

Reaping what was sown:
Spenser, Chaucer, and *The Plowman's Tale*

by

David Paul Clark

A Thesis Submitted to the
Graduate Faculty in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS

Department: English
Major: English (Literature)

Approved:

In Charge of Major Work

For the Major Department

For the Graduate College

Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

1995

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION	1
Spenser and the Plowman	1
The Renaissance Chaucer	6
Spenser Invoking Chaucer	14
CHAPTER TWO - WHAT THE PLOWMAN EVOKES	16
The Plowman Motif	16
The Plowman and the Renaissance Chaucer	22
Chaucer's Elizabethan Author-Function	31
CHAPTER THREE - SPENSER INVOKING THE PLOWMAN	36
The Renaissance Plowman	38
Spenser and the Plowman	41
Spenser and <i>The Plowman's Tale</i>	44
Conclusion - A Nationalist Spenser	51
NOTES	57
WORKS CITED	58
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	62

CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION

Spenser and the Plowman

...to pick up one "Chaucerian" half line...lifts a whole web, and reveals complex, half-visible transformation... (Miskimin 289).

In the four hundred years since Edmund Spenser first published his works, much has been made of the connections between Spenser's work and Geoffrey Chaucer's. Dozens of studies have done close readings of the obvious links, those places in Spenser's canon which most obviously show Chaucer's presence in Spenser's poetry: the references to "Dan Geffrey," "well of English undefyled." Only recently, however, have studies begun to recognize the real complexities of Chaucer's influence on Spenser.

Spenser, after all, did not write in an ivory tower, constructing poems from fragments of the works of others. His life and work were profoundly connected to the politics of the time; to some today, perhaps distastefully so: Anne Higgins claims that "[o]ne reason that Spenser is little read today is that we are uncomfortable with the nakedness of *The Faerie Queene's* imperialist ideology and ambitions" (34). In "Spenser Reading Chaucer: Another Look at the *Faerie Queene* Allusions," Higgins goes on to say that contemporary critics feel more comfortable with Chaucer because his "tolerance and skepticism are more to our taste" (34). And I think it is fair to say that most scholars today *do* see Chaucer as tolerant and skeptical, but Spenser's Chaucer was hardly less political than Spenser himself.

John Burrow's "Geoffrey Chaucer" entry in the *Spenser Encyclopedia* makes clear why this was so. Burrow notes that Chaucer's canon was volatile, to

say the least, during Spenser's lifetime. The Chaucer that Spenser most likely read, the 1561 John Stowe edition of *The Woorkes of Geffrey Chaucer*, contained 39 works that modern scholars no longer believe are Chaucerian, among which only "A balade of good counsaile" and "the Siege and destruccion, of the worthie Citee of Thebes" were credited to others (both were credited to "Jhon Lidgate"). The other 37 apocryphal works became associated with Chaucer's name between his lifetime and Spenser's, constructing a politicized Chaucer of the Renaissance that is very different from our contemporary understanding of Chaucer as a poet of "tolerance and skepticism" (Higgins 34).

Burrow's understanding that Spenser's Chaucer was different from ours greatly complicates contemporary study of the impact of Chaucer's work on Spenser's; Burrow notes the very different perspective this understanding of the Renaissance Chaucer's canon puts on studies of Chaucer/Spenser influence. For example, Spenser's description of Chaucer as a poet of "warlike numbers and Heroicke sound" (*FQ* IV.ii.32), perhaps surprising to modern readers, can be explained as the influence of Spenser's readings of the Renaissance Chaucer, whereas before scholars often assumed he had simply misread Chaucer. But Burrow denies that Chaucer's canon had an effect on Spenser's pastoral poetry: "Since Chaucer did not cultivate pastoral, he had little to contribute to Spenser's shepherds' world - only the delightful cameo of the 'lytel herdegromes' (*House of Fame* 1224-6), which Spenser thriftily used twice (*SC*, *Feb* 35-41, *FQ* VI.ix.5)" (145).

As John King points out, however, Chaucer's expanded Renaissance canon actually had a lot to contribute to Spenser's understanding of the "Protestant

pastoral satire” that was the foundation of much of Spenser’s work in *The Shepheardes Calender* (14). King notes that *The Shepheardes Calender* contains several allusions to *The Plowman’s Tale*, a Wycliffite poem that was inserted in Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* in the sixteenth century. There are quite a few echoes of the *Tale* in Spenser’s poem; as King points out, for instance,

Thomalin’s hostility to ostentatious Catholic vestments “ygyrt with belts of glitterand gold” (“July,” 1.177) accords with the Pelican’s attack on corrupt priests in the *Tale*:

That hye on horse willeth ryde
 In glitterand golde of grete aray,
 I-paynted and portred all in pryde.... (21)

This is one of but a number of near-direct quotations from *The Plowman’s Tale* in *The Shepheardes Calender*. And in addition to the quotations, King says, Spenser borrows from the *Tale* and the tradition of "plowman works" surrounding it his "language, characterization, and thought associated with the simple plowman who implicitly or explicitly represents Christian social ideals--poverty, hard work, piety, and humility" (26). In addition, King feels that the debate between the Wycliffite Pelican and the Catholic Griffon in *The Plowman's Tale* may well have informed Spenser's construction of his beast fables in the *Calender*.

But this link between *The Plowman’s Tale* and *The Shepheardes Calender* is nothing new; Edwin Greenlaw made the connection between the *Calender* and *The Plowman's Tale* in 1911. What is new and interesting in King's book is the connection he makes between *The Plowman's Tale* and Redcrosse, the hero of the first book of Spenser's *Faerie Queene*. Scholars have, of course, previously noted Chaucer's influence on Redcrosse. John Upton notes that in the first canto of Book Three, Britomart's description of Redcrosse's love

for Una is a near quotation from Chaucer's *Franklin's Tale*. And they are remarkably similar:

Ne may loue be compeld by maisterie;
 For soone as maisterie comes, sweet loue anone
 Taketh his nimble wings, and soon away is gone. (III.i.25)

Love wolle not be constreyn'd by maistry:
 When maistry cometh, the god of love anone
 Betith his winges, and farewell he is gone. (*FranT* 764-6)

But surprisingly, until King no one examined the fairly obvious; how the Renaissance Chaucer's *Plowman's Tale* affected Spenser's construction of his hero of holiness, St. George/Redcrosse. Redcrosse, after all, is a plowman, as is revealed to us and him by Contemplation near the end of Book One:

For well I wote, thou springst from ancient race
 Of *Saxon* kings, that haue with mightie hand
 And many bloudie battailes fought in place
 High reard their royall throne in *Britaine* land,
 And vanquisht them, vnable to withstand:
 From thence a Faerie thee vnweeting reft,
 There as thou slepst in tender swadling band,
 And her base Elfin Brood there for thee left.
 Such men do Chaungelings call, so chaungd by Faeries theft.

Thence she thee brought into this Faerie lond,
 And in an heaped furrow did thee hyde,
 Where thee a Ploughman all vnweeting fond.
 As he his toylesome teme that way did guyde,
 And brought thee vp in ploughmans state to byde,
 Whereof *Georgos* he thee gaue to name,
 Till prickt with courage, and thy forces pryde,
 To Faery court thou cam'st to seeke for fame,
 And proue thy puissaunt armes, as seemes thee best became. (I.x.65-6)¹

Redcrosse is the product of a truly English lineage, from Saxon kings, and he is a plowman, a "young man of rusticity," as Spenser refers to him in his

prefatory letter to Sir Walter Raleigh. It would have been very difficult for Spenser to find a classical source for such a character, a rustic English plowman. But in English literature, such sources were abundant, and surely, King notes, the "strident Protestantism" of *The Plowman's Tale* and other "plowman" works like *Pierce the Ploughman's Crede* "conditioned Spenser's incorporation of a humble English plowman into romantic epic" (220). It seems entirely probable, given that Spenser's work throughout his writing career was demonstrably affected by the Renaissance Chaucer, and particularly given that Spenser obviously was familiar with *The Plowman's Tale*, that Spenser's construction of Redcrosse was affected by the Renaissance Chaucer's apocryphal plowman.

John King's observation of the link between the English plowman in the Renaissance Chaucer's *Plowman's Tale* and the English plowman in Spenser's *Faerie Queene* Book One points to a larger, little examined issue. The Renaissance Chaucer--a poet of love, a poet of "warlike numbers and Heroicke sound" (IV.ii.32), a radical religious reformer, a poet very different from our own Chaucer--had a dramatic effect on Renaissance writers that has been underrecognized *because* the Renaissance Chaucer was so different from our own. Many of the influences and allusions in Renaissance works that have been seen by scholars as classical (or even confusing) may well have been, to Elizabethans, Chaucerian.

But of course exploring all of these influences would be far beyond the scope possible in this study. In focusing in this thesis on the link between the two plowmen, I will show the way a single, powerful aspect of the Renaissance Chaucer transformed the first book of one of the most canonical poems in English

literature, the *Faerie Queene*. Demonstrating how *The Plowman's Tale* transformed Spenser's work in Book One is important for us because an understanding of the *Tale's* impact makes us re-examine our views of Edmund Spenser himself, showing him to be a poet concerned with the cultural construction of the English nation.

The Renaissance Chaucer

The obvious question with which to begin is: Why? Why would Spenser choose to integrate a plowman into the first book of what was to be his crowning poetic achievement? And why would he have based that incorporation upon a native English source like *The Plowman's Tale*? His contemporaries, after all, were far more interested in working with classical texts, which held fewer poetic and political risks than native sources. Gabriel Harvey's famous comment that Spenser had let "Hobgoblin run away with the garland from Apollo" (Spenser *Poetical* 10.472) was meant to chide Spenser for letting *The Faerie Queene* stray too far from the classics. Why would Spenser risk the disapproval of his colleagues, and perhaps the court, by basing his poetry on native sources?

A possible explanation is offered by Richard Helgerson in his *Forms of Nationhood: The Elizabethan Writing of England*. While not entirely about Spenser, Helgerson's book is nonetheless one of the more influential recent books about Spenser and politics. Helgerson posits that the immense changes brought by the change of the church from papal to monarchical control and by the establishment of the English empire (by parliamentary decree in the 1530s) caused immense anxiety among England's cultural elite over the construction of the

cultural identity of their nation. If England was an empire, they wondered, where were its great cultural trappings?

The result of this cultural anxiety was that many in the Elizabethan cultural elite (including Spenser, naturally) embarked on an exploration (and thereby creation) of the English national identity. Because so much of what was truly English was not of the Tudors, but of the Saxons and others, the literature that these newly “nationalist” writers created was often not simply a pure reflection of those who happened to control the state, the ruling class. Poets concerned themselves instead with what was historically English, the past and the common people.

For a poet attempting to create a new, nationalist form of poetry, the most obvious sources would have been what Helgerson refers to as “Gothic” sources, historical English poets who wrote in the vernacular. The most obvious of these might well have been Geoffrey Chaucer, the truly English poet whose ancient wisdom was compared to Virgil's by Elizabethan scholars. John Foxe reports in his *Acts and Monuments* that a "Master Brickham" had the following etched on Chaucer's tombstone in 1556:

Qui fuit Anglorum Vates ter maximus olim,
Galfridus Chauce conditur hoc tumulo.
Annum si quæras Domini, si tempora mortis,
Ecce notæ subsunt quæ tibi cuncta notent
25 Octob Anno 1400

Here beginneth the Reformation of the Church of Christ in the time of Martin Luther. (Foxe 2:56)

[English Translation]
Who once was three times the greatest poet of the British,
Geoffrey Chaucer is buried in this tomb.
If you want to know the year and time of death,
Underneath are noted the letters for all to read

October 25, 1400.

Here beginneth the Reformation of the Church of Christ in the time of Martin Luther.²

Vates, in the first line of the epitaph, means "poet," but it also means "soothsayer" or "prophet" and it is a word often associated in the Renaissance with Virgil. It is clear from the Latin verse (which is still on the tombstone), then, that Chaucer was respected in the Renaissance for his ancient, English wisdom. The final, English line is more troublesome, as it no longer appears on the stone. The inscription may never have existed; the accuracy of Foxe's text is, to say the least, somewhat suspect. For example, the 1641 printing's "Master Brickham" is "Buckham" in the 1591 and "Brigham" on the stone itself. Regardless, Foxe apparently either believed that the words were there or wanted his readers to believe they were; either way, it is apparent that Chaucer was idolized by some as a groundbreaking religious reformer.

We have long known that Spenser thought of Chaucer as the "well of English undefyled" (IV.ii.32), so it is perhaps not surprising to us to see this near-worship of Chaucer in the Renaissance, but the politicization of him the last line implies is alien to our own perceptions of Chaucer as a "tolerant" and good humored "skeptic" (Higgins 34); it seems to imply, after all, that Chaucer was the origin of the Reformation. But this perception of a reformation-minded Chaucer is not at all uncommon in the Renaissance. For another example, we can turn to Puttenham's *Arte of English Poesie*. Puttenham, in the course of a discussion of poetic "ornamentation," says the following:

Sir *Geffrey Chaucer*, father of our English Poets, hath these verses following in the distributor.

When faith fails in Priestes sawes

And Lords hestes are holden for lawes
 And robberie is tane for purchase,
 And lechery for solace
 Then shall the Realme of Albion
 Be brought to great confusion

Where he might have said as much in these words: when vice abounds, and vertue decayeth in Albion, then &c. (224)

Puttenham, like Brickham, cites "father" Chaucer as a great English poet.

It is the lines he puts in Chaucer's mouth that are surprising; most modern scholars would agree, I think, that these politically charged lines certainly aren't Chaucerian, but Puttenham matter-of-factly attributes them to Chaucer in the course of an apolitical discussion of poetic strategy, seemingly without fear of being challenged. So these words, political and alien to our expectations of Chaucer, were likely commonly accepted as being his.

And these lines, like the final line in the epitaph, are concerned with the politics of religion. It is difficult to imagine our contemporary Chaucer as a radical religious reformer, but in looking at Elizabethan texts, it becomes apparent that he was perceived that way during the Renaissance. Again and again he is cited as a reformer and his name is acquired for use by various reform movements. One of the more interesting citings, perhaps, is Sir William Vaughn's. Vaughn, a little-known 17th century scholar-of-sorts, gives Chaucer full credit for beginning the reform movement, claiming that "his" *Plowman's Tale* was the push needed for such reformers as John Wycliffe and Martin Luther to abandon the church of Rome (111). It is apparent, then, that the Chaucer of the Renaissance is quite different from our own, and that in particular, as is apparent from Vaughn's work, a good number of the attitudes and ideologies attributed to him are a product of the sixteenth-century inclusion of *The Plowman's Tale* in his canon.

The inclusion of works like *The Plowman's Tale* in Chaucer's canon dramatically altered Chaucer's Elizabethan author-function. An author-function, as defined by Michel Foucault in his "What Is an Author?," is the collective discursive power given to the name of an author, defining what it is to be, for instance, Chaucerian or Shakespearean. The nature of this power, according to Foucault, is subject to change, as it is constructed by the works and attitudes attributed to an author during a given historical period. So what it meant to be Shakespearean during the Renaissance may well be quite different from what it means to be Shakespearean today.

Of course, very few authors have the discursive power of a Shakespeare, an authorial power that causes other authors to follow in the footsteps of the master. Only a select few are "originators of discourse," writers who create the conditions and rules under which future writers compose their works (Foucault cites in particular Freud and Marx). But Chaucer is certainly one of the few; his authority operated as an origin of discourse for the newly nationalist writers of the Renaissance; Chaucer, "father of our English Poets" (Puttenham 224), defined what it was to be an English poet. Given what we have seen about the state of his canon during the Renaissance, it is not surprising that much of what the Renaissance Chaucer dictated about the nature of true English poetry would seem to us not Chaucerian at all.

After all, we have seen that Renaissance perceptions of Chaucer were heavily influenced by the inclusion of such works as *The Plowman's Tale*, and it is not difficult to imagine that the works the Renaissance Chaucer authorized were religious and political. It is also, therefore, not difficult to imagine that the

influences of such a Renaissance Chaucer are difficult for us to discern as readers of a kinder, gentler Chaucer. Works that were inspired by the "Chaucer" who wrote *The Plowman's Tale* have distinct characteristics that we do not often associate with our Chaucer: often they incorporate the common people of England into apocalyptic radical religious reform propaganda. All of the traits of these works--apocalyptic vision, reform propaganda, inclusion of the common folk--are shared by the *Tale*, and are overlapping traits that Helgerson notes are extremely compatible with the production of nationalist texts. Nationalist texts, in his view, are generally apocalyptic and Protestant, and are almost always "inclusive," by which he means they are not "exclusive," focusing only on the aristocracy; they include the common folk.

An example of the type of nationalist, reform-minded, apocalyptic work I'm referring to is Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*, in which Foxe himself acknowledges the importance of Chaucer and his *Plowman's Tale*. Foxe's work, a history of the church in England, is unflinchingly Protestant and apocalyptic, dealing as it does with the evils of the archaic Roman church, and it is, as Helgerson observes, remarkably inclusive of the common people of England. As Helgerson notes, "Foxe's book pays unusual attention to commoners. Many of his martyrs, from ancient apostles to modern Protestants, are common laborers and craftsmen. And the persecuting authorities, as Foxe represents them, often worry about the spread of heretical--that is, godly--ideas among the vulgar masses" (252).

The publishing of the bible in English in the mid-sixteenth century had been a great leveler; commoners now had their own access to spirituality (not just what

was given them by their priests), and could theoretically have as much or more knowledge of God and righteousness as any aristocrat or scholar. And *Acts and Monuments* testifies to this new power:

...wives, widows, and maidens, merchants and craftsmen, husbandmen, laborers, and servants are subjugated to the same interrogations, answer with the same articulate and informed conviction, die with the same fortitude as their social betters. And many of them proudly call attention to their humble station. (Helgerson 264)

And in addition, Foxe's work is undoubtedly nationalist. His depiction of the universal church, despite its obvious Roman beginnings, rests heavily on the deeds of Constantine and Wycliffe, two Englishmen. Foxe is depicting, then, a new-found importance of the common people and a concern for a truly English history for his church, in attempting to construct the Church of England as truly English as opposed to the Roman Catholic Church. This is perhaps not surprising; as he was writing the work (first published in English in 1563), the English state was once again in the control of the Catholics after having been "Reformed" by Henry VIII.

The founder of the type of discourse Foxe was producing, as he to some extent acknowledges (referring to Chaucer as a "right Wickleuian" [Foxe 2:55]), was of course the Renaissance Chaucer. The *Plowman's Tale* and a few other works, like the also apocryphal and equally Protestant and inclusive *Jack Upland* (which Foxe attributed to Chaucer and printed in *Acts and Monuments*) had established what it meant to be a nationalist writer. The establishing of "nationalist" discourse gave a model to those who, like Foxe, aspired to be

Protestant, inclusionary, and "right Wickleuian" (all of which are very compatible goals for poets aspiring to be nationalist).

This model, of course, did not arrive out of nowhere, and as we will see, there were plowman works with these characteristics before *The Plowman's Tale* was appended to Chaucer's canon. The works using what I will refer to as "the plowman motif" all featured commoners, and were generally apocalyptic and Protestant, and the tradition both fed into and was fed by the addition of "The Complaint of the Plowman" (what became *The Plowman's Tale*) to Chaucer's canon and author-function. The existence of the motif, found in a number of like-minded works featuring humble plowmen as spokesmen for the common people, righteousness, and religious reform, is what made the addition of the *Tale* to Chaucer's works such an adept political move. And the addition of Chaucer's immense cultural authority to the motif in turn authorized its existence and validated its righteousness.

Spenser Invoking Chaucer

As we will see, the Renaissance Chaucer was defined in large part by *The Plowman's Tale*, and the plowman motif was pervasive and well known by the Elizabethan reading audience. As a result, when Spenser makes very specific mention of Redcrosse's origins as a "Ploughman" in the tenth canto of Book One, he is invoking a tradition of considerable cultural import, and although we obviously cannot know, the invocation seems deliberate.

After all, Spenser makes his goals in writing the first book of *The Faerie Queene* clear in his letter to Raleigh. He tells Raleigh that the hero of his first book of holiness will be

a tall clownishe younge man, who falling before the Queen of Faries desired a boone (as the manner then was) which during that feast she might no refuse: which was that hee might haue the atchieuement of any aduventure, which during that feaste should happen, that being graunted, he rested him on the floore, unfitte through his rusticity for a better place. (408)

Spenser's hero is a simple rustic commoner, until he dons the armor the Faerie Queene gives him, after which he seemed "the goodliest man in al that company..." (408). So Spenser's work is inclusive of the common people of England, showing how they, too, can be icons of virtue and holiness. But of course, if Spenser's desire was only to give his Redcrosse rustic origins, the knight of holiness might have been found and raised by any sort of common laborer. That he is a plowman is significant; because of the pervasiveness of the plowman motif, when Spenser finally reveals Redcrosse's name, for many of his readers "plowman" would connect immediately with Chaucer's plowman, giving them every indication that *The Faerie Queene* was following in the "footing of [the] feete" (IV.ii.34) of Chaucer, the father of English poetry, with all the cultural and political significance that we have seen that act had during the Renaissance.

So while modern scholars have traditionally read the plowman reference as an allusion to Ovid or Cicero (Spenser *Variorum* 294), for many Elizabethan readers, the allusion may have worked quite differently. To return to the Miskimin quotation with which I began this introduction, invoking the plowman likely lifted "a whole web" (289) of associations for the readers, who would immediately have

connected Spenser's invocation of the plowman with other English "plowman" works (like the quotations from Foxe and numerous other works I will address in chapter two), particularly the Renaissance Chaucer's *Plowman's Tale*. This would, for them, make the apocalyptic, reform-minded, and inclusive first book of *The Faerie Queene* resonate with new significance and demonstrate Spenser's desire to be a truly English poet.

What to us, then, may seem an insignificant mention of St. George's roots was for Renaissance readers a clear indication of the profoundly nationalist character of Spenser's work. I will devote the rest of this study to exploring this link, exploring how the Renaissance Chaucer, as constructed by the poetry and prose of the plowman motif, and specifically by *The Plowman's Tale*, influenced Spenser's construction of the first book of *The Faerie Queene*.

CHAPTER TWO - WHAT THE PLOWMAN EVOKES

Our host him axed, 'what man art thou?'
 'Sir,' quod he, 'I am an hyne;
 For I am wont to go to the plow,
 Anderne my mete yer that I dyne.
 To swete and swinke I make avow,
 My wyf and children therwith to fynd,
 And servè god, and I wist how;
 But we lewd men ben full[y] blynd. (*PlowT* 25-32)³

The Plowman Motif

The Plowman figure that appears in the first book of *The Faerie Queene* comes out of a long and varied English literary tradition that shares many of the concerns of the nationalist works produced due to the cultural anxiety spawned by the establishment of the English empire. Works using what I will refer to as the "Plowman motif" are generally apocalyptic, concerned with religious reform, and, perhaps obviously, inclusive, as nearly all include a plowman figure, a rustic spokesman for the common people.

Thomas Elliot, in his study of the plowman motif, identifies a number of works that fit into this mini-genre. Among them are *Jack Upland*, *Upland's Rejoinder*, and perhaps more obviously, *How the Plowman Lernerd his Pater Noster*, *Pierce the Ploughman's Crede*, *The Prayer and Complaint of the Plowman Unto Christ*, and *The Plowman's Tale*. Together, these works form an amazingly consistent literary tradition. In order to better understand what is evoked when Spenser invokes the plowman in *The Faerie Queene* Book One, I will begin this chapter by examining the evolution of the Plowman motif. I will do so because exploring the manner in which the depiction of the plowman figure changed from a profoundly ignorant commoner to a righteous reform advocate is

important in understanding what Spenser was invoking. I will also explore what is nearly indistinguishable from the plowman motif as Spenser knew it, the cultural authority of the Renaissance Chaucer. As we will see, the Plowman motif intermingled with Chaucer's author-function, both contributing to and being affected by Chaucer's cultural authority in becoming the tradition that Spenser later received and invoked in his work.

There are numerous references to plows and plowers in the Bible, and perhaps as a result, the plowman figure has long been appearing in English texts as a representative of the common people. For the purposes of this study, I will begin with the early fourteenth century appraisal of plowmen by the Franciscan Alvarus Pelagious, who said of plowmen: “. . .even as they plough and dig the earth all day long, so they become altogether earthy; they lick the earth, they eat the earth, they speak the earth; in the earth they have reposed all their hopes nor do they care a jot for the heavenly substance that shall remain” (qtd. in Johnson 121).

In this quotation we see the rustic plowman, connected to the earth, the soil of England, but it is clear from this quotation that plowmen were held in low esteem, thought to be unspiritual and ungrateful, at least by members of the clergy. And this is not an isolated example of the apparent disdain of the literate for plowmen; *How the Plowman Larned his Pater Noster*, too, shows a plowman in an unfavorable light. In general, as Barbara Johnson notes in her study of the plowman figure, in the early fourteenth century plowmen “were seen as dissolute, irresponsible, wasteful, and insubordinate” (120).

William Langland's *Piers Plowman*, however, forever altered the image of the plowman figure; unlike the Franciscan's plowmen, Langland's Piers is an ideal

Christian. He is not, however, a political figure or a reformer; it is the dreamer figure in the poem who satirizes the church. It didn't take long, however, for Piers, already associated with rusticity and the earth simply by being a plowman, to become an extremely political figure associated with revolt and reform. During the Peasants' Revolt of 1381, John Ball, a rebellious priest, invoked the name of Piers Plowman in his letters: "...and biddeth hem that thei bee war of gyle in borugh, and stondesth togidre in Godes name, and biddeth Peres the Ploughman go to his werk, and chatise wel Hobbe the Robbere, and taketh with yow Iohan Trewman, and alle his felawes, and no mo, and loke schappe you to on heued, and no mo" (Dobson 381).

And as John Bowers, editor of *Canterbury Tales: Fifteenth-Century Continuations and Additions*, points out, one chronicle of the revolt listed a "per plowman" as a leader of the revolt, along with John Ball and Jack Straw (23). Whether or not this was meant literally, it is clear that an association had been created. The association of Piers with the Peasants' revolt politicized the plowman figure and strengthened the somewhat odd connection of a literary figure to the often illiterate common people.

Although the goals of the Peasants' Revolt were not overtly religious, once the plowman became associated with revolt and reform, it perhaps became easy for writers to imagine the plowman as an advocate of religious change. Once Piers became seen as an advocate of political change, his status as an ideal, pure Christian would seem to make him, and therefore the plowman figure, likely to advocate religious reforms as well.

And, indeed, works using the plowman motif that appeared soon after Langland's added this new element to the plowman's character, characterizing him

as a Lollard and, therefore, a vocal critic of the church. In *Pierce the Ploughman's Crede*, for example, the narrator goes to four different orders of friars asking to be taught his creed, and it is only when he comes upon a “sely man...upon the plough hangen” (C1) that he is helped. The plowman is a very poor man whose “hod was ful of holes” (C1)--nonetheless, he offers to share his dinner. He then proceeds to deliver a biting critique of the friars and the church, including a comment on Wycliffe and a criticism of their treatment of Walter Brute, a Lollard branded a “heretik” (C4).

This “Pierce” the plowman, clearly intended to be connected to Langland’s “Piers,” has all the characteristics of the old Piers--connection to the earth and common people, and spiritual purity--but in addition, he is a religious reformer. The portrayal of the plowman as destitute, yet giving, is in itself perhaps an implicit critique of friars’ neglect of their vows of poverty, and his speech critiquing the church in typical Lollard fashion clearly positions him as a Wycliffite. It is his ability to teach the narrator his creed when the friars could or would not, however, that is revolutionary; the poem seems to be setting up the common, rustic plowman as an alternative to the clergy, thereby decentering traditional church authority.

Pierce the Plowman's Crede, then, clearly comes from the same line of discourse that produced Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments*. As I discussed in the last chapter, Foxe emphasized the emerging religious autonomy of the common people, made possible by the printing of the Bible in English. Foxe, a radical Protestant, shared many of the concerns of the *Pierce* author, and it seems likely that Foxe was inspired to some extent by the works in the plowman motif. It was typical,

after all, for reformers to cite “ancient” works in an attempt to give their claims an historical basis, and, indeed, Foxe published with *Acts and Monuments* an anonymous work compatible with his both own work and the works of the motif: *The Prayer and Complaynt of the Plowman Unto Christ*.

The Prayer and Complaynt, although thought to be published long after *Pierce the Plowman's Crede* (scholars have dated the work around 1531, several years before Godfray's first printing of *The Plowman's Tale* [Wawn 175]), shares many of the same concerns as *Pierce*. The text is ideal for Foxe's anti-Catholic Book of Martyrs; it is overtly Wycliffite and critical of priests and the church, as can be seen in this speech of the plowman: “. . .the people is broughte in to this belefe that one preest hath a gretter power to assoylen a man of his synne...than an other preest hath...Another myschef is that these preestes sellen foryeuenes of menes synnes and absolucyons for money and this is an heresy accursed” (B4).

The work concludes that only Christ may absolve people of sin, for “...there nys but one prest that is Christ that may know in certen the lepre of the soule” (A3). Like *Pierce the Plowman's Crede*, then, this text seems to assert that the common people no longer need an intermediary between themselves and God.

The work further attempts to assert the importance of the common people by pointing out that Christ and his apostles were commoners, “ydiotes fysshers, carpenters and other of the rascall sort” (A3), and claims that those that put Christ to death were “the holy bysshoppes, the vertuous preestes, the auntyent doctours, the great lerned lawyers, and the wys and sage elders....” It goes on:

Even nowe after the same maner...our holye bysshops with all their ragmans rolle be of the selfe same sort, very children of their fathers the pharyses bysshops and preestes which so accused Christ and his apostels of new lernig ye do se howe they defame, sclauder and persecute the same worde and prechers and folowers of it. (A3)

The writer, then, parallels the persecution of Christ and his rustic followers by the “pharyses” with the contemporary persecution by the church of the religious reformers, who, the plowman narrator strongly implies, are, through their rusticity, closer to Christ; they, unlike the clergy, follow the “same worde” as Christ.

This manipulation of the plowman figure was undoubtedly significant in changing perceptions of and giving power to the common people. Barbara Johnson, in her examination of this work, observes that “[n]eedless to say a plowman did not write this, but even if the manipulation of the plowman figure resided in the hands of learned men, it cannot but have helped give consciousness if not a voice to the working people who played so important a role in the development of Protestantism” (126).

And Foxe, too, as we have seen, felt that “giving consciousness” to the working people was important. It is probably for this reason that Foxe elected to print *The Prayer and Complaynt* in his *Acts and Monuments*. But the impact of the plowman motif on Foxe’s work goes beyond the insertion of *Prayer and Complaynt*. *Acts and Monuments*, written about 200 years after the Franciscan quotation with which I began this exploration of the plowman figure, contains many plowmen as representatives of the working class common people, demonstrating clearly the extent to which the plowman motif had become

pervasive and an important image for writers to invoke. But while it is evident from examining the plowman motif that there was a distinctive tradition of the plowman figure in English works, by examining Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*, first published in 1563, it becomes clear that for Foxe, the works in the tradition that had the greatest impact were those of the Renaissance Chaucer.

The Plowman and the Renaissance Chaucer

By examining a number of (but certainly not all) plowman texts, we have seen how the plowman figure evolved from a negative image of an ignorant, illiterate country bumpkin to a wide spread image of a noble, holy, and well-spoken representative of the common people and the Protestant reform movement, constructing a distinct motif of plowman works that share similar themes and concerns.

The image of the plowman became so prevalent in the Renaissance that it came to represent all commoners. John King points out that Foxe, in describing *Jack Upland*, another radical reform work he published in his *Acts and Monuments*, seems to assume that its narrator, a simple countryman, must be a plowman. Foxe describes the narrator as “a certaine uplandish and simple ploughman of the Countrey,” despite the fact that the narrator is never called a plowman in the text. Foxe attributes this tale, which is Wycliffite and sympathetic to commoners, to Geoffrey Chaucer (King 24).

As I have been arguing, attributions like this one by Foxe represent the creation of a very different Chaucer from the one with which we are familiar. This Chaucer is a Protestant religious reform advocate concerned with the plight of the

common people. For Foxe to assign *Jack Upland* to Chaucer is surely significant in the creation of the Renaissance Chaucer. But perhaps no attribution is more significant, finally, than that of the apocryphal *Plowman's Tale*, a work that, as I mentioned in chapter one, is very much in the tradition of the works of the plowman motif and that is cited by Foxe and by many other Elizabethan writers as evidence of Chaucer's Lollard sympathies (Heffernan 160). In the remainder of this chapter, I will examine the tale, and the manner in which the tale enriched and empowered the plowman motif, making it what it was when Spenser invoked it in *The Faerie Queene*.

Chaucer's plowman, as described by Chaucer in the "General Prologue" of *The Canterbury Tales*, seems remarkably like Langland's Piers: simple, earthy, and holy:

With hym ther was a PLOWMAN, was his brother,
 That hadde ylad of dong ful many a fother;
 A trewe swynkere and a good was he,
 Lyvyng in pees and parfit charitee.
 God loved he best with al his hoole herte
 At alle tymes, thogh him gamed or smerte,
 And thanne his neighebor right as hymselfe.
 He wolde thresshe, and thereto dyke and delve,
 For Cristes sake, for every povre wight,
 Withouten hire, if it lay in his myght.
 His tithes payde he ful faire and wel,
 Bothe of his propre swynk and his catel.
 In a tabard he rood upon a mere. (*GP* 529-41)⁴

Chaucer's depiction of a man who lived in "pees" and "parfit charitee" and who paid his tithes in full hardly seems like a portrait of a religious reformer. The only hint of scandal associated with Chaucer's plowman is his brother, the Parson, who in the Man of Law's Epilogue is accused by the host of being a Lollard.

But we have no *Plowman's Tale* from Chaucer, nor do we have any evidence that he wrote one, and John Bowers sees in the fact that the Man of Law's Epilogue disappeared temporarily in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries an effort by Chaucer to delete a politically dangerous reference. Bowers goes on to conjecture from this that perhaps Chaucer decided not to write a tale for his plowman for the same reason (23). This seems plausible, since at the time Chaucer wrote the *Canterbury Tales*, *Pierce the Ploughman's Crede* and other plowman works were already giving the plowman figure new religious and political significance of which Chaucer was undoubtedly aware.

Regardless of the reason, what we have are two *Plowman's Tales*, one written by Thomas Hoccleve and inserted into a few editions of the *Canterbury Tales* in the fifteenth century, the other of origins unknown, written by an anonymous poet, written, by scholars' best estimates, sometime between 1350 and 1532. Hoccleve's poem, perhaps because it was uncontroversial (depicting a "vertuous" monk and a lady) and because it was widely known to have been Hoccleve's, seems to have made little impact on Chaucer's author-function. The other tale, however, when it was inserted into *The Canterbury Tales* made a substantial impact on perceptions of Chaucer's canon.⁵

The author of the poem that became *The Plowman's Tale* probably remained anonymous largely because of the dangers associated with supporting Wycliffe and the Lollards during much of the fourteenth and fifteenth (and part of the sixteenth) centuries. When the monarchy was controlled by Catholics, to disagree with church doctrine was heretical and therefore extremely dangerous. So in the case of the works in the plowman motif, there was perhaps more at

work in the authors' anonymity than Foucault's understanding of medieval literary authorship; the authors remained anonymous out of concerns for self-preservation. But after Henry VIII took the throne, the atmosphere changed, if only slightly. Henry's Act of Supremacy (issued in 1534) created the Church of England and severed the church's ties to Rome.

But the Act, of course, was not simply the solitary act of an all-powerful, divinely-inspired ruler; it was only the official pronouncement of an elaborate and ongoing campaign to transfer the power of the church from the papacy to the monarchy. A significant part of that campaign, naturally, was propaganda, and Thomas Berthelet, the king's official printer, was kept extremely busy churning out volumes of material. So busy, says Andrew Wawn, that Thomas Godfray, an independent printer, was enlisted to help; as evidence that Godfray was working closely with Berthelet, Wawn points out that the two printers "sometimes use the same title-page border" (177). Berthelet and Godfray produced a great deal of propaganda, says Wawn, all of which celebrated the direct divine authority of the king (as opposed to authority granted by the church) and the Protestant reformation. Around 1536, Godfray printed *The Plowman's Tale* (175).

This is not a surprising thing for a propagandist to have done; Henry's propagandists were aware, certainly, of Wycliffe's reform efforts one hundred and fifty years prior to theirs, and it would seem natural to them, no doubt, to attempt to legitimize their movement by aligning it with a movement supported by the respected wisdom of the ancients, establishing a nationalist, English religion as an alternative to bowing to the authority of Rome. Creating "Chaucer's" *Plowman's Tale* would have seemed to them to be the ideal solution; no writer was more

distinctively English than Chaucer, and the religious reform advocated in the poem would have been helpful to them in establishing the legitimacy of their cause. In addition, connecting the poem to Chaucer enabled them to include the common people, whose allegiance was important in trying to discredit the authority of Rome.

Given their goals, the unattributed *Plowman's Tale* was probably, for the reformers, too great a temptation to ignore. The poem itself is, by modern standards, no great work of art, but its themes caught the eyes of the reform propagandists. It is set up in the form of a debate, a format it has in common with many of the other works in the plowman motif as listed by Thomas Elliot, including *Jack Upland*. In addition, Elliot notes that in contrast to traditional debates like *The Owl and the Nightengale*, the debates in the plowman motif have a clear winner (118). In *The Plowman's Tale*, the clear winner is a Pelican, an advocate of religious reform.

In all extant copies of the tale, including Godfray's 1536 (which was printed independently of *The Canterbury Tales* [Wawn 176]), the tale opens with a prologue which tells the story of how the plowman came to join the pilgrimage in the *Tales*. At the end of this prologue, the host asks the plowman to "preche" "some holy thing" (45-6). The plowman responds with the tale of a Protestant-sympathizing Pelican "withouten pride" (1.87), who in the poem debates a Catholic Griffon "of a grymme stature" (1.86) over the relative merits of their beliefs. After the "Pellican began to preche," in "mercy and...mekeness," he begins immediately to criticize the church and the clergy:

Christes ministers cleped they been,

And rulen all in robberye;
 But Antichrist they serven clene,
 Attyred all in tyrannye;
 Witness of Johns prophecye,
 That Antichrist is hir admirall,
 Tiffelers attyred in trecherye;
 All such faytours, foul hem fall! (189-96)

His criticisms continue for nearly 1000 lines; the Griffon interrupts only twice to ask questions: “What canst thou preche ayenst chanons / That men clepen seculere?” (3.717-18), and “of monkes canst thou ought?” (3.990). After the Pelican’s lengthy diatribe, there is a short exchange, during which the Griffon demands the Pelican recant, or else

Thou shal[t] be brent in balefull fyre;
 And all thy secte I shall distrye,
 Ye shal be hanged by the swyre!

Ye shullen be hanged and to-drawe
 Who giveth you leve for to preche,
 Or speke agaynes goddes lawe,
 And the people thus falsly teche? (3.1234-40)

After the verbal exchange, the Griffon leaves to gather an army to defeat the Pelican. The Pelican also leaves and returns with a phoenix, who in the apocalyptic climax destroys the Griffon and his allies “without mercy” (3.1349).

In the poem, the Protestant Pelican is both verbally and physically victorious, and is overtly sympathetic to the common people; in talking of the priests, it notes:

That is blessed, that they blesse,
 And cursed, that they cursè woll;
 And thus the people they oppresse,
 And have their lordshippes at full;
 And many be marchauntes of woll,
 And to purse penyes woll come thrall;

Th porè people they all to-pull,
Such falsè faytours, foul hem fall! (173-80)

The priests are evil, then, because they oppress poor people for their own gain. Given this, and the obviously reformist slant of the debate and the work, the tale must have seemed a natural for Chaucer's pious plowman, and putting such a tale in the mouth of the rustic commoner makes this poem into a full-fledged member of the plowman motif. In addition, the basic theme of the poem was certainly compatible with the goals of Henry's propagandists, so it is not particularly surprising that Godfray printed it in 1536, soon after Henry's decree of separation from the Pope's church. Soon after this printing of *The Plowman's Tale* by itself, the tale, unaltered in any way, was printed in Thynne's 1542 edition of Chaucer's works, added to the end of *The Canterbury Tales*. In Stow's 1561 edition, the tale was moved, inserted in between the Manciple's and Parson's tales.

It is interesting that, as I mentioned, the prologue to the tale, the link which puts the tale in the mouth of the plowman and connects the poem with *The Canterbury Tales*, is present in all the existing copies of *The Plowman's Tale*. It is present even in the 1536 Godfray printing, which was separate from *The Canterbury Tales*, and in the one manuscript copy known to exist (Irvine 28). It is this prologue, according to Wawn, which gives us insight into the way the tale was constructed by reformers for Henry's benefit. Wawn notes that it cannot be conclusively proven that the tale ever existed without a prologue, but with a linguistic analysis and an analysis of the poem's relationship to *I Playne Piers* (yet another "plowman" work), he demonstrates convincingly that while the poem itself is probably from the early fifteenth-century, the prologue was the invention of a

sixteenth century “interpolator” (187). Having shown that the *I Playne Piers* poet knew and quoted *The Plowman’s Tale* in constructing his poem, he points out that it is very unlikely that had the poet known the tale was attributed to Chaucer (which he certainly would have known had the prologue been attached), he would have “deliberately suppressed such information.” Doing so, after all, would mean “depriving his argument of the sustaining force of Chaucer’s reputation” (187), and few other “propagandists of later years missed the opportunity to harness Chaucer’s name and reputation to their cause. . .” (186).

The prologue, then, was a sixteenth century invention, and on this evidence, we can be reasonably sure that Henry’s propagandists didn’t miss the opportunity with *The Plowman’s Tale*. According to Wawn, we can clearly see that “...the poem was resurrected in the sixteenth century by those anxious to emphasise both the historical continuity of the Henrician cause and the extent to which current abuses within the church also had an ancient pedigree” (190).

It is likely not a coincidence, then, that *The Plowman’s Tale* (along with Chaucer’s other works) was among the few religious works explicitly exempted from censorship by Henry’s “Acte for thadvancement of true Religion.” The poem was brought back, and the prologue added, so that the propagandists could insert the poem into the *Canterbury Tales*, thereby borrowing from the ancient wisdom and cultural authority of Geoffrey Chaucer for the cause of the Protestant Reformation. As Helen Cooper notes:

[the tale’s] ascription to the Ploughman would be a Reformation invention designed to give the work a spurious authority by association with England’s master poet. Whatever the date of the prologue that relates the work to the *Tales*, it provides evidence of how seriously Chaucer’s own condemnation of ecclesiastical abuses

was taken. The inclusion of the *Plowman's Tale* among his genuine works in turn encouraged the Elizabethan interpretation of Chaucer as a proto-Protestant. (418)

So by acquiring an obscure poem from the plowman motif and attaching it, via a spurious link, to *The Canterbury Tales*, Protestant reformers achieved a great deal, bringing Chaucer's authority to their cause and thereby constructing their movement as not only a separation from the Catholic church, but as a return to English national culture, a fight for English religious autonomy in the face of Roman Catholic tyranny from afar. But in making this Chaucer/plowman connection, they also dramatically altered the way Elizabethans saw Chaucer. The "poet of love" (Higgins 19) (a poet not entirely incompatible with our own Chaucer) became in addition a proto-Protestant reform advocate. And not only was this "new" Chaucer a religious reformer, he was an author using the plowman motif, and together, these attachments to Chaucer's image and canon dramatically altered Chaucer's author-function in Elizabethan times.

Chaucer's Elizabethan Author-Function

Because Geoffrey Chaucer's authority was harnessed by the Henrician propagandists to further their cause, perceptions of Chaucer were changed for many years. Evidence of this change can be seen in any number of Elizabethan texts; Chaucer is cited in a number of catalogs listing supporters of the Protestant cause (Andrew Wawn mentions, for example, 1635's *Protestant's Evidence*), and lines from the *Plowman's Tale* and *Jack Upland* (which, as I noted earlier, was another work of the plowman motif often attributed to Chaucer) began to show up in texts as evidence of Chaucer's religious views.

Perhaps no evidence of the changed perception of Chaucer is more startling, however, than that contained in William Vaughn's *Golden Fleece*. As I mentioned earlier, Vaughn was an obscure seventeenth century scholar; he published a number of treatises on Protestant reform issues under the pseudonym "Orpheus Jr." In the midst of *The Golden Fleece*, a lengthy treatise on the trials of religion, Vaughn included a literal trial, in which Scotus, "the Master of Subtile Questions" (110) puts "Geffrey Chaucer" on trial in the court of Apollo for "calling the Pope Antichrist and comparing the Romish Church to the griping Griffon and the true Church to the tender Pellican" (110-11).

Obviously Vaughn, writing about one hundred years after Henry began his Reformation, believes without question that *The Plowman's Tale* belonged to Chaucer; what is most startling in Vaughn's work is his summation of the impact the tale has had on English history:

[Scotus] complayned of Sir *Geffrey Chaucer* the English Poet, that he about the latter end of King *Edward* the thirds Raigne, had published in his *Plow-man's Tale* most abhominable Doctrine, which infected not only diuers rare wits of that Age, but likewise wrought so much alteration in succeeding times, that *Iohn Wickliffe*, *Iohn Husse*, *Ierome of Prague*, *Luther*, and other now stiling themselves *Protestants*, had quite abandoned their Mother *Church of Rome*, which had flourished in stately Pompe and *Pontificalibus* for many hundred of yeares before. (111)

By Vaughn's account, then, Chaucer had not simply been an artist who received and reproduced Protestant propaganda; he was the instigator of the entire Reformation, and by publishing *The Plowman's Tale*, he had inspired Luther and Wycliffe to abandon the Church of Rome. *The Golden Fleece* then quotes several hundred lines directly from *The Plowman's Tale*, presumably as Scotus's evidence of Chaucer's heresy, after which Chaucer, having been

“commanded by *Apollo* to defend his Doctrine” (121), “proues” that the Pope is indeed the “great and uniuersal Antichrist prophesied in the Scriptures” (121).

Even if we put Vaughn’s hyperbole and questionable historical accuracy aside, his work does give us an idea of the effect the insertion of *The Plowman’s Tale* into Chaucer’s canon had on Elizabethan perceptions of Chaucer’s authorial power. But Vaughn is a little-remembered scholar whose work was little-known during the Renaissance. A more universally known work was Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments*, first published in English in 1563, which has not only been seen by many scholars as influencing *The Faerie Queene*, but was an extremely powerful and pervasive work that did much to reflect and expand Chaucer’s Elizabethan reputation.

Foxe seems to have little doubt of Chaucer’s religious stance; at one point, for example, when discussing Thomas Linacre and Richard Pace, Foxe includes this discussion of Chaucer: “Moreover to these two I thought it not out of season, to couple also some mention of Geffrey Chaucer...Who (no doubt) saw in Religion as much almost as even we doe now, and uttereth in his Works no lesse, and seemeth to be a right Wickleuian, or else there was never any” (2:55-6).

For Foxe, a radical Protestant, to say Chaucer “saw in Religion as much almost as even we doe now” is a great compliment; even though Chaucer came from ancient times, Foxe felt that Chaucer had the foresight and knowledge to understand Foxe’s notions of the truth of religion. In addition, Foxe came to believe, somewhat like Vaughn, that not only was Chaucer a good Wycliffite, but his works caused others to see the truth about Religion:

So it pleased God then to blind the eyes of them, for the more commodity of his people, to the intent that, through the reading of his treatises, some fruit might rebound thereof to his Church, as no doubt it did to many. As also I am partly enformed, of certaine which knew the parties, which to them reported, that by reading Chaucer's Workes they were brought to the true knowledge of religion. And not unlike to be true. (2:56)

Of course, it is not *all* of Chaucer's works that Foxe is referring to, because of course in Foxe's view there is one particular Chaucerian tale that teaches the truth more plainly than others:

For to omit other parts of his volume, whereof some are more fabulous than other, what tale can be more plainly told than the tale of the ploughman? Or what finger can point out more directly the Pope with his Prelates to be Antichrist, than doth the poor Pelican reasoning against the greedy Griffon? Under which *Hypostasis*, or Poesie, who is so blind that seeth not by the Pellican the Doctrine of Christ, and of the Lollards to be defended against the Church of *Rome*? Or who is so impudent that can deny that to be true which the Pellican there affirmeth in describing the presumptuous pride of that pretensed church?...And therefore no great marvell if that narration was exempted out of the Copies of Chaucer's Works: which notwithstanding now is restored again, and is extant for every man to read that is disposed. (2:56)

From this quotation, we can understand that not only did Foxe apparently base nearly his entire impression of Chaucer on one apocryphal work, but that this impression was so deeply ingrained that he interpreted the sudden, late sixteenth-century appearance of *The Plowman's Tale* in Chaucer's canon as evidence that the tale had previously been suppressed by agents of the "Church of *Rome*."

This displays the power of the Henrician manipulation of Chaucer's work; the propagandists' insertion of *The Plowman's Tale* into Chaucer's canon not only changed Chaucer's canon and allowed them to borrow from his cultural authority, it changed Renaissance perceptions of Chaucer. It is evident in Vaughn's and Foxe's comments that they never doubted that Chaucer was fundamentally radical and proto-Protestant. And because Chaucer was, in

Spenser's words, the "well of English undefyled," the undisputed father of English poetry, these changes to his canon and changes in Renaissance perceptions of Chaucer didn't just create an ancient ally for the reform advocates, enabling them to more easily push through their reforms; it altered Chaucer's author-function, changing what it meant to be an English poet.

As we will see in the next chapter, the Renaissance Chaucer that was constructed through the interweaving of his works and those of the plowman motif makes Spenser's pledge to follow the footing of Chaucer's feet very different from how it has commonly been understood in contemporary scholarship. When, near the end of the first book of *The Faerie Queene*, Contemplation announces that Redcrosse is a plowman, Spenser is invoking for his readers what we have seen is a very complex discourse, supporting as it does the interests of both Henrician reformers, for whom it condones and justifies action, and England's common folk, to whom it gives a voice; for both groups, it is profoundly nationalist. And underlying this discourse, as we have seen from the testimony of John Foxe, is the cultural authority of the Protestant, nationalist Renaissance version of Geoffrey Chaucer.

CHAPTER THREE - SPENSER INVOKING THE PLOWMAN

The understanding of the Renaissance Chaucer I've arrived at in Chapter Two greatly complicates traditional studies of the influence of Chaucer on Spenser, and complicates our more general understanding of Spenser as well. Scholars have for generations noted that the *Faerie Queene* represented Queen Elizabeth, and it has been generally agreed that *The Faerie Queene* is supportive of the aristocracy.⁶

The implication of this opinion has been that scholars have often assumed that Spenser's work in *The Faerie Queene*, because it is supportive of the aristocracy (and I think it certainly is), cannot be what Richard Helgerson refers to as a "nationalist" work, a work that builds on truly English history and people and thereby decenters traditional authority. Helgerson himself argues in his *Forms of Nationhood* that because Spenser is supportive of the aristocracy, his work cannot be nationalist and must therefore be "statist." But this rigid "statist/nationalist" dichotomy is finally, like most dichotomies, an unsatisfying oversimplification. As we have seen in examining Henry's reform efforts in the early sixteenth century, it can be to the advantage of the state to promote nationalist discourse, particularly when it comes to the Reformation, which sought to create a truly nationalist Church of England apart from the outside authority of Rome. And presumably, it could well be to the benefit of the nation to promote statist discourse in order to win various concessions; the discourses are convoluted and contradictory.

It would seem illogical to simply label Spenser a statist, then, and ignore all evidence to the contrary. Certainly, as countless scholars have observed, Spenser's work contains classical sources and clear allegiances to the crown, but as can be seen by reading nearly any of the dozens of scholarly books that have been written on *The Faerie Queene*, Spenser's work cannot be reduced to these simple properties; it is a swirl of competing discourses which borrows from a wide range of classical, biblical, and medieval sources. These sources may have entered Spenser's work directly through his reading, or may have been filtered through what Helgerson refers to as "Gothic" sources: traditional, vernacular, English texts (as opposed to those which were imported or inspired by classical sources). Anthea Hume, for example, claims Spenser's depiction of the Error episode in Book One was influenced by John Bale's interpretation of the book of Revelations (77-9).

Because of the immense complexities involved in the issues of determining the influences on a work, it is difficult to justify positioning Spenser as entirely nationalist or not nationalist; evidence for both views can be produced. As we will see, the Renaissance Chaucer was a significant contributor to Book One of *The Faerie Queene* as well, and through an examination of Book One in light of what we've seen about the Renaissance Chaucer and the plowman, we will see a more populist Spenser emerge, one obviously concerned with what is English and with a more inclusive national culture; he is certainly, at least in this respect, a nationalist poet.

The Renaissance Plowman

Very few scholars have made the connection between Chaucer's plowman and Spenser's plowman, Redcrosse, and it is not difficult to see how the traditional reading of the plowman in *The Faerie Queene* has prevented scholars from making what seems a fairly obvious connection, English plowman to English plowman. Readers like John Upton, a most influential Spenser scholar, have traditionally emphasized classical and biblical sources for most of Spenser's work. Upton, for example, felt that the plowman reference in I.x.66 referred to Roman literature:

Georgos in the Greek language signifying a husbandman, our poet hence takes occasion - according to his usual method - of introducing that marvellous tale of Tages, and applying it to his hero. Tages was the son of the earth; a ploughman - "As he his toilsome teme that way did guide" - found him under the furrough, which the coulter-iron had turned up. This wonderful tale the reader may see in Cicero, *De Divinatione* 2.23; Ovid, *Met* 15.553, and in other writers. (Spenser *Variorum* 294)

This interpretation of the plowman is still widely accepted and published, and the few scholars that have seen something else in Spenser's mention of the plowman have not explored their insights. Kent Hiatt, for example, says only that "the question of the Plowman's Tale...certainly needs canvassing in the future" (27). But no one has explored the issue, so it is easy to imagine how Upton's work, like many of the traditional, classical connections, came to be seen as decisive.

But as we've seen, the plowman figure, while it may well have called up notions of Cicero and Ovid in some of Spenser's highly educated contemporaries, likely had, in general, a very different significance for many of his readers. The

plowman figure, after all, was powerful; almost on his own, he created the Renaissance Chaucer for many of Chaucer's readers. As we have seen, when Chaucer's canon was connected to the plowman's motif, it had a dramatic effect on the readings of Chaucer by John Foxe and other Elizabethans. It altered Elizabethan perceptions of Chaucer to the point that, according to Foxe, "Master Brickham" added to his epitaph the quotation I cited in chapter one, quite literally setting in stone for Elizabethans the view of Chaucer as a Protestant reformer and the wellspring of English poetry.

And because works like Foxe's were so widely read and the connection between Chaucer and the plowman motif was so widely known, a reference to a plowman, then, called up for Elizabethan readers visions of this Protestant Chaucer and a nationalist English poetry, the rules for which were set out by this "greatest poet of the British." As Seth Lerer notes in his study of the fifteenth century reception of Chaucer, Chaucer functioned as a Foucauldian originator of discourse:

Chaucer produces in his own work the "rules of formation for other texts." The genres of the dream vision, pilgrimage narrative, and ballad, and the distinctive idioms of dedication, patronage, and correction that fill those works, were taken up by fifteenth-century poets, not simply out of imitative fealty to Chaucer but instead largely because they were the rules of formation for poetry. (11)

Lerer's observation is no less true for the sixteenth century; Chaucer defined what it meant to be an English poet. And because, as we can gather from his tombstone inscription, so much of what Chaucer meant to the English Renaissance was tied up in the attribution of *The Plowman's Tale* to him, the rules he established came from the tale: an English poem was not only defined by

the formal characteristics of Chaucer's poetry, but it was also Protestant, apocalyptic, and radically inclusive. "Chaucer's" plowman, after all, was a humble rustic commoner who was also a preacher of the Protestant word.

And perhaps because to be an English poet was to be a Chaucerian, the plowman figure continued to be pervasive in the Renaissance after Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*. As Barbara Johnson notes, the very image of plowing became more common, and it came to be a metaphor for "sowing the word of God, doing good work, preaching and expounding the scriptures" (140). Perhaps inspired by the notion of "doing good work," the plowman figure's function expanded to include social and nationalist concerns; as Robert Lane notes: "The plowman tradition also included more straightforward social and political commentary. In *Newes from the North, Otherwise Called the Conference Between Simon Certain, and Pierce Plowman* (1579), Pierce, like the *Calendar*, combines populism with a literate culture. . ." (87).

And in one of the more influential and oft-cited of the plowman works, Hugh Latimer's "Sermon of the Plough," Latimer dramatically reverses the traditional plowman/priest hierarchy, completing the transformation of the plowman figure from Franciscan Alvarus Pelagious's ignorant and earthy rube to a uniquely devout figure: "And now I shall tell you who be the ploughers; for God's word is a seed to be sown in God's field, that is, the faithful congregation, and the preacher is the sower...For preaching of the gospel is one of God's plough-works, and the preacher is one of God's ploughmen" (57).

So in the Renaissance, preachers, rather than insulting plowmen, sought to be associated with them. The plowman figure surpassed even the preachers in pure piety; they were far from ignorant of their heavenly destiny. Preachers, it seems, were left claiming they were plowmen, in an attempt to borrow from the cultural and religious authority plowmen had been granted, as, through Chaucer's cultural authority, they had become constructed as the pinnacle of holiness.

Spenser and the Plowman

It is not surprising, then, that Spenser selected a plowman as the hero of his book of holiness. It is important to realize, though, that in doing so he was indicating, to Elizabethan readers at any rate, his participation in an ongoing English literary tradition based on the author-function of Geoffrey Chaucer.

As we've seen in chapter one, Spenser was familiar with at least part of the plowman motif; it seems clear that his Piers in *The Shepheardes Calender* was inspired by Langland's Piers (or a combination of the various "Piers" and "Pierce"s in the motif) (Lane 85-6). More importantly, as we've also seen, Spenser knew *The Plowman's Tale*. Lines from the tale appear nearly unaltered in Spenser's *Shepheardes Calender*: in "Aprill," line 99, for example, Spenser's "Albee forswonck and forswatt I am" bears more than a passing resemblance to *The Plowman's Tale*'s "He was all forswonke and all forswatte" (1.14), and perhaps more tellingly, "Februarie" line 149, "Unto his Lord, stirring up sterne strife," echoes line 53 of *The Plowman's Tale*, "A Sterne stryf is stered newe," and is accompanied by a gloss in which E.K. attributes the line to Chaucer: "Sterne strife) said Chaucer" (Spenser 426). The line doesn't appear anywhere in

Chaucer's work other than in *The Plowman's Tale*. In addition, in the epilogue of the *Calender*, Spenser reiterated the connection between his poem, Chaucer and the plowman figure: "Dare not to match thy pype with Tityrus hys style / Nor with the Pilgrim that the Ploughman playde a whyle: / But followe them farre off, and their high steppes adore" (Spenser 467).

The reference to "Tityrus" is interesting, in that Renaissance readers would have been quick to associate this name with Virgil. E. K. tells us earlier, however, that "Tityrus" is Chaucer, so it appears that Spenser, like the engraver of Chaucer's tomb, wishes to associate Chaucer's ancient wisdom with Virgil's. And Spenser's mention of the "Ploughman," while it could, as we've seen, refer to any of a number of plowman figures in literature, nonetheless connects Spenser's work with the plowman motif, and, if only by proximity, associates Chaucer with the plowman. In making this connection, says Robert Lane, Spenser was "drawing on Chaucer's substantial cultural authority," which "reinforced the *Calender's* effort to license its social and political critique" (86). Lane also notes that, as I quoted earlier, the *Calender* "combines populism with a literate culture" (87); by including references to the plowman motif and a plowman figure in his poem, Spenser is being inclusive, giving a voice to all English people.

So *The Shepheardes Calender* refers to Chaucer's *Plowman's Tale* and includes a plowman of its own, and it shares with the plowman motif a nationalist concern. And indeed, the same can be (and has been) read into the first book of the *Faerie Queene*, in particular in Spenser's choice of St. George as a hero. As Harold Weatherby points out, Spenser selected George as his hero despite the saint's diminishing esteem within both intellectual and Catholic circles, most likely

because "the 'great martyr' and dragon slayer was enormously popular" (120). Indeed, he was; James Nohrnberg observes that George was the lead in a mummer's play of the time. For what reason, other than a desire for inclusiveness, would Spenser select a hero so likely to draw the scorn of his intellectual Humanist friends? It seems likely that, as Weatherby notes, "Spenser was no Humanist - no intellectual snob like Harvey - and...he wanted for his hero a popular cult figure" (120).

In selecting George, Spenser displays both a populist bent, and a desire for nationalism, to include the common people of England as well as what is transcendently English. George was enormously popular with the common people, of course, largely because few heroes are as decisively English as George, the patron saint of England (with the possible exception of Arthur, who, of course, is also in the poem), and Spenser takes care to note that not only is his St. George a product of Saxon kings, he comes directly from a "heaped furrow," the soil of England (I.x.65-6).

So already we can see a possible nationalist bent in *The Faerie Queene*, one that is consistent with our perceptions of other works in Spenser's canon as well as with the Renaissance Chaucer. Along with the inclusiveness that characterizes both *The Plowman's Tale* and *The Faerie Queene*, Spenser also shares with his Chaucer a well-documented Protestantism. Chaucer, while not technically a Protestant, had been (as we have seen) constructed as a spokesman of sorts for the cause by Henry's propagandists, John Foxe, and others. As for Spenser, it has been often and widely acknowledged by scholars for many years

that Spenser was a staunch Protestant; the only question that's been debated recently is how strong a Protestant he was.⁷

And certainly there is ample evidence of anti-Catholicism in Book One of *The Faerie Queene* that seems to back up the assumption of Spenser's Protestantism; the sinister Archimago, with his "tongue as smooth as glas" tells of Saints and Popes and says his "Aue Mary" before and after (I.i.35). Duessa, too, is an evil papist, and as Hume observes, in Book One she and Archimago are paired with Sansjoy and Sansfoy, both Muslims, in an unholy quartet that hates "highest God" (I.i.37). These are, of course, but a few of dozens of possible examples, and numerous studies (including Hume's) have also shown that Redcrosse's adventure reflects a very Protestant conception of holiness.

Spenser and The Plowman's Tale

Perhaps we can say at this point that Spenser is both Protestant and at least partially nationalist, both of which, as discussed, are primary features of the Renaissance Chaucer. But to draw any conclusion at this point would require a logical leap; even if we can assume both that Spenser is nationalist and Protestant, it proves nothing about his use of *The Plowman's Tale*.

In fact, this same evidence can lead us to two very different possibilities: first, that Spenser may have been influenced by *The Plowman's Tale* because he shares its concerns for nationalism, or, second, that perhaps his poetry displays these concerns because that is what he came to believe English poetry was meant to be through his study of the Renaissance Chaucer. Of course, this is paradoxical, inasmuch as Spenser, given the classical interests of his peers, would

not have been likely to choose to write English, or Gothic, poetry had he not already had a desire to be nationalist. Were he not a nationalist, he would not have wanted to follow Chaucer's feet. The combination of the discourses is complex, and Spenser's beliefs and motivations are finally unknowable and unfathomable. All we can be reasonably sure about is that *The Plowman's Tale*, as we will see, bears a remarkable similarity to the work Spenser produced in the first book of *The Faerie Queene*, and was almost certainly a stronger influence on the work than has been previously acknowledged.

The obvious "plowman" evidence in the poem is not exactly overwhelming; the only explicit reference to a plowman is in the verse I quoted in the first chapter:

Thence she thee brought into this Faerie lond,
And in an heaped furrow did thee hyde,
Where thee a Ploughman all unweeting fond.
As he his toylesome teme that way did guyde,
And brought thee up in ploughmans state to byde.... (*FQ* I.x.66)

In addition, this quotation is perhaps significant:

By this the Northerne wagoner had set
His sevenfold teme behind the stedfast starre,
That was in Ocean waves yet never wet
But firme is fixt, and sendeth light from farre
To all, that in the wide deepe wandring arre. (*FQ* I.ii.1)

As James Nohrnberg points out, this constellation is, in fact, Bootès, or, "The Plow." But of course it would be difficult to build much of a claim from an obscure mention of a constellation. But the first book of *The Faerie Queene* does share certain traits of *The Plowman's Tale*.

To begin, *The Faerie Queene*, like *The Plowman's Tale*, with its apocalyptic destruction of the Griffon and his comrades in Catholicism, has long been thought an apocalyptic work. Josephine Waters Bennett, in her influential *Evolution of The Faerie Queene*, discusses at length the degree to which the Book of Revelations influenced *Faerie Queene* Book One, noting in particular that "The Revelation, like Book I, ends with the slaying of the old dragon and the marriage of Christ with his church" (113). Of course, as Bennett also notes, the Book of Revelations was highly significant to Renaissance readers and it appears in any number of works; regardless of Spenser's actual source(s) for his apocalyptic narrative, it is certainly compatible with that of *The Plowman's Tale*, and there is every reason to believe that his impressions of apocalypse were filtered through a contemporary source like the Bale interpretation of Revelations and/or *The Plowman's Tale*.

As even Nohrnberg notes (Nohrnberg most generally cites classical and biblical sources for Spenser's images), some of Spenser's other materials were almost certainly not based on "pure" classical and biblical sources, but were gathered through readings of other English works. The bloody cross that represents St. George through most of the book, after all, while it almost certainly originally came from a biblical source (Isa. 63), in Nohrnberg's opinion clearly owes a debt to Langland's Piers:

The imagery of the shield of his body, the beloved in a castle, and the heraldic "colors" of human nature, are more specifically feudal. Though by no means a fully developed motif in Langland, the identification of Piers the Plowman, who harrows hell, with Jesus the Joustier, who undertakes the tournament, provides a remarkable instance...

That Pieres the Plowman . was paynted al blody,
And come in with a crosse. bifor the comune peple,

And rigte lyke in alle lymes . to owre lorde Iesu;
 And thanne called I Conscience . to kenne me the sothe.
 "Is this Iesus the Iuster?" quot I . "that Iuwes did to deth?
 Or it is Pieres the Plowman! . who paynted hum so rede?"
 Quode Conscience, and kneled tho . "thise aren Pieres armes,
 His coloures and his cote-armure . ac he that cometh so bloody
 Is Cryst with his crosse . Conqueroure of Crystene." (B-Text, Pass XIX.1-
 14)

(Nohnberg 190)

So Nohnberg believes Spenser's bloody cross may well have come from a plowman work, more specifically, from a plowman, and as he goes on to note, "The association between the plowman and moral vision is well established in the English imagination" (190).

Despite this insight, Nohnberg nonetheless has some difficulty establishing Redcrosse's origins; he notes that it is "not uncommonly asserted that Redcrosse is an everyman," yet seems surprised that "none of the types of the missionary Redcrosse - Christ, St. Michael, St. George, Perseus, Seth, and the allegorized Astolfo - establish Redcrosse's personal character" (261). The classical and biblical figures, of course, contributed to the overall picture of Spenser's St. George, but they don't account very well for the rustic naïvete Redcrosse displays, particularly in the first few cantos of Book One.

It has been widely noted, after all, that Redcrosse is an almost astonishingly naïve young man, able to rashly confront obvious dangers such as the monster Error and the physical confrontations of Sansfoy and Sansjoy, but unable to detect and escape the more subtle dangers presented by Archimago's trickery and the House of Pride. Instead of an already pure saintly figure, Spenser is presenting to us, in Hume's words, "the representative erring man" (85), who is guilty of the

familiar sins of pride and lust. Until he is able to recognize his weaknesses, he is only potentially St. George.

This is then, of course, is a very Protestant hagiography; as Hume notes, "Spenser's Protestant conception of 'true Holinesse' caused him to transform his inherited fiction in the most radical way" (74). In the St. George legend as handed down from Lydgate and others, after all, the slaying of the dragon was George's first act; he achieves near-instant sainthood. In order for George to reflect Spenser's Protestant reworking of the tale, however, he needed to begin somewhat deficient, psychologically unfit for his quest, and much in need of help from a greater power.

This type of character was new literary territory, and it is not surprising that Nohrnberg is unable to find a model for Redcrosse's naivete in classical and biblical models; Spenser, after all, was creating not an instant saint, but a rustic who developed to sainthood. As he said in his letter to Sir Walter Raleigh published with *The Faerie Queene*, his hero in Book One was to be a "tall clownishe young man" who "rested on the floore" at the Queen of Faerie's palace, "unfitte through his rusticity for a better place" (*Spenser* 408).

This rustic figure, naturally, was the earthy plowman, a rustic "everyman" who was able to represent for Spenser the common sins of humankind and the path to true holiness through sacrifice and recognition of one's own faults. Spenser's signalling of Redcrosse's origins in I.x.66 is significant, then, because, to Elizabethans it indicated that the path to holiness was open to them; George/Redcrosse (or "Georgos," which is Greek for "husbandman" or "ploughman") was, as I pointed out earlier, quite literally a product of the soil of

England, a rustic commoner, a "man of earth" (*FQ* I.x.52) who was able to attain sainthood through the grace and salvation of God.

And, as John King points out, the verses themselves, while they may well have elicited visions of Cicero and Ovid for some of Spenser's readers, would certainly have brought the plowman motif to the minds of many. King, who as I mentioned before was one of very few scholars to note the importance of *The Plowman's Tale* in the construction of *The Faerie Queene*, notes that Spenser infuses his work with the "native English tradition of plowman satire" (220). In addition, the invoking of the "ploughman" in I.x.66:

align[s] the knight's character with the native georgic tradition of *Piers Plowman*, *Pierce the Plowman's Crede*, and the pseudo-Chaucerian *Plowman's Tale*. Surely the strident Protestantism of the sixteenth-century editions of these texts conditioned Spenser's incorporation of a humble English plowman into romantic epic. (220)

King also notes that "The knight's destiny to 'walke this way in Pilgrims poore estate' (st. 64) suggests that his route combines the quest for spiritual understanding of Piers Plowman and the pseudo-Chaucerian Plowman with the Protestant way to salvation" (220). And indeed, that seems to be the case; as we've seen, Spenser's work portrays a decidedly Protestant "way to salvation," and in order to do so, it utilizes not classical or biblical sources, but a common man, a rustic who, in Nohrnberg's words, becomes "champion of the Word" (Nohrnberg 679). In doing so, Redcrosse resembles no other literary figure so much as he resembles the plowman, who, as we have seen, developed from a figure to be scorned to a figure to be emulated, and finally became, as we can see in "Chaucer's" plowman, a preacher in his own right, a true champion of the word.

To make too much of this parallel development would be misleading, of course, as it seems to assert Spenser's awareness of the development of the plowman motif. But certainly there is a strong similarity between the plowman figure and Redcrosse, strong enough, perhaps, to fill in the gap in Nohrnberg's study and make it clear that a substantial part of the shaping of Redcrosse/St. George was due to the influence of the Renaissance Chaucer's *Plowman's Tale*; both are Protestant and apocalyptic, and both represent rustic men who are able to rise above their conditions to take control of their own spiritual destinies. Spenser's work was heavily influenced by an English poetic tradition that grew out of the cultural authority of the Renaissance Chaucer.

Conclusion - A Nationalist Spenser

As I discussed earlier, Richard Helgerson posits in his book that the cultural anxiety caused by the creation of the new English empire caused artists and others to seek a truly English national identity that was not necessarily reflective only of those who happened to currently hold power, the Tudors. These new nationalist works reflected the people and history of England, and because they were not purely reflective of the aristocracy, they caused something of a breakdown in the old hierarchies; monarchy came "contestable" (12) and society at large became more inclusive of "national folk"; English culture actually began to include those outside the aristocracy. This change was reflected in (and created by) the discourse of the time, in which Helgerson sees a clear split; texts positioned themselves on one side or the other of the new nation/state line. Works that support the state over the nation were generally focused on what was

upper-class and male, while works that support the nation over the state “include - and even identify with - women and commoners” (297).

Earlier, I discussed some of the difficulties associated with such a rigid nationalist/statist dichotomy, and in Helgerson’s rigid scheme, Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* seems schizophrenic, seeming to advocate both national culture and the power of the state. Spenser, after all, was hardly contesting the monarchy in writing his poem (on the contrary, seemingly hundreds of books and articles have been written to demonstrate how Spenser was showing his allegiance to the queen in the poem). But he is inclusive and nationalist at the same time, including as he does the commoner plowman St. George and the woman warrior in Britomart. In Helgerson’s scheme, however, to be somewhat statist is to be statist, so while Helgerson does feel that Spenser repositions power from the monolithic authority of the queen to a more dispersed power of the nobility (57), the poem is then in his view nonetheless aristocratic and therefore state-based and exclusionary of the “national folk.” As a result, Helgerson stops short of proclaiming *The Faerie Queene* an example of the “nationalist poetics” that were then elaborating on the new English national cultural identity.

But what disturbs Helgerson about Spenser’s “straddling” of the nation/state line doesn’t necessarily make his poem any less nationalist. As we have seen in this study, Spenser’s work in the first book of *The Faerie Queene*, while it may well be characterized by some as being in some ways aristocratic, is certainly informed by English national culture in the form of the Renaissance Chaucer’s *Plowman’s Tale*. And his readers were very likely aware of this connection. Given the pervasiveness of the plowman motif in the Renaissance, it

seems entirely plausible to suppose that Spenser's reading audience was far more aware of the connection than we are, and that for them, Spenser's invoking of the plowman near the end of Book One was a key nationalist connection to have made.

Spenser, typically, does not reveal his character's name and nature until far into the poem, although, as many scholars would be quick to point out, readers would have immediately linked the man and the woman riding the white ass followed by a lamb with the St. George legend. The legend is, as discussed, decidedly English and nationalist, but it is conceivable that Spenser's writing of the legend could at first be read, as Helgerson seems to, as yet another tale of the righteous exploits of a noble aristocrat.

But this reading ignores what would have been clear to Spenser's contemporary readers from the beginning, that Spenser's main character in the first book of his great poem was a rustic commoner. Sixteenth century editions of the poem all included Spenser's Letter to Raleigh, in which he refers to his character as a "rustic," cueing readers into Redcrosse's origins. And when it is signalled to readers that Redcrosse is from the earth, a plowman, any aristocratic reading of the legend re-writes itself. To readers familiar with the discourse of the humble, vocal, and righteous plowman, the first book of *The Faerie Queene* becomes not the tale of an aristocrat gaining power over the masses through his spiritual superiority, but the tale of an "everyman" who came to holiness despite (or even because of) his humble upbringing.

This connection to the plowman motif is a decidedly inclusive and nationalist twist to Spenser's plot. *The Faerie Queene*, Book One, appears to be

asserting that anyone, regardless of birth, has the potential for holiness, and that it can be achieved on one's own, without the benefit of kings or clergy; all that is needed is faith, willful effort, and the grace of God. This, too, is a theme which, as we have seen, comes from the teaching of Wycliffe and *The Plowman's Tale*. And as we have seen, the nationalist character and apocalyptic tone also, to return to the Miskimin quotation in chapter one, raise the web of the Renaissance Chaucer's plowman, and looking at the first book of *The Faerie Queene* in terms of the influence of the Renaissance Chaucer gives us a view of Spenser's work not often put forward in the past few hundred years.

And it is not difficult to understand why this view has not been common; traditional studies of Spenser, as I have noted, focused extensively on the possible connections between Spenser's work and classical and biblical sources, despite Spenser's and the English Renaissance's obvious devotion to father Chaucer. This focus of scholarship has made it seem Spenser was more tied to his intellectual, as opposed to national, roots, and as a result, Spenser scholarship has tended to reiterate, time and again, the already well-established connections between Spenser, his colleagues, and the monarchy. It is of course perfectly valid to study Spenser in those terms. But these studies have also been rather limiting, building on each other's assumptions, drawing similar conclusions, and suppressing other possibilities.

The "other possibilities" I am referring to are of course more and more thorough investigations of the impact the Renaissance Chaucer had on the works of Renaissance artists. In this study, I've examined only the impact of a single apocryphal *Canterbury Tale* on Renaissance reception of Chaucer's works, and,

as we have seen, the impact of the incorporation of *The Plowman's Tale* into Chaucer's canon was significant, affecting the works of dozens of Renaissance artists. Failure to take into account the differences between the Renaissance Chaucer and our own can and has meant less-than full understandings or even misunderstandings of the influences of Chaucer on Renaissance artists and their work.

In the case of *The Plowman's Tale*, coming to an understanding about the manner in which the *Tale*, when inserted into Chaucer's canon, affected discourse in the Renaissance, has allowed us to look at the first book of *The Faerie Queene* in a slightly different way. Knowing that the Renaissance Chaucer was a significant part of Spenser's construction of Redcrosse gives the poem an inclusive and nationalist character not often recognized previously, thereby constructing for us a different understanding of Spenser himself; while it may be true that, as Helgerson claims, Spenser was sympathetic to the aristocracy, his use of Chaucer displays a decidedly nationalist bent. In addition, given what we have seen about the power of Chaucer's author-function in the Renaissance, Spenser's use of the Renaissance Chaucer's poetry in Book One perhaps displays his desire (several years before his reference to following the "footing" of Chaucer's "feete" was published) to connect his own poetry to the vatic power of the Renaissance Chaucer, perhaps in an effort to make his own poetry vatic and revered, allowing him to gain in artistic following and personal prestige.

Spenser may well have wished to take on or borrow the immense cultural authority which the Renaissance granted Chaucer (as we have seen from the Vates quotation on Chaucer's tombstone) in order to construct himself as a vatic poet.

He may also have wished to create what Helgerson calls “nationalist” poetry. Regardless of his intent, his incorporation of the authority of the Renaissance Chaucer into his work did both. Seeing the manner in which Spenser used the Renaissance Chaucer to shape Book One of *The Faerie Queene* to be a nationalist, populist work shapes for us a different understanding of Edmund Spenser, a more culturally aware and nationalist Spenser than has traditionally been depicted in the scholarship.

John Burrow, in *The Spenser Encyclopedia*, mentions that Camden reports that the epitaph on Spenser's tomb begins “Hic prope Chaucerum situs est Spenserius, illi / Proximus ingenio, proximus ut tumulo,” which translates as: “Here, buried next to Chaucer, lies Spenser / Close to him in wit, and as close in his tomb” (144).

The implication is obvious; the two poets, both major figures in English literary history, were as close in life as they are in death. In closing, I would only suggest that such a close tie, which is clear in the number of obvious and less obvious homages to Chaucer that appear in Spenser's work, deserves more critical scholarly attention, because both the extent of Chaucer's influence and the nature of the Renaissance perception of Chaucer's influence have both been underaccounted for in studies of the first three books of *The Faerie Queene* for too long. It is also important because renewing study of Spenser in terms of our new understanding of the meaning of the Renaissance Chaucer for the Elizabethans creates a very different Spenser than we have ever seen before.

NOTES

¹ All quotations from Spenser are from *Poetical Works*, Eds. J.C. Smith and E. de Selincourt, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1936).

² Thanks to Professor Madeleine Henry of the Iowa State University department of Foreign Languages and Literatures for her translation of this quotation.

³ Quotations from *The Plowman's Tale* are from Geoffrey Chaucer, *Chaucerian and Other Pieces*, Ed. Walter W. Skeat, Vol. 7 of *Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1897).

⁴ Quotations from Chaucer are from *The Riverside Chaucer*, Ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1987).

⁵ Alice Miskimin notes in *The Renaissance Chaucer* that the version of *The Plowman's Tale* in Thynne's 1542 Chaucer is now attributed to Hoccleve (247). This is a misreading of her source, Eleanor Hammond's *Chaucer: A Bibliographical Manual*, which says the *Plowman's Tale* in the 1542 Thynne is of "unknown authorship" (444).

⁶ See, for instance, Edwin Greenlaw's *Studies in Spenser's Historical Allegory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1932).

⁷ See, for instance, John King's "Was Spenser a Puritan?" *Spenser Studies* 6 (1985): 1-31.

WORKS CITED

- Bennett, Josephine Waters. *The Evolution of The Faerie Queene*. New York: Burt Franklin, 1960.
- Bowers, John, ed. *Canterbury Tales: Fifteenth-Century Continuations and Additions*. Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1992.
- Burrow, John. "Geoffrey Chaucer." *The Spenser Encyclopedia*. Ed. A.C. Hamilton. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990.
- Chaucer, Geoffrey. *Chaucerian and Other Pieces*. Ed. Walter W. Skeat. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1897. Vol. 7 of *Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*. 7 vols. 1897.
- . *The Riverside Chaucer*. Ed. Larry D. Benson. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987.
- Cooper, Helen. *The Canterbury Tales*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989.
- Dobson, R.B. *The Peasant's Revolt of 1381*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1970.
- Elliott, Thomas J. "Complaint as a Middle English Genre: A Survey of the Tradition Culminating in the School of *Piers Plowman*." *DAI* 31 (1971): 4116A. U of Michigan.
- Foucault, Michel. "What Is an Author?" *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*. Ed. Donald F. Bouchard. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977. 113-38.
- Foxe, John. *Acts and Monuments*. 3 vols. London: Printed for the Company of Stationers, 1641.
- Greenlaw, Edwin. "The Shepherds Calender." *PMLA* 26:3 (1911): 419-51.

- Hammond, Eleanor Prescott. *Chaucer: A Bibliographical Manual*. New York: Peter Smith, 1933.
- Heffernan, Thomas. "Aspects of the Chaucerian Apocrypha: Animadversions on William Thynne's edition of *The Plowman's Tale*." *Chaucer Traditions: Studies in Honour of Derek Brewer*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990. 155-67.
- Helgerson, Richard. *Forms of Nationhood: The Elizabethan Writing of England*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.
- Hieatt, A. Kent. *Chaucer, Spenser, Milton: Mythopoeic Continuities and Transformations*. London: Queen's University Press, 1975.
- Higgins, Anne. "Spenser Reading Chaucer: Another Look at the *Faerie Queene* Allusions." *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 89 (1990): 17-36.
- How the Plowman Larned his Pater Noster*. London, 15??.
- Hume, Anthea. *Edmund Spenser: Protestant Poet*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.
- Irvine, Annie S. "A Manuscript Copy of *The Plowman's Tale*." *Studies in English* 12 (1932): 27-56.
- Johnson, Barbara A. *From Piers Plowman to Pilgrim's Progress: The Generic and Exegetical Contexts of Bunyan's "Similitude of a Dream."* *DAI* 44 (1983): 2154A. Brown University.
- King, John. *Spenser's Poetry and the Reformation Tradition*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990.

- Lane, Robert. *Shepherds Devises: Edmund Spenser's Shepheardes Calender and the Institutions of Elizabethan Society*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993.
- Latimer, Hugh. "The Sermon on the Plough." *The English Sermon*. Ed. Martin Seymour-Smith. Vol. 1. Cheadle: Carcanet Press Limited, 1976. 56-74. 3 vols.
- Lerer, Seth. *Chaucer and His Readers: Imagining the Author in Late Medieval England*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993.
- Miskimin, Alice. *The Renaissance Chaucer*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975.
- Nohnberg, James. *The Analogy of The Faerie Queene*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976.
- Pierce the Ploughman's Crede*. London, about 1394.
- Prayer and Complaynt of the Ploweman Unto Christ*. London, 1531?.
- Puttenham, George. *The Arte of English Poesie*. G.D. Willcock and Alice Walker, eds. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1936.
- Spenser, Edmund. *Spenser: Poetical Works*. J.C. Smith and E. de Selincourt, eds. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1912.
- . *The Works of Edmund Spenser: A Variorum Edition*. Edwin Greenlaw, Charles Osgood, and Frederick Padelford, eds. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1932.
- Vaughn, William. *The Golden Fleece: Diuided into Three Parts*, 1621.

- Wawn, Andrew N. "Chaucer, *The Plowman's Tale*, and Reformation Propaganda: The Testimonies of Thomas Godfray and *I Playne Piers*." *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 56 (1973/1974): 174-92.
- Weatherby, Harold. "The True Saint George." *English Literary Renaissance* 17:2 (1987): 119-41.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the members of my committee, Professor Susan Yager, Professor Charles L.P. Silet, and Professor Dawn Bratsch-Prince, for their time and helpful suggestions. And I would like to thank my Major Professor, Linda Galyon, whose guidance and endless patience for my questions helped make my thesis and my degree program much more than they might have been.

Most of all, I'd like to thank Jeanette for her support and patience during the many days and nights I spent with Spenser and Chaucer.