the evolving English monarchy.

NOTES

1. Andrew King, "Lines of Authority: The Genealogical Theme in *The Faerie Queene*." *Spenser Studies* XVIII (2003) 59.
2. King, "Lines of Authority," 61.
3. *Ibid.*, 75.
4. Margaret Christian, "The Ground of Storie: Genealogy in *The Faerie Queene*," *Spenser Studies* IX (1991): 62.
5. Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A. C. Hamilton (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2007), footnote to III.iii.29; Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Histories of the Kings of Britain*, trans. Sebastian Evens (Boston: E. P. Dutton, 1958), XXI.V.
6. King, "Lines of Authority," 68.
7. Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, III.iii.29.6.
8. *Ibid.*, III.iii.29.7.
9. *Ibid.*, III.iii.26.1-2.
10. *Ibid.*, III.iii.24.3-5.
11. *Ibid.*, III.iii.25.6-9.
12. *Ibid.*, VII.vii.58.1-59.7.
13. *Ibid.*, III.vi.37.
14. John Cawood, trans., *The Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion of The Church of England* (London: 1571), Christian Classics Eternal Library, accessed May 1, 2015, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/creeds3.iv.xi.html>: Article X.

- 15.** Ibid., Article XVII.
- 16.** Christian, “The Ground of Storie,” 63.
- 17.** Monmouth, *History of the Kings of Britain*, VIII.IXX - XX.
- 18.** Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, III.iii.27.1-2.
- 19.** Ibid., III.iii.27.1.
- 20.** Ibid., III.iii.24.1-2.
- 21.** *Geneva Bible*. (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007), Revelation 17:1.
- 22.** Quoted in King, “Lines of Authority,” 64.
- 23.** Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, II.x.68.2-6.