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Translatio materiae: Spenser, the Humanists, and a Poetics of Matter

In the ruin history has physically merged into the setting. And in this guise history does not assume the form of the process of an eternal life so much as that of irresistible decay. ... In the process of decay, and in it alone, the events of history shrivel up and become absorbed in the setting.

—Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Genre*

The first epic simile of Spenser's *Faerie Queene* (1590/96) is rich with matter's potential. Constituting a single stanza, the simile's content announces that a primary concern of the epic will be the relationship between poetic structure and the plenitude of matter that fills that structure. The vehicle of the simile—the flooding of the banks of the Nile river—erupts into the poem not only descriptively but also diagnostically. It announces that the *Faerie Queene* is a poem made of invented matter that will endlessly carry forward, mutate, and multiply for the duration of the epic:

As when old father *Nilus* gins to swell
With timely pride aboue the *Aegyptian* vale,
His fattie waues doe fertile slime outwell,
And ouerflow each plaine and lowly dale:
But when his later spring gins to auale,
Huge heapes of mudd he leaues, wherin there breed
Ten thousand kindes of creatures partly male
And partly femall of his fruitful seed;
Such vgly monstrous shapes elswher may no man reed.¹

The simile is as much a description of the Nile's annual swelling as of Spenser's epic embarkation. "Old father *Nilus*" begins to swell with "timely pride," and so too does the epic begin, with this literary device, to swell with narrative possibility born of matter. The Nile's waves are "fattie," more solid than liquid, and they pour forth ("outwell"²) a "fertile slime"

¹ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, 2nd ed., eds. A.C. Hamilton et al. (London: Routledge, 2013), I.i.21. Hereafter, all citations of the *The Faerie Queene* will refer to Hamilton's edition unless otherwise noted.

² Hamilton, ed., *The Faerie Queene*, note to I.i.21.3.

bearing the potential for life. In the “[h]uge heapes of mudd” the Nile leaves in the flood-site, all sorts of life begin to “breed” and grow, “ten thousand kindes of creatures” born of his “fruitful seed.” These creatures are various in shape and kind and include figures “vgly” and “monstrous.”³ In Spenser’s poem, the same poetic matrix breeds the good, the bad, and the ugly, and in perfect Spenserian ambiguity, these creatures share a recyclable matter.

I begin with this simile, just as Spenser places it in primary position in his epic, because it demonstrates the persistent logic of the poetics of matter in Spenser’s corpus and especially in his *Faerie Queene* as apotheosis of that poetics. My proposed term for narrative matter’s movement and mutation in Spenser’s poetry is *translatio materiae*, literally, the “translation” or “carrying over” of “matter.” It is kin to *translatio imperii* and *translatio studii*, the reception of imperial power and ideas, respectively, from one culture to another. Like these related terms, *translatio materiae* is born from Spenser’s engagement with the European humanist poetry of the preceding years, works which were in turn shaped by their authors’ considerations of Roman ruins. In the mass of material rubble humanists encountered in Rome’s ruin, in the recognizable yet deforming architectural bodies resting there, “history has physically merged into the setting.”⁴ The opportunities at sites of ruin were twofold for the humanists. First, ruins offered preserved objects and ornaments to be carried away, or “translated,” from Rome to the sites of budding European nations. Spolia could be integrated into the figurative building-projects that

³ Ibid., see notes to I.i.21 for other humanist treatments of the flooding of the Nile. Vitruvius also describes an abiogenetic process, but one in which the beasts are drowned rather than supported by the muddy matter: “For the increase of the river Nile doth greatly benefit and help that country, because through the great overflowing thereof, many hurtful beasts breeding there are thereby dispatched and drowned, except they [that] speedily fly for refuge unto the higher places.” See: Vitruvius, *On Architecture, Vol. I: Books 1-5*, trans. by Frank Granger. Loeb Classical Library 215 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1931), 1.4.11.

⁴ Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Genre*, trans. Joan Osborne, with an introduction by George Steiner (London: National Library Board, 1977), 178.

constituted French, English, German, and other vernacular and poetic traditions. Second, rumination on Rome's disintegration provided a tangible lesson on earthly pride; Rome was the greatest titan in a catalogue *de casibus* and her earthly remains were a reminder of the flesh's impermanence and the Christian soul's transcendence. Furthermore, Petrarchism and its disciples easily equated the immortality of their poetic project with the restorative power of Christian faith. Antiquity, resurrected in the humanist text, enjoyed an immortality similar to the resurrection of the human soul; the poetic text, then, was afforded a trope of immortality borrowed from the Christian paradigm. In Petrarch and in the work of his inheritors, "the new appropriation of antiquity takes place under Christian premises: the aura of religious resurrection is fully bestowed on the worldly event of cultural *renovatio*."⁵

For Edmund Spenser, matter's earthly decay and the soul's transcendence via a Christian solution is unsatisfactory. This is not to say, of course, that Spenser deviated from early modern Neoplatonic divisions of body and soul; *Ruines of Time*, the first poem in his *Complaints* (1591), dutifully laments the "instability of worldly greatness" and turns toward "earthly fame memorialized in poetry and divine reward."⁶ Rather, Spenser's adoption of the humanist interest in sites of decay and ruin often foregoes the easy resolution in matter's earthly impermanence. Spenser chooses instead to stay with this decaying matter, to remain with the remains to observe, document, and poetically mimic the problem of decaying matter and the processes of material proliferation that take place in this site. In this activity, Spenser develops a new *translatio*, one which accepts inheritances from Rome in various forms—textual, imperial, artistic—while

⁵ Gerhard Regn, "Negotiating Religion and Art: Wagner, Petrarch, Dante," *MLN* vol. 126, no. 4 (September 2011): S81.

⁶ Richard Schell, ed., "Introduction" to *The Ruines of Time*, in *The Yale Edition of the Shorter Poems of Edmund Spenser*, ed. William Oram et al. (New Haven: Yale UP, 1989), 225.

insisting on their material intractability. My analysis begins where Spenser experiences the treatment of ruined matter in continental humanist texts, particularly the work of Joachim du Bellay, and derives from them a poetics and vocabulary inspired by representations of ruins yet essentially *about* matter. My study is not, therefore, an analysis of Spenser's primary contact with archaeological ruins, which Andrew Hui argues produces a "poetics of ruin" in *The Faerie Queene* whereby "monuments and ruins represent the inner states of characters in the poem" and their respective "moral edification[s]."⁷ Rather, I examine Spenser's secondary contact with the nature of matter in sites of ruination as poeticized by humanists at Rome. Spenser observes in these works the modes by which matter exists, moves, and changes. For the humanists, Rome's remains become either spolia transported linearly through the progression of empires or a corpse decayed to dust, spirit having departed. *Translatio materiae*, which pervades Spenser's corpus, reproduces the humanist attention to the site of Rome's decaying body but innovates an interest in matter's permanence and non-linear proliferation.

Translatio materiae is no more a Spenserian law, per se, than any other "law" by which Spenser's characters, landscape, or poetics abide only to err when we think they have at long last adhered to a formula. *Translatio* encompasses movement ("carrying over," "bearing forward") of matter from one place to another, though not necessarily in a linear progression, and matter's change of state ("transformation"), though not necessarily, as Debapriya Sarkar has suggested of Spenserian matter's evolution, towards that matter's natural "ontological limit."⁸ *Translatio* for Spenser moves beyond paradigms of linearity in early Renaissance art, to which Georges Didi-Huberman ascribes "primitive notions of 'youth,' 'maturity,' and 'decay.'" It instead allows

⁷ Andrew Hui, *The Poetics of Ruins in Renaissance Literature* (New York: Fordham UP, 2016), 196.

⁸ Debapriya Sarkar, "Dilated Materiality and Formal Restraint in *The Faerie Queene*," *Spenser Studies* vol. 31/32 (2018): 139.

matter to possess a “*temporality that is not merely historical*” and to resist the finality of historical evolution or any “direction of history.”⁹ *Translatio materiae* runs through Spenser’s poetry as the transformation and transportation of matter from states of decay into narrative and poetic afterlives. Spenser addresses matter’s persistence and propensity to move and transform by pointing to the internal, material exchanges between matter and the meaning matter holds: via *translatio materiae*, decayed or destroyed matter may enjoy an afterlife reincorporated into other allegorical figurations, into the landscape, or even into poetic structure or device.

For the purposes of this essay, I treat *Faerie Queene* Book One as exemplary of *translatio materiae* and as symptomatic of—and introductory to—*translatio materiae* as it suffuses the entire epic and perhaps even the Spenserian corpus. Where the poem is flooded with matter belonging either to the realm of narrative or to the realm of poetic structure, more will grow from the matrix. The image of the flooded Nile thus becomes emblematic of the poem’s interest in matter as it is carried beyond its original fluvial bounds, transformed in state from liquid water to viscous slime to thick mud, and laid down as a site for the endless propagation of new life. Old Father Nile is a poet, flooding his poem with matter. The simile introduces the poet—the maker of this matter—as harnessing matter’s potential for proliferation. In what follows, I begin to explore the many iterations of this principle in the first book of the epic. I draw these episodes into dialogue with motifs of matter in Spenser’s *Complaints*—a 1591 collation of nine poems including two translations of du Bellay’s work—whose composition history shares an extended temporality with *The Faerie Queene*.¹⁰ Through this comparison, I

⁹ Georges Didi-Huberman, “Viscosities and Survivals: Art History Put to the Test by the Material,” in *Ephemeral Bodies: Wax Sculpture and the Human Figure*, ed. Roberta Panzanelli (Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute, 2008), 160.

¹⁰ Ronald Bond, ed., “Introduction” to the *Complaints*, in *The Yale Edition of the Shorter Poems of Edmund Spenser*, ed. William Oram et al. (New Haven: Yale UP, 1989), 217-22.

aim to show how *The Faerie Queene*'s poetics reproduce and expand the *translatio materiae* of the *Complaints*, which owe a debt to first-hand, continental humanist accounts of Rome's ruined matter.

In the final lines of his *Deffence et Illustration de la Langue Francoyse* (1549), tucked into the "Conclusion de tout l'Oeuvre" that bookends the apology, the humanist poet Joachim du Bellay rallies a war cry for the French to come to the defense of their beloved but neglected language. He commands the conquering army of French speakers and writers: "Là donq', François, marchez couraigeusement vers cete superbe cité Romaine: et des serves depouilles d'elle (comme vous avez fait plus d'une fois) ornez voz temples et autelz."¹¹ His direction is for the defenders of the French language and culture to pillage the ruins—temples, palaces, hills—of ancient Rome and to carry off her spoils to their poetic and linguistic benefit. The double meaning of "des serves depouilles"—"her captured spoils," as Helgerson translates, but also literally, her "skins" or corporeal remains—identifies Rome as a body to be disinterred and the French people as her graverobbers. As Thomas Greene diagnoses of the humanist formula exemplified by du Bellay, "masonry begins with... exhumation."¹² Du Bellay commands that the spolia stripped ruthlessly from Rome's buried body be used to adorn new European establishments: "Pillez moy sans conscience les sacrez thesors de ce temple Delphique, ainsi que vous avez fait autrefois: et ne craignez plus ce muet Apollon, ses faulx oracles, ny ses fleches

¹¹ "Up then, Frenchmen! March courageously on that proud Roman city and from her captured spoils (as you have done more than once) adorn your temples and altars." Joachim du Bellay, *La Deffence et Illustration de la Langue Francoyse. The Defense and Enrichment of the French Language*, in *Joachim du Bellay: The Regrets, with the Antiquities or Rome, Three Latin Elegies, and the Defense and Enrichment of the French Language: A Bilingual Edition*, ed. and trans. Richard Helgerson, pp.317-417 (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2006), 412-3. Hereafter, all quotations and translations of du Bellay's prose and poetry will be cited from Helgerson's edition unless otherwise noted.

¹² Thomas Greene, *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1982), 222.

rebouchées.”¹³ In the Catholic posture of sixteenth century France, du Bellay evokes Apollo, the Greco-Roman source of poetry, and simultaneously dismisses the god as a mute, impotent, and false oracle, with his arrows having been blunted (“ses fleches rebouchées”). Rome herself is dead, buried, mute, and only her physical and textual treasures endure. Pillage these linguistic, artistic, and monumental remains and carry them forth to your new infant language, du Bellay issues in his closing edict.

Du Bellay’s *Deffence* and the metaphors within it circumscribe the moment and material methods of the classical Renaissance across Europe. At stake are the ravaging and revival of lost poetic traditions, the innovation of new poetic forms, and the establishment of legitimate vernaculars high enough in style to be used for both the imitation of the old and the innovation of the new. As empiricism gained ground in Europe—Rachel Eisendrath observes the shift from Petrarch’s ekphrasis of “material Rome” refracted through “book knowledge” to a sixteenth century “emphasis on the factuality of things”¹⁴—so too did metaphors of a Renaissance at Rome articulated in objective, material terms. Petrarch’s refuge in the Platonic, which for him offered an eternal afterlife for his beloved Laura and for his poetry, transformed into a late-humanist involvement in Rome’s tangibility whereby poets took what they wanted for material repurposing and resolved what remained in the promise of Christian afterlife. Poets like du Bellay accept the factuality of things as grounds for a lament on matter’s inevitable decay. Spenser, I argue, goes *beyond* the factuality of real things to foreground the tangibility of

¹³ “Pillage without scruple the sacred treasures of that Delphic temple, as you did in the past, and fear no more that mute Apollo, his false oracles, nor his blunted arrows” (413).

¹⁴ Rachel Eisendrath, *Poetry in a World of Things: Aesthetics and Empiricism in Renaissance Ekphrasis* (Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 30-1; 50.

represented matter in his poetic landscape, as well as this matter's capacity to infuse his poetic structure.

Leonard Barkan, following in the footsteps of Greene, detects in Rome's exhumation a material exchange between the found old and the created new: the "unearthed object becomes a place of exchange not only between words and pictures but also between antiquity and modern times and between one artist and another."¹⁵ In the humanists' own words, this exchange was reified in what they could take from Rome's remains and incorporate into new linguistic and poetic structures. Spolia collected from the ruins of antiquity were the building blocks for new nations. In Benjamin's words, "[t]he legacy of antiquity constitutes, item for item, the elements from which the new whole is mixed. Or rather: is constructed."¹⁶ Du Bellay's call for a militaristic march on the materials of Rome represents his treatment of the inorganic objects remaining there. These sacred ornaments offered their excavators the ability to carry away as matter the symbolic power of empire. In a pattern of *translatio imperii*, humanists transported "les sacrez thesors de ce temple Delphique" in their weathered form to adorn newly erected altars. For du Bellay, material *renovatio* is a metaphor for the edification and ornamentation of French language and literature. He proposes to deliver this collection of antiques to the leader of the French nation, Henry II, in the dedicatory poem of *Les Antiquitez de Rome* (1553), a Petrarchan sequence of thirty-two sonnets. "Au Roy," the liminal poem, offers the poems as a substitution for "ces ouvrages antiques."¹⁷ His offering is that, if accepted, the king will be able

¹⁵ Leonard Barkan, *Unearthing the Past: Archaeology and Aesthetics in the Making of Renaissance Culture* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1999), 4.

¹⁶ Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Genre*, 178-9.

¹⁷ "These ancient works." Joachim du Bellay, *Le Premier Livre des Antiquitez de Rome contenant une generale description de sa grandeur, et comme une deploration de sa ruine plus un Songe ou Vision sur le mesme subject*, in Joachim du Bellay, pp. 245-95, ed. and trans. by Richard Helgerson, line 1.

to boast “d’avoïr hors du tumbeau/Tiré des vieux Romains les poudreuses reliques,”¹⁸ toward the ultimate goal of a figurative foundation for French culture: “Que vous puissent les Dieux un jour donner tant d’heur,/De rebastir en France une telle grandeur.”¹⁹ Du Bellay’s choice of verbs here—“rebastir,” rather than “batir”—signals that the *naissance* is a *re-nnaissance*, just as the *bâtiment* is always already a *re-bâtiment*.

Distinct from the *translatio* of spolia away from Rome’s grave is the humanist attitude towards the city’s decaying flesh, rotting after her proud fall; for many sixteenth-century humanists, the fate of such matter did not invite a literal re-incorporation or the material exchange that Barkan suggests. If Du Bellay’s presentation of inorganic, historical spolia is didactic, violently urging the French to incorporate Roman ornamentation, his discussion of Rome’s organic bodily matter is elegiac, lamenting her soul’s departure and the remains of her fleshly corpse. The Derridean “thing” at which du Bellay stands, composing his Petrarchan lament, is emphatically *not* Rome herself, haunting spirit having departed:

Rome n’est plus, et si l’architecture
Quelque ombre encore de Rome fait revoir,
C’est comme un corps par magique sçavoir
Tiré de nuict hors de sa sepulture.

Le corps de Rome en cendre est devallé,
Et son esprit rejoindre s’est allé
Au grand esprit de ceste masse ronde. (*Les Antiquitez* 5.5-11)

Rome is no more: but if the shade of *Rome*
May of the bodie yield a seeming sight,
It’s like a corse drawne forth out of the tombe
By Magicke skill out of eternall night:

The corpes of *Rome* in ashes is entombed,
And her great spirite rejoyned to the spirite
Of this great masse, is in the same enwombéd.²⁰

¹⁸ “of having pulled from the tomb the dusty remains of the ancient Romans” (7-8).

¹⁹ “May the gods one day give you the good fortune to rebuild in France such greatness” (9-10).

²⁰ Edmund Spenser, *The Ruines of Rome: by Bellay*, in *The Yale Edition of the Shorter Poems of Edmund Spenser*, ed. William Oram et al., pp. 381-405 (New Haven: Yale UP, 1989), lines 61-7.

In what might be described as a hauntology of Rome, du Bellay indicates that the “thing” of Rome—her material corpse—is divorced from the departed spirit, rendering her no longer herself: “Rome n’est plus.” Even the humanist exhumation of her corpse is not a resurrection, for it does not inherently (re-)join the departed spirit to bodily flesh. In Derrida’s words, the likeness of the exhumed thing to the dead king should not persuade us that the King is present. After death, “King is a thing, Thing is the King, precisely where he separates from this body which, however, does not leave him... ‘The body is with the King, but the King is not with the body. The King, is a thing’.”²¹ Rome’s body, like the King’s body, has not left its geographical burial site, but the only thing that could make the entire entity of Rome present again would be a necromancing, a summoning of “un corps par magique... tiré de nuit hors de sa sepulture.”

Such a necromancing is, of course, impossible, and in this realization du Bellay pivots from lamentation on the thing’s lack to consolation in the soul’s departure for another sphere. Rome’s body, her “corps,” is returned (“devallé”) to dust (“cendre”), while her spirit is departed (“s’est allé”). The spirit’s destination is characterized by the Pléiade poets’ beloved poetic antithesis: it is gone to rejoin the “grand esprit de ceste masse ronde.” Embedded in the spirit’s return to an off-stage spirit is the paradox of that spirit’s belonging to an inherently material “masse.” Spenser, in his translation of *Les Antiquitez* entitled *Ruines of Rome: by Bellay*, varies du Bellay’s French slightly, inserting into the final line of the passage a clause absent in the original: “is in the same enwombed.” The pressure of rhyme may not be enough to explain the connotation of this additional phrase: where du Bellay ends with the soul’s parting to rejoin some other “thing,” for Spenser, the spirit is not only rejoined to the great spirit of the universe but is

²¹ Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, trans. Peggy Kamuf, with an introduction by Bernd Magnus and Stephen Cullenberg (New York, London: Routledge, 2006), 8.

also embedded in the womb of the great mass. The spirit's departure, then, is not the end of a salvation equation. It is the beginning of a decidedly material rebirth.

The Manichean divide between earthly mutability and heavenly permanence, one which the Catholic du Bellay so readily accepts, is superseded in Spenser's work in favor of matter's potential for *translatio* into new forms. The structure of his *Faerie Queene* is often built in imitation of the material properties of the things which his narrative contains: historical spolia, heaps of ashes and rubble, and decaying bodies. Gordon Teskey speaks of the paradox of poetry's materiality in the Spenserian world and corpus:

Poetry confers a visionary firmness, an identity, on the fleeting world of experience. But if we try to use poetry to pursue the truth too far, as Mutabilitie does, then Nature's words to Mutabilitie may be applied to the project of *The Faerie Queene* as well: "thy decay thou seekst by thy desire." But, as we have seen, this is only partly true or true only in a limited sense; and the limitation applies to poetry as well. For what could be more natural to the materials of poetry—diction, meter, rhythm, rhyme, enjambment, syntactical complexity, decaying and reforming images, stanzas, structures, stories, visions—than for these diacritical things always to be longing to turn into one thing that is always better than them selves, such as the truth, even as they continually return to themselves?²²

Spenser is indeed interested in the material qualities of poetic structure and especially in how poetry mimics earthly matter, but perhaps not, or not only, for the sake of allowing verse to turn towards or into Platonic truth. Rather, his interest, born in response to the humanist poetry elegizing Rome's death, is in matter's desire not to turn into "one thing" but in its potential to travel towards and turn into endless things. This involves a material exchange amongst narrative things as well as between narrative thing and the poetic matter that surrounds it. Through *translatio materiae*, represented objects and literary device share in the same "great masse" (*Ruines of Rome* 67) of the epic. Thus, the fleeting nature of matter in *The Faerie Queene* is solved not with the *ubi sunt* topos, but rather by matter's translations into a mutable matrix of

²² Gordon Teskey, *Spenserian Moments* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 2019), 414.

poetic forms, units, and structures. Represented matter and poetic matter exist in a shared, closed circuit whose constant *translatio* perpetuates the “endlesse worke” (*FQ* IV.xii.1).

A template for *translatio materiae* in Spenserian narrative emerges when we again consider the rhyme between “tomb” and “womb” that Spenser adds to du Bellay’s verse:

The corpes of *Rome* in ashes is entombed,
And her great spirite rejoyned to the spirite
Of this great masse, is in the same enwombed. (*Ruines of Rome*, 65-7)

Rome’s corpse, though bereft of soul in du Bellay’s portrayal, harnesses in Spenser’s English a potential for material abiogenesis. In linking “womb” to “tomb” through rhyme, Spenser rewrites the earthly demise and spiritual transcendence that du Bellay ascribes to Rome. Instead, Rome’s spirit, which belongs to some universal spirit (“the spirit/Of this great masse”) prepares for rebirth in the ashes. *The Faerie Queene*’s first heroic episode recycles the material potential that Spenser ascribed to Rome’s decaying corpse. Redcrosse Knight and his companion Una have just begun their quest when they encounter a beast whose matter will haunt them—and the poem—for cantos to come. Error’s nature, her implosion, and the indefatigable persistence of her matter, are, I propose, analogous to Spenser’s contemporaneous exploration of Rome’s material demise in the *Complaints*. The Error episodes and subsequent episodes I will discuss do not portray antique ruins but rather recapitulate the *translatio materiae* that occurs at a site of material destruction or decay. Error’s processes of life, reproduction, and death share material properties with Rome’s proud fall, her spirit’s resurrection in the Renaissance, and the problem of her body’s persistent materiality. Spenser takes up the body’s scattered remains to show its potential for material reproduction, propagation, and perpetuation in his poem’s narrative.

Half woman and half serpent (I.i.14), Error lies in her den with thousands of young “of sundrie shapes” “[s]ucking vpon her poisonous duggs” (I.i.14). As soon as the wandering

Redcrosse errs into her nest, which is “no place for liuing men” (I.i.13), the material flow of her reproduction reverses. The bright reflection of Redcrosse’s armor drives Error’s young towards re-entry into her body: “Soone as that vncouth light vpon them shone,/Into her mouth they crept, and suddain all were gone” (I.i.15). Error’s nurturing suddenly becomes materially cyclic: the young, fed by her milk, disappear again into her body at the sight of the light. Though the contrast between the Knight of Holinesse’s brightness and Error’s brood’s preference for darkness explains their retreat, the material consequence undercuts the simplicity of the light/dark binary in Christian allegory. Redcrosse’s errant entry actually *causes* Error’s young to creep back into her mouth as if for consumption and digestion. His light launches her material cycling rather than preventing or halting it. Inherent in the materiality of this moment, then, is an irony that erodes the allegorical structure. Even at the inception of the epic, Error’s physicality gestures to what Teskey calls the “metaphysical decay” of allegorical structure.²³ Indeed, the diction of the lines subtly suggests this decay in describing Redcrosse’s light as “vncouth”: uncivilized or rude.

We find a parallel for Error’s material cycling in an image in the *Ruines of Time*. The speaker in this poem, the female *genius*, Verlame, of the ancient Roman city of British Verulamium, laments her city’s material demise:

O vaine worlds glorie, and unstedfast state
Of all that lives, on face of sinfull earth,
Which from their first untill their utmost date
Tast no one hower of happiness or merth,
But like as at the ingate of their berth,
They crying creep out of their mothers woomb,
So wailing backe go to their wofull toomb.²⁴

²³ Gordon Teskey, *Allegory and Violence* (Ithaca, London: Cornell UP, 1996), 58.

²⁴ Edmund Spenser, *The Ruines of Time*, in *The Yale Edition of the Shorter Poems of Edmund Spenser*, ed. William Oram et al., pp. 230-61 (New Haven: Yale UP, 1989), lines 43-9.

All life on “sinfull earth,” she claims, has but a sip, only a “tast,” of happiness before entering back into the body of mother earth whence it came. Death for all creatures is “like as at the ingate [entrance] of their berth,” Verlame suggests. The dying and decaying crawl back to their “wofull tomb,” emitting the same cries as when they “creep out of their mothers woomb.” “Creep[ing]” and going “backe” suggests a vitality and motion for these beings, a cycle driven by their very material displacement from the “woomb” of mother earth.

Error’s kinetic response to Redcrosse’s entry further foregrounds her cyclical re-generativity. Startled by his unexpected entrance into her lair, she rises up,

And rushed forth, hurling her hideous taile
About her cursed head, whose folds displaid
Were stretched now forth at length without entraile (*FQ* I.i.16)

The physical arrangement of Error’s tail announces the nature of her material being and recalls the (re-)cycling of her offspring. Error’s matter runs around and through her in coils. When she rises, the folds that were wrapped with “entraile”—wrapping or coiling—unroll and stretch out. Indeed, “entraile” puns on “entrails,” evoking the way her consumption and reproduction similarly take a coiling pathway, wrapping from her womb back to the opening of her mouth. Even as she unwraps, reflexivity is transferred from her bodily arrangement to her movement: she sees Redcrosse in the opening of the den, and “sought backe to turne againe” (I.i.16) to retreat into her original position. Error’s coiled arrangement and primary position in the poem evoke Dante’s figure of Minos, the humanoid King of Crete guarding the gates of Hell. He passes judgement on all the souls that enter, indicating the level to which they are destined by the number of coils of his tail that he wraps around himself: for each sinner that comes before him,

“he girds himself with his tail as many times/as the levels he wills the soul to be sent down.”²⁵

Error as the personification of sin is, of course, allegorically linked to the judger of sins. Yet her position as a “gatekeeper” to the poem is also similar to Minos’ position at the infernal gates. At the “ingate” to the “berth” of the epic, Error’s body—and matter’s cycling through it—is presented as a governing principle for the poem. This principle, *translatio materiae*, is derived from and synonymous with the mechanics of the mass of matter decayed and enlivened again at the site of ruins. Error’s bodily processes are an entrée to the place—Faeryland—and by extension serve as introduction to the workings of the poem.

Redcrosse’s attack, though it aims to keep Error “[f]rom turning backe” (I.i.17), actually envelops him in the material endlessness of her reproductive cycles. In the thick of his fight with her, he is wrapped up in her monstrous tail. The narrator remarks, in an aside characteristically placed in the final alexandrine line, “God helpe the man so wrapt in *Errours* endlesse traine” (I.i.18). The correlating Spenserian phrase that Error’s “endlesse traine” evokes, of course, is the poet’s self-conscious remark on the “endlesse worke” (IV.xii.1) of his composition. Error’s endless, wrapping tail predicts this epithet for the poem while also performing the material recycling that will produce more verse. When Redcrosse finally grabs hold of and chokes Error’s neck, she spews out lumps of flesh, slimy reptiles, and written matter:

Therewith she spewd out of her filthie maw
A floud of poyson horrible and blacke,
Full of great lumps of flesh and gobbets raw,
Which stunck so vildly, that it forst him slacke,
His grasping hold, and from her turne him backe:
Her vomit full of books and papers was,
With loathly frogs and toades, which eyes did lacke,
And creeping sought way in the weedy gras:

²⁵ Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, vol. 1 of *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*, ed. and trans. Robert Durling, intro. and notes by Ronald Martinez and Robert Durling (New York, Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996), 5.11-12.

Her filthie parbreake²⁶ all the place defiled has. (I.i.20)

Error is like the poem: as structural container, she consumes and contains all variety of things, and she produces matter of the same varieties. Nothing need be created or destroyed, for all matter is preserved and endlessly digested and re-materialized in her body. Here is all the matter of the Faeryland, laid out in front of us. The helpless man “wrapt” in her train, though he tries to choke her, incidentally reverses her churning and turning of matter into offspring. At this narrative moment the Nile simile appears, as if to suggest that the masses of flesh, frog, and text that spew from Error’s mouth into the poem might produce their own manner of abiogenetically derived beasts to bother the hero (and the poet).

This reproduction compounds when Error, sensing the knight’s waning powers in the face of her expulsion, also pours out her “fruitfull cursed spawne of serpents small” (I.i.22). In the second epic simile of the poem, separated from the first by only one stanza, the swarm of spawn that ensues is likened to a “cloud of cumbrous gnattes” who “doe molest” a “gentle Shepheard” (I.i.23). Of course, the pastoral vehicle of this simile is distinct from the mytho-geographic one preceding it. Yet noteworthy is the manner in which the swarm of gnats has, in a sense, erupted from the “fertile slime” of the banks of the Nile to disturb a locale to which they do not belong: the pastoral *locus amoenus*. The first simile has produced the matter for the second. Beasts born of the Nile are like a swarm of gnats, and Redcrosse is like a shepherd, “that from their noyance he no where can rest” (I.i.23); the second simile proliferates from the rich matter of the first. Spenser thus performs at the level of poetic structure what he describes of the Nile: when the poem is flooded, poetic matter propagates. The pastoral simile is a product of this material propagation.

²⁶ “parbreake: vomit.” Hamilton, ed., *Faerie Queene*, note to I.i.20.9.

When Redcrosse finally puts an end to Error's life, the result is that an endless mass of fertile slime erupts from her body. Unfortunately, this is a mass that Redcrosse misunderstands; body having been destroyed, Error's matter floods the poem like the Nile flooding its banks. Redcrosse cuts off her head, and "a streame of cole black blood forth gushed from her corse" (I.i.24), to which her "scattered brood" (I.i.25) immediately flock:

Weening their wonted entrance to haue found
At her wide mouth, but being there withstood
They flocked all about her bleeding wound,
And sucked vp their dying mothers bloud,
Making her death their life, and eke her hurt their good. (I.i.26)

Error's bloody mass is entombed, and in the same enwombed. Her young seek entrance, or "ingate," into what was moments ago their womb, i.e., the "wide mouth" from which they poured. Finding no passage there, they instead swarm around her "bleeding wound" (the aural resonance between wound and womb is no accident here), discovering a second womb from which they can suck life. The alexandrine in this stanza articulates the *translatio materiae* taking place: death becomes life, hurt becomes good, *by means of* the transformation and carrying forth of the material remains. Error is ruined, but her remnants are quickly re-incorporated in exemplification of the early modern "grotesque realism" that permits the grotesque, pregnant body, "unfinished, [to] outgrow[] itself, transgress[] its own limits" through gestation.²⁷

Yet Error's material "resurrection" in her children is doubly ruined when her offspring,

Having all satisfide their bloody thirst
Their bellies swolne he saw with fulnesse burst,
And bowels gushing forth (I.i.26)

What seemed about to be a re-incarnation of life in her children becomes their death. Error's spawn overflow, "bellies swolne," and with "fulnesse burste," and the contents of their bodies

²⁷ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984), 18; 26.

gush out onto the ground. In a reiteration of the Nile simile, the earth is saturated with a fertile slime that holds the potential to propagate “[s]uch ugly monstrous shapes [that] elsewhere may no man reed” (I.i.21). This is where the poem begins. Where the poetics of du Bellay’s hoped-for reincarnation of Rome in new European nations, namely France, might have ended with Error passing her animating lifeblood to her living offspring, Spenser implodes the living relics who feed from her great mass. The matter pours into the ground of Faeryland, endowing the place not only with the power to replicate Error through reuse of her matter, but with the growth of something else entirely. Spenser’s *translatio materiae* is not simply the inheritance of spolia or the movement of a spirit from its inhabitation in one body to another. Rather, it is an unstoppable overflowing of matter and its power to endlessly transform, disguise, and bear new life. This will be the poetics of *translatio materiae* in the epic to come.

The operations of the Error episode demonstrate how Spenser drives forward his poetic production through decaying and discarded matter. Her narrative death is colored by her substance’s distribution into her offspring and subsequent dispersal into Faeryland’s soil. The fight between Error and Redcrosse, which the latter perceives to have been conclusive, actually catalyzes the reproduction of errors in Book One. The danger of a material proliferation after the purported ending to an allegorically evil beast is reiterated in the conclusion to Book One, where Redcrosse repeats his misreading of matter’s inevitable *translatio*. In the climactic episode of Book One, the knight slays the dragon. But though the monster falls as proudly and decisively as Rome—“So downe he fell,” and then again two lines later, “So downe he fell” (I.xi.54)—its matter remains as an allegorical conundrum. Joe Moshenska observes that the body “lingers as a material mass subjected to new practices and interpretations.”²⁸ The monster is not obliterated,

²⁸ Joe Moshenska, *Iconoclasm as Child’s Play* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2019), 194.

but leaves, in Spenser's words, "so huge and horrible a masse" (I.xi.55), that his characters and even his readers are compelled to confront the potential for *translatio materiae* in its bodily matter. Townspeople gather around the rotten beast. Some repeat Redcrosse's reading of Error's death, wonder if the mass of the dragon might be reanimated in its children: "in his wombe might lurke some hidden nest/Of many Dragonettes, his fruitfull seede" (I.xii.10). Others still "measure him nigh stand,/To proue how many acres he did spred of land" (I.xii.11). Though the townspeople literally gauge the dragon's size in acres, the poet's choice of phrase in "spred of land" alludes to the mythological dangers latent in sowing dragon's teeth. As Jason planted, so Redcrosse spilled Error's fertile mass across the planes of Faeryland; in both cases, figures threaten to spring up from the disseminated dragon remains.

If the remains of Redcrosse's conquests allow the poet, through mimicry of humanist imagery, to wrestle with problems of incomplete material erasure and the *translatio* of remains into other narrative figures, then the appearance of Arthur, his contest with a giant, and his rescue of Redcrosse allow Spenser to experiment with the *translatio* of decaying narrative matter into poetic device. Arthur, who belongs to British mythology outside of the poem, is translated into Spenser's poetic construction like spolia. He steps into the poem in one of the many moments of the Redcrosse Knight's absence, doubling for the hero while filling the void left by the hero's failure in his role. Where Redcrosse's victories leave dangerous piles of matter subject to new life and interpretation, the mythical Arthur obliterates his enemies. He is proof of concept in a negative sense, highlighting the principle of *translatio materiae* by exceptionally managing to erase all traces of his enemy's matter and convert it into naturalistic simile. Arthur then performs a positive *translatio* by rescuing Redcrosse from his captured state, where the latter is materially languishing. Arthur is thus imbricated in multiple acts of *translatio*: himself a

monument of British history, the diegetic matter he obliterates is translated into poetic device, and he subsequently salvages Redcrosse by actually *restoring* his body and preventing the decay of his earthly flesh. The Arthur episode of Book One borrows humanist patterns of ruination but ultimately resists salvation in spiritual transcendence, instead taking recourse in the creation or resurrection of poetic forms and bodies through the *translatio* of ruined matter.

Arthur's arrival in the poem is catalyzed by the fall of the Redcrosse Knight, but it is the *translatio* of Redcrosse's armor as relic that announces Arthur's entry. Redcrosse has been captured by Orgoglio the giant, stripped of his knightly vestments, and conveyed off the scene. The Dwarf, his page, comes to the scene of his departure as agent of *translatio materiae* to pick up the matter of his fall and carry it forward as a message. He "saw his maisters fall," and "when all was past" (I.vii.19), comes forward to examine the remains. The succession of the fall, time past, and an examination of the remaining relics quickly syncopates the formula for the creation of history and myth through the excavation of ruins. In an instant, Redcrosse is afforded the status of absent legend, reduced to material relics. Redcrosse's "forlorne weed" (I.vii.19) retrieved by the Dwarf refers as much to the layer of armor he bore ("weed" being an archaic synonym for armor or mail²⁹) as to what that armor might become if left to rust. Weeds will take over the relics, rendering the armor of the fallen knight a monument. The Dwarf carries the knight's "weed" from the scene, the shield and sword constituting new "ruefull monuments of heauinesse" (I.vii.19). The peril and grief ("heauinesse") that these "moniments" convey is evident in their wearer's absence. Yet also emphasized is their *translatio* from this place to another, a movement underscored by their heavy weight. The Dwarf is messenger and translator, and his message contains both words and historicized matter.

²⁹ "weed, *n.2*," *s.v.* *OED* II.4.

The formulation for bearing off the discarded armor of a fallen knight reworks the borrowing of armor that actually introduces Redcrosse as a figure carrying forward the material indentations of history in his armor. It is *translatio materiae*, the translation of borrowed matter, that announces Redcrosse's arrival in the very first stanza of the poem:

A Gentle Knight was pricking on the plaine,
Ycladd in mightie armes and siluer shielde,
Wherein old dints of deepe woundes did remaine,
The cruell markes of many a bloody fielde;
Yet armes till that time did he neuer wield. (I.i.1)

Redcrosse rides into the poem in a mode of *translatio materiae*, carrying relics that bear the marks of wars in which he did not participate. This biographical point is deferred until the last line of his introduction so that we are almost persuaded into believing *his* activities caused the patina. In fact, these "deepe woundes" of war are not his own. Old "dints," a Spenserian neologism, combines the strike ("dint") with the material mark it leaves on the metal ("dent"),³⁰ reinforcing that Redcrosse is party to the latter without having experienced the former. Nonetheless, the poem's vocabulary carries both, offering an ontology for the shield that speaks to its history of use and its new ownership by a green knight. When the Dwarf presents Una with the armor, which she calls, "these reliques sad" (I.vii.24), there is an historical irony to her sadness: the Redcrosse Knight's armor was always already a relic. Nothing has changed about his armor; it has simply come into its own being by becoming an historical relic.

Arthur's armor, however, and the aura he carries with it stand apart from the relic-status of Redcrosse's armor. His armor belongs to a category of immutable material things, an emphatically paradoxical category in Faeryland. Arthur's "warlike shield" is made not of

³⁰ Hamilton, ed., *The Faerie Queene*, note to I.i.i.3.

“steele” nor of “bras,” for “such earthly metals soone consumed beene” (I.vii.33). Rather, the shield is hewn from a singularly solid substance, one impenetrable to time:

But all of Diamond perfect pure and cleene
It framed was, one massy entire mould,
Hewen out of Adamant rocke with engines keene,
That point of speare it neuer percen could,
Ne dint of direfull sword diuide the substance would. (I.vii.33)

On a theological level, of course, the shield is adamantine because it represents indefatigable faith, impervious to human error. In the relative materiality of the poem, Arthur’s armor has a completely atemporal nature: his shield, though it may have been struck by “speare” or “sword,” was “neuer percen.” Where Redcrosse’s armor is always already an historical relic, Arthur’s armor is prehistoric and post-historical: it will never bear the dints of time. The atemporal nature of Arthur’s armor is essential both to its material constitution and to the destruction it enacts. Where Redcrosse’s successful encounter with the dragon nonetheless leaves a “masse” (I.vii.55) that the reader is forced to fold it back into the allegory,³¹ Arthur’s encounter with allegorical evil leaves no material trace. He has the power to translate his enemies into nothingness: “Men into stones therewith he could transmew,/ And stones to dust, and dust to nought at all” (I.vii.35). The ladder of Arthur’s *translatios*, from body, to stone, to dust, to “nought,” intensifies the material erasure the speaker observes at the site of Verulamium in *The Ruines of Time*, where steeples and towers become “but a heap of lyme and sand” (129). Destruction by Arthur, as it echoes and furthers the destruction described at Verulamium, is more profound than ruin over time that leaves weathered monuments. There is no “heauie record” (*FQ* I.vii.48) of Arthur’s victories. His allegorical nature is purer, perhaps, than Redcrosse’s. Besides representing a version of the Christian knight whose attacks against evil have conclusive and totalizing

³¹ Moshenska, *Iconoclasm as Child’s Play*, 194.

consequences, he also stems the flow of fertile matter from Error's den, a flow which has haunted Redcrosse through the book. Indeed, as Arthur announces to Una, "Despair breeds not... where faith is staid" (I.vii.41).

Arthur's erasure of the "hideous Geaunt horrible and hye" (I.vii.8) foils Redcrosse's failures to materially obliterate evil. His defeat of the giant does not simply lay the latter low, but actually restores to the Giant's body a natural etiology whereby he again becomes one with the landscape. This destruction is distinct from one wherein the monster's material remains might invite allegorical reanimation. It also concludes a pattern whereby monstrous beast is born of the poem's fertile slime, as the giant himself was: "The greatest Earth his vncouth mother was," who "Brought forth this monstrous masse of earthly slyme,/Puft vp with emptie wynd, and fild with sinfull cryme" (I.vii.9). With Arthur's intervention, Orgoglio's bodily matter is composted back into the poem via natural simile. Though his body is not explicitly discarded in the narrative, the similes obliterate his remains by recycling the matter of the scene of his death into descriptions of natural processes. As the first blows are struck against the giant, the matter of his body collides with the matter of the earth. Arthur severs the giant's left arm,

which, like a block
Did fall to ground, depriu'd of natiue might;
Large streames of blood out of the truncked stock
Forth gushed, like fresh water streame from riuen rocke. (I.viii.10)

The material dissolution of the giant's body begins immediately in the simile. Spenser's heroic agent leaves no ambiguous matter to decay in the narrative of the poem: instead, the poet de-animates the arm immediately by likening it to a "block," and then the work of poetic re-purposing begins. The de-limbed body becomes a "truncked stock," a limbless tree, while the blood from his wound pours out of the poem "like fresh water" from a natural, rocky landscape.

The giant, as soon as he is “depriu’d of natiue might,” is actually re-incorporated into the material landscape. His matter becomes “native” to Faeryland once again.

The dismembering of the giant and the composting similes that ensue continue so that, by the time he topples completely, none of his matter remains. As Arthur deals the fatal stroke to the Giant’s right leg, like “the strongest Oake” (I.viii.18), “downe he tumbled; as an aged tree” (I.viii.22). Not only does the creature’s limb collide with the dirt, but its corollary in the simile, the ancient oak, begins its erosion at the moment of its fall: as it tumbles from its position “on the top of rocky clift,” it hits craggy rocks on its way down (I.viii.22) and further reduces into its elemental nature. Erosion interior to the giant oak as well as exteriorly inflicted evokes Spenser’s *Ruines of Rome* translation of one of du Bellay’s images. An ancient oak marries a natural feature—the tree—with decorations of ancient relics to show that, though the latter may last long enough for a poet of a new nation to uncover them, the former will meet its natural, material end in due time. The *Complaints*’ Lucanian “great Oke” is “clad with reliques of some Trophées olde” (379-80), trophies perhaps akin to Redcrosse’s abandoned, dinted “moniments.” Yet these are not enough to protect her from an innate decay: “her trunk all rotten and unsound/ Onely supports herselfe for meate of wormes” (385-6). Spenser borrows du Bellay’s assertion that lasting, historical monuments “record” (390) the decaying bodies they once adorned.

When Arthur and Una finally discover and free Redcrosse from Duessa’s dungeon, he has been weakened, decayed, and materially lessened:

His sad dull eies deepe sunck in hollow pits,
Could not endure th’vnwonted sunne to view;
His bare thin cheekes for want of better bits,
And empty sides deceiued of their dew,
Could make a stony hart his hap to rew;
His rawbone armes, whose mighty brawned bows
Were wont to riue steele plates, and helmets hew,
Were cleane consum’d, and all his vitall powres
Decayd, and al his flesh shronk vp like withered flowres. (FQ I.viii.41)

The hero's "sad dull eies deepe sunck in hollow pits" uncannily mirror the deep, hollow pit they find him in. Redcrosse is starved, his cheeks, "thin...for want of better bits"; the pathetic fallacy of the landscape consumes his body. Furthermore, the hero's history of denting and dinting now inflects his body: armes "wont to riue steele plates, and helmets hew" are "cleane consum'd, and all his vitall powres/ Decayd." Like the great Oak of the *Ruines of Rome*, Redcrosse's decaying flesh and the lasting "moniments" of armor alongside him are together a "record" of the permanence of history and the mutability of matter. Redcrosse is in danger of actually becoming an archaeological site only legible in the record. Armor preserved, he is nonetheless rotting from the inside. The hero, subject to *translatio materiae*, has almost become one of those decaying, antique corpses consumed by the nature of the poem. Yet the Dwarf's discovery of the historical record and Arthur's subsequent, material-obliterating intervention are enough to stave off the translation of the protagonist's body into some other narrative "thing." They prevent his decaying flesh from joining the mass of matter cycling through the epic.

Arthur has thus rescued Redcrosse not only from allegorical evil, but also from being consumed by the *translatio materiae* inherent to the *Faerie Queene's* poetics. His action demonstrates that no matter—human, monstrous, or otherwise—is assured in Faeryland. Ultimately, Arthur as proof of *translatio materiae* is underscored in the materially pronounced ending he delivers to Orgoglio, wherein the giant's severed members are synthesized not into the landscape of Faeryland, but actually into naturalistic similes. The matter of his body does not explode into slime and soak into the ground as Error's has done, nor does his ultimate end leave a trophy to record his presence. Arthur affords little of the giant for us to remember him by:

That huge great body, which the Gyaunt bore,
Was vanish quite, and of that monstrous mas
Was nothing left, but like an emptie blader was. (I.viii.24)

Complete elemental erasure of the monstrous beast is critical because it leaves no fertile matrix of composing poetic matter in which sinful spawn might grow. Spenser puns on “vanisht” and “vanquisht” here: the giant is not only conquered, but actually disappeared.

Of the giant, there “was nothing left” of slime or fertile mud. The “nothing” that remains is likened to a type for nothing, i.e., a negative space, underscoring the meta-destruction that Arthur enacts. A simile with “an emptie blader” as vehicle is more nothing than nothing, for it self-consciously presents its own material emptiness. Like Lear’s “O without a figure,”³² a round zero with no other numerical or material mass to give it weight, the empty bladder reminds us that, in Spenser’s narrative, *ex nihilo, nihil fit*.³³ The empty bladder stands opposed to the gaping holes of Error’s mouth and womb, which formed a circuit of sinful reproduction likened to the fertile soil of the swelling Nile even in the obliteration of her monstrous form. Arthur’s obliteration of a monster likened to “an emptie blader” ensures that Orgoglio has been reduced well beyond Error’s incomplete material end. Even the nothingness of his end has already been converted into a simile rather than laid out in literal terms of the narrative. Represented matter becomes a poetic proliferation: in worldly matter’s disappearance, the poem’s matter continues. The bladder, then, like the Nile before it, is also an emblem of the poem, for it demonstrates that narrative matter might be “obliterated” such that a scene emptied of narrative stuff is one constituted by that stuff’s translation into poetic structure.

This, then, is the ultimate use of *translatio materiae* by the poet, as well as by Arthur, the Dwarf, Error, and even the Redcrosse Knight as agents of the principle. Whether historicized

³² William Shakespeare, *King Lear: Combined Text*, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, 3rd ed., ed. Stephen Greenblatt et al., pp. 2494-2570 (New York, London: Norton, 2016), 1.4.160.

³³ “Nothing will come of nothing.” See: note to *King Lear*, 1.1.88 for this phrase as an Aristotelian maxim.

relics are carried forward, rotting bodies are salvaged from their graves, or monstrous masses are felled and converted to an organic poetic matter from which naturalistic similes might grow, *translatio materiae* keeps the epic rushing forward like a river, to and from which tributary sources of matter variously converge and diverge. In *The Faerie Queene*, the Nile never ceases her cyclical flooding; the birth of generative matter is simply re-presented in the multitude of material generations and translations that the poem contains. The blueprint for *translatio materiae* was not Spenser's own—it is genetically linked to the other *translatios* of the Renaissance humanist *renovatio* of antiquity. In Spenser's English works, these motifs proliferate into an “endlesse worke” (*FQ* IV.xii.1) whereby poetry's earthly matter enjoys a persistent vitality, not one in which spirit is transported into a heavenly realm, but in which represented matter is translated, transposed, and transformed into further narrative objects and eventually into poetic structure. Thus, from humanist conceptions of antique matter's ruin and decay, Spenser derives a poetic philosophy of matter's movement and change, one which resists the divide between body and soul, between narrative object and poetic device, and between impermanence and persistence.

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