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This volume describes itself as an ‘opinionated state of the art’ (ix) collection and is the attempt of an impressive group of contributors to redirect Spenser studies. In the process they challenge many giants of Anglo-American Spenser criticism - Judith Anderson, Harry Berger Jr., Patrick Cheney, and Louis Montrose included. The book is in three sections, one historicising, one thematic and one formalist. The first reads Spenser through his relationship with the classical and medieval past and through book history. The second focuses on Spenser and music, whilst the final section elucidates the distinctiveness of his poetic style. Most of the eight essays (there are also three poems) carefully signpost future research directions.

In the opening chapter, Syrithe Pugh revisits Spenser’s relationship with his major classical model, Virgil, arguing that his ambivalence about the *rota Virgiliana* is not anti-Virgilian but derives from Virgil’s own contemplation of possible artistic futures. Spenser’s response to the *Aeneid*, particularly, shows him intuiting complexities that are still debated by Classicists. Pugh is especially strong on the relationship between ‘Aprill’ and *The Faerie Queene*; she reads the move to dynastic epic praise as pointedly conditional upon Elizabeth I’s response to the Protestantism of *The Shepheardes Calender*. Kathryn Walls’s essay addresses the thorny issue of Spenser’s notion of history and adds significantly to this discussion. Like other critics interrogating periodisation, she recognises that Spenser had a sense of ‘medievalism’ before the nineteenth-century’s invention of that term. This is evident in his perception of the medieval period’s alterity. Walls sees Spenser’s periodisation as structured by two analogous ruptures: Christ’s Incarnation and the Henrician Reformation. Her essay reveals that Spenser’s periodising tendencies restructure chronology and – because
he offers nothing comparable to the Middle Ages – are paradoxically ahistorical. The final essay in this section, by Elisabeth Chaghafi, provides a useful overview of book historical work on Spenser. Her analysis of the 1595 printed Quarto of *Colin Clouts Come Home Again*, demonstrates that it is effectively a miscellany of elegies for Sir Philip Sidney presented as a community of poetic voices. Chaghafi’s key point is that influential understandings of Spenser construct an isolated authorial voice misleadingly dependant upon separation from its original print context. She makes a persuasive case for further book historical approaches to his works.

The second section, ‘Spenser and Music’, contains two essays that will become reference points. David Scott Wilson-Okamura enumerates the ways in which music and musicians are heard in Spenser’s poems, helpfully grounding his discussion in sixteenth-century musical practices. Gavin Alexander establishes which parts of his works appealed to composers, revealing that it is in *The Shepheardes Calender* that his poetry makes closest contact with music. This section importantly signals some of the ways that Spenser’s poetry was perceived by his contemporaries as being different from that of its time: it demonstrates that Spenser is less technically musical than contemporaries (like George Gascoigne) and appears less frequently in early modern compositions (than, say, Sidney).

In a refreshing moment, the final section opens with works commissioned from established American poets. As an apt prologue to a concluding group of essays concerned to destabilise patterns of reading Spenser, April Bernard’s ‘Trying to Like Spenser’ wittily sketches the bewildering ‘ordeal’ of engaging with ‘our Faerie’ (157). K. Silem Mohammad’s ‘Amograms’ rewrite *Amoretti* 1 and 2 by scrambling their letters and reassembling them in the Spenserian sonnet form but in a different order. This reflects Spenser’s interest in the material process of writing: they are poems made of the same matter (letters and form) as the sonnets but recoded into another meaning. They read the sonnets to the letter but their radical
rewriting is antithetical to close reading. This poetical interlude marks an effective transition to three synergistic essays on *The Faerie Queene* that unsettle dominant methods of Spenser criticism. Hecht examines different readings of the Hellenore episode to argue that it fractures the interpretive structures of the poem. This essay generates a productive conclusion but via a circuitous route whose power would be increased with more detail about the argument’s implications for the poem as a whole. Are there further moments of interpretive rupture in Spenser? Could they be connected to other energies, such as his poetics of deferral? The final two essays, the most provocative of the volume, theorise how to read (or not to read) Spenser. Lethbridge insists that close reading simply does not work for Spenser, unlike his major early modern counterparts Shakespeare and Milton. This is because of the poetry’s repetition, formulae, rhyme, and lack of ‘surface densities [...] and dramatically conceived voices’ (176). Moving apace with ringing clarity, Spenser’s poetry is not expressivist; it is thought rather than felt, the verse possessing a forward trajectory that enables the poem to work by moments. The nature of the Spenserian moment interests Gordon Teskey; he postulates that the ‘moment of wonder’ is the dominant feature of *The Faerie Queene*’s surface. Spenser links fragments of episodes in stasis and kinesis for the reader’s contemplation and the poem comprises an ‘array’ (219) of moments that are simultaneously (and curiously) still and in motion. This essay reads counter to the architectural structures that readers of Spenser are trained to look for and the volume pairs it effectively with Lethbridge’s in an explicit attempt to forge new critical methods.

This is a strong collection with some minor drawbacks. It does not pretend to be comprehensive but (Chaghafi’s and Walls’s entries excepted) the major works markedly predominate. Very occasionally readings are strained. The final section is undoubtedly powerful, and the second groundbreaking, but the first, although it contains excellent research, does not push as convincingly in new directions. A contribution on affect would be
a timely inclusion, especially given Lethbridge’s argument against expressivism. However, this is a valuable book that will be important to many scholars - those combining early modern music and poetry, those studying Elizabethan poetics, and, naturally, Spenserians, all of whom should read it.

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