

### i. Poet, royal patron, *ultima Britannia*

The link between maps and state power is no better revealed than in Lesley Cormack's studies of the ambitions of such early modern English geographers and cartographers as John Dee and Richard Hakluyt to map England as a new imperial world center.<sup>1</sup> In the imperial vision of these men, maps were crucial to the new nation's self-definition. Hence, unmediated iconographic links between maps and English *imperium* are obvious in Queen Elizabeth's portraiture.<sup>2</sup> In her 1588 Armada portrait, for example, the queen's right hand rests gently, but no less authoritatively, on a small globe, her royal navy in full view through the window behind her. In her famous 1592 Ditchley portrait, the queen stands on a map of England that also embodies her rule over an emergent nation's rise to early maritime prominence. Her white shoes rest delicately on her island's southern half, close to the map's representation of her London epicenter. The portrait is a fitting companion to the allegorical title page of Dee's 1577 *General and Rare Memorials Pertayning to the Perfect Arte of Navigation*, where the figure of "Britannia," kneeling on the shoreline, urges Elizabeth to seize Occasion by the forelock - to seize the moment, that is, to usher in the nation's era of imperial centrality.<sup>3</sup>

On a more dissonant note from the literary front, recent studies have exposed the deteriorating bonds between the poet Edmund Spenser and his patron-queen Elizabeth during the 1590s.<sup>4</sup> This chapter seeks to further our understanding of Spenser's

---

<sup>1</sup> Lesley Cormack, *Charting an Empire: Geography at the English Universities 1580-1620* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997). An important recent study of Dee's nationalism is William H. Sherman, *John Dee: The Politics of Reading and Writing in the English Renaissance* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995).

<sup>2</sup> The definitive study of Elizabeth's portraiture is Roy Strong, *Portraits of Queen Elizabeth* (Oxford, 1963).

<sup>3</sup> John Dee, *General and Rare Memorials Pertayning to the Perfect Arte of Navigation* (London, 1577); repr. Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, 1968 [STC 6459]. For further commentary on Dee's title page, see Margery Corbett and Ronald Lightbown, *The Comely Frontispiece: The Emblematic Title-page in England, 1550-1660* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), 49-51; Frances A. Yates, *Astraea: The Imperial Theme in the Sixteenth Century* (London, ARK, 1985), 48-50; and John King, *Tudor Royal Iconography: Literature and Art in an Age of Religious Crisis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 238-41.

<sup>4</sup> Catherine Bates, *The Rhetoric of Courtship in Elizabethan Language and Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), and Jane Tylus, *Writing and Vulnerability in the Late Renaissance*

disillusionment with the Elizabethan courtly cult by investigating how he maps the queen's coastlines not as Dee's Britannia, gateways to England's brave new world of maritime imperial expansion, but rather as antiquity's *ultima Britannia*, a marine region so remote it was located on the extreme northwest edges of the world.

It may seem irrelevant to dwell on what is cartographically absent from the Ditchley portrait. Specifically, it may seem beside the point to observe that Elizabeth's imperial stance blocks from view the island's North Atlantic archipelagos – the Orkneys, the Shetlands, and, most notably, the Hebrides, once identified by Ptolemy as the tide-ripped, northernmost final stop before emptying out into antiquity's dreaded “Hyperborean ocean.”<sup>5</sup> But I hope to show that Books 3 and 4 of *The Faerie Queene* (1590-96), Spenser's epic tribute to Elizabeth, uses the brush strokes of poetry in effect to paint the Hebrides onto the Ditchley portrait's canvas – the Hebrides, that is, as the cartographic stage for acting out the poet's ambivalences toward his queen.

Spenser's *Letter to Raleigh* that accompanies the first three books of *The Faerie Queene* is at best a sketchy summary of his epic tribute to Elizabeth. It is all the more noteworthy, therefore, when the poet alerts his readers to the future “misery of Florimell,” one of the epic's several surrogates for Elizabeth, or Gloriana as the epic's “most excellent and glorious person of our soueraine the Queene.”<sup>6</sup> Spenser addresses the potential indecorum of associating his sovereign queen with “misery” by pointedly including Florimell's vicissitudes among several episodes that are not so-termed “intendments” but rather “Accidents,” events driven less by the engines of epic destiny than by chance and happenstance, the staples of the romance genre. In so doing, the poet seemingly compliments his queen by portraying her as that most alluringly feminine of literary heroines, the romance damsel in distress.

---

(Stanford University Press, 1993). For the general decline of the patronage system under Elizabeth, see *The Reign of Elizabeth I: Court and Culture in the Last Decade*, ed. John Guy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

<sup>5</sup> *Claudius Ptolemy: The Geography*, trans., ed. Edward Luther Stevenson (New York: Dover Publishing, 1991), 46. As late as 1699, an anonymous author, commenting on Scottish coastlines, compared them to a louse, “whose legs and engrained edges representing the Promontories and Buttings out into the sea: nor does the comparison determine there . . . [it] has calved those nitty Islands called the Orcades, and the Shetlands (quasi Shite-Land) islands. . .” (*The Character of Scotland* [London, 1699]: sig. A2r).

<sup>6</sup> All references to the *Letter to Raleigh* and *The Faerie Queene* are taken from *Edmund Spenser: The Faerie Queene*, ed. A. C. Hamilton, text edited by Hiroshi Yamashita and Toshiyuki Suzuki (London: Longman, 2001).

But the fact remains that the perils of Florimell take place on an unmapped, menacing seacoast where readers can begin to speculate on just how disingenuous the *Letter to Raleigh*'s distinction between "intendments" and "Accidents" may be. Is it mere "Accident" that this surrogate for the queen is stranded on a bleak coastline? Or rather, is this coastline a covertly disguised "intendment" that relocates the queen from the Ditchley portrait's imperial center to an obsolete but, for such humanist poets as Spenser, still culturally charged cartography of the topos of an *ultima Britannia*?

Antiquity's geographic topos of an *ultima Britannia* is more than implicit in Spenser's *The View of the State of Ireland*, where the author's stand-in Irenius observes that Ireland "is by Diodorus Siculus, and by Strabo, called Britannia, and a part of Great Britaine."<sup>7</sup> Irenius recruits these ancient geographers in the service of early modern Anglo-Irish politics, offering their perception of Ireland as a territory within a larger Britain as political justification for England's colonial mapping of Ireland under the larger name of a sovereign "Great Britaine." But Spenser knew that underwriting Diodorus Siculus' and Strabo's discourse on Britain was not politics but geography – namely, classical geography's topos of an *ultima Britannia*. Spenser's rigorous humanist education had taught him that these geographers' mapping of Ireland as "a part of Great Britaine" confirmed antiquity's few if any distinctions among the striated coastal cliffs and aggressive tidal incursions of the elemental periphery identified as Britannia.

Such early modern continental cartographers as Ortelius and Dee's mentor Mercator had long since rendered the topos of *ultima Britannia* obsolete; and one can safely conclude that Elizabeth, for one, was hardly under pressure to preoccupy herself with the topos' cultural and geographical distancing of the British Isles from an earlier Mediterranean *axis mundi*. But Spenser composed much of *The Faerie Queene* as a civil servant in colonial Ireland; and, residing on the margins of the queen's "greatest Isle" (1Proem.1), he had more occasions to contemplate the lingering relevance of this otherwise obsolete topos for his version of a *translatio imperii*.<sup>8</sup> From an Irish vantage

---

<sup>7</sup> *Edmund Spenser: A View of the State of Ireland*, eds. Andrew Hadfield and Willy Maley (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 52.

<sup>8</sup> Key book-length studies of the vexed question of Spenser in/and Ireland include Richard Rambuss, *Spenser's Secret Career* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Andrew Hadfield, *Edmund Spenser's Irish Experience: Wilde Fruit and Salvage Soyl* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997); Willy Maley, *Salvaging Spenser: Colonialism, Culture and Identity* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 1997); and Richard

point, Spenser would have been all the more aware that antiquity's north Atlantic explorers judged all the archipelago's broken coastlines – from northern Ireland's Lough Foyle to the Shetland firths, and, for that matter, from Cornwall to Kent – as uniformly dangerous, all equidistant from the liminality of the Mediterranean *peirar*.

Spenser's poetic isolation on a "salvage" island distanced from London's network of court patronage was exacerbated by his patron-queen's waning support of his career ambitions. If Spenser did at times resent writing the story of the Elizabethan *translatio imperii* in geographic isolation on an island viewed by the queen's court as "overseas," then one safely occulted strategy for protesting her indifference was to remap her "greatest Isle" as no less isolated than his own marginal Ireland. Writing in England's colonial periphery, Spenser remaps the queen's realm as itself peripheral – not an increasingly metropolitan center but antiquity's *ultima Britannia*. And thus readers are presented with the irony of Spenser, self-fashioned as "England's Virgil," allowing antiquity's spectral geography to exert its regressive pull on visions of England's imperial future.

## ii. The turn to literary history: Mapping Spenser's Faerie seacoast via Ariosto

Key episodes in Books 3 and 4 of *The Faerie Queene* render the aforementioned Florimell, "chaste" but also perpetually "chased" by male predators, even more vulnerable by stranding her amidst "the surges hore" and "craggy cliffs" (3.4.7) of the baleful Faerie seacoast. My as yet far from self-evident mapping of this surrogate for the queen in a Hebridean terror-coast entails a number of steps that will be this chapter's task to disclose. A point of origin for my argument is the possibility that the poet's imaginary Faerie world, so often presumed unmappable, can at times be plausibly charted somewhere other than in a fictive not-Britain.

Put another way, the argument begins with a resistance to Samuel Taylor Coleridge's oft-cited conclusion that Faerie land "is in the domains neither of history or

---

A. McCabe, *Spenser's Monstrous Regiment: Elizabethan Ireland and the Poetics of Difference* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002). For the gender politics shadowing the subject of Spenser in/and Ireland, see Clare Carroll, "The Construction of Gender and the Cultural and Political Other in *The Faerie Queene* 5 and *A View of the Present State of Ireland: The Critics, the Context, and the Case of Radigund*," *Criticism* 32 (1990): 163-91.

geography. . . . it is truly in the land of Faery, that is, of mental space.”<sup>9</sup> Since Coleridge’s positing of a Faerie land without geography, scholars have been largely unmoved to peel away the layers of Spenser’s studied vagueness (“where is that happy land of Faery, / which I so much do vaunt yet no where show[?]”) to actually map Faerie land’s location.<sup>10</sup> Though cagey about Faerie’s not-British whereabouts, Spenser does, after all, offer an orienteering challenge to his readers to search for “certain signes here sett in sondrie place” (2Proem.4). Perhaps, he slyly suggests, parts of Faerie land can even be mapped across the Atlantic in “fruitfullest Virginia” (2Proem.2).

And perhaps the Faerie seacoast can be mapped, via the literary history of dynastic epic, back across the ocean in the North Atlantic’s bleakest Hebrides. A reliable “sondrie place” for locating the Faerie seacoast – and, as I will eventually argue, a key if covert enabler of Spenser’s subversive mapping of England in *ultima Britannia* – is the eighth canto of the *Orlando furioso*, the 1532 Ferrarese dynastic epic written by Ludovico Ariosto, one of several esteemed “Poets historicall” singled out for praise in the *Letter to Raleigh*.

Ariosto’s epic was often on Spenser’s mind as the latter mapped the dynastic coordinates of his own epic.<sup>11</sup> In fact, his programmatic surpassing of Ariosto’s version of the *translatio imperii* results in, arguably, *The Faerie Queene*’s most successful merging of poetic ambition and deference to his queen, converting British provinciality into imperial centrality. To cite one example, Elizabeth was undoubtedly pleased with one of *The Faerie Queene*’s more authoritative remappings of Ariosto’s Ferrarese New Troy, its relocation of the *Orlando*’s prophet-mage Merlin to the British Isles. In Canto 3.16-60, Ariosto’s Merlin prophesies the ancestral glory of the Estensi, culminating in the poet’s patron Ippolito as a new Augustus. This Merlin, however, derives not from Welsh

---

<sup>9</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Miscellaneous Criticism*, ed. T. M. Raysor (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1936), 37.

<sup>10</sup> A notable exception is Michael Murrin, who argues that much of Faerie land, following the examples of the thirteenth-century *Huon of Bordeaux* and Jean of Arras’s late fourteenth-century *Melusine*, can be located in Southeast Asia (“Spenser’s Fairyland,” in *The Allegorical Epic: Essays in Its Rise and Decline* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980]).

<sup>11</sup> A list of the earliest pathbreaking studies of Ariosto’s influence on Spenser includes R. E. Neil Dodge, “Spenser’s Imitations from Ariosto,” *PMLA* 12 (1897); Susannah McMurphy, *Spenser’s Use of Ariosto* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1924); Thomas Greene, *The Descent from Heaven: A Study of Epic Continuity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963); Chapter Six of Paul Alpers, *The Poetry of the “Faerie Queene”* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967); Robert M. Durling, *The Figure of the Poet in Renaissance Epic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967).

tradition but rather from the poet's familiarity with continental disseminations of the matter of Arthur as it intersected with the matter of Charlemagne. Spenser, reading Ariosto closer to the geographical origin of the matter of Arthur, counters with an authentically Welsh Merlin whose delve, not just a romance locale, is pointedly located in "*Maridunum*, that is now by chaunge / Of name *Cayr-Merdin* cald" (3.3.7).<sup>12</sup> Exploiting the Tudor myth of Welsh descent from Arthur, Spenser strategically remaps Cayr-Merdin's seeming provinciality as nothing less than the center of Tudor England as a Trojan *renovatio*.

Less complimentary to Elizabeth are those moments when Spenser strays from the structure of epic prophecy to explore some of the more dilatory paths of Ariosto's sprawling narrative. In his epic's eighth canto, Ariosto temporarily abandons the high seriousness of the matter of Charlemagne in favor of a low-comic melodrama that strands his hermit-chased heroine Angelica on the lonely, orc-patrolled island of "Ebuda" (a location perhaps stemming from his familiarity with the Estense collection of Ptolemaic maps to be discussed later in this chapter). This episode, in turn, provides proleptic clues that the bleak Faerie seacoast where Elizabeth's rape-threatened surrogate Florimell is stranded is also identifiably Hebridean. One can imagine Ariosto's male patron Ippolito, from his perspective in the continental duchy of Ferrara, leisurely reading as little or as much of this far-flung episode as he deemed entertaining. But for Spenser's patron Elizabeth, much more was at geographic stake in *The Faerie Queene's* adaptation of the Ebuda episode: reigning over an island whose northernmost coast *was* the Hebrides, the queen was pointed northward to picture herself as shadowed by the cultural threat of being stranded in antiquity's remote edges of the earth.

### iii. Cymoent's lyrical Mediterranean, Marinell's terror-coast

This chapter will culminate in a detailed examination of how Ariosto's Hebridean *ultima Britannia* becomes mapped within the gender politics of *The Faerie Queene*. But over the course of the next three sections, I seek to tease out a rich context for this conclusion by probing the extent to which England's Virgil strives to depict his Faerie

---

<sup>12</sup> For attention to Cayr-Merdin as Spenser's exercise in antiquarian discourse, see Andrew Fichter, *Poets Historical: Dynastic Epic in the Renaissance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 172; and Bart van Es, *Spenser's Forms of History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 52-8.

seacoast as patently not-Mediterranean. No one knew better than Spenser that it was the tide-caressed Mediterranean that, in antiquity's geo-cultural imagination, had defined the alterity of the coastlines of the British Isles. And Spenser's stranding of portions of his narrative in Ariosto's Hebrides is all the more noteworthy in light of his intimate familiarity with Mediterranean coastlines as antiquity's privileged training ground for poets. His failure to disclose his Faerie seacoast's precise location self-consciously violates what he knew was Mediterranean poetry's custom of laying autobiographical claim to the local shores that nourished it.

In the introductory chapter, I singled out Rosalie Colie's reminder that, in Italian Renaissance writing, "[g]eography counted," with such local habitats as Boccaccio's Florence endowing his writing with what she termed "the numen of poetic significance." I would add that an intimate link between Italian Renaissance genre and Mediterranean coastal habitats was forged in Sannazaro's piscatory eclogues, his site of a numinous poetics becoming the Bay of Naples and the deep blue Mediterranean in view of the villa where he wrote. When his five neo-Latin eclogues were published in 1526, they inspired an immediate vogue in Renaissance Italy for an idealized seacoast.

Sannazaro's piscatory eclogues are deeply rooted in a venerable Mediterranean coastal poetics with a powerful sense of place.<sup>13</sup> The genre originated with Theocritus's *Idylls*, set in the poet's native Sicily, where shepherds batten their flocks while stealing glimpses of the sea and overhearing the distant surf – or where forsaken lovers sing to their lost beloveds as waves reflect the moonlight. Almost a century ago, Henry Hall captured the dreamy charm of the Theocritean shore-pastoral in ways that virtually define antiquity's Mediterranean-caressed *peirar*: "In a land of islets, islands and promontories many a youth drove his flock afield on hillsides whence he could look down on the blue shield of the sea, rimmed with white surf. . . ."<sup>14</sup> Theocritus's idylls were imitated by Virgil, whose celebrated fourth *Georgic* features such charming vignettes as the sea-god

---

<sup>13</sup> On his eclogues as a revival of the Latin language at the roots of ancient pastoral, see William J. Kennedy, *Jacopo Sannazaro and the Uses of Pastoral* (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1983).

<sup>14</sup> Henry Hall, *Idylls of Fishermen: A History of the Literary Species* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1914), 1.

Proteus taking shelter in a coastal cave on a hot day, while his companionate sea-creatures gambol in the waves.<sup>15</sup>

Sannazaro's eclogues also transport ancient pastoral's carefully cultivated mix of naivete and sophistication to the seashore. In his first eclogue, "Phyllis," Mediterranean shores resonate with the sympathetic plaints of sea-birds mourning the anniversary of the death of the fisher-girl Phyllis. Her grieving lover Lycidas visits her coastal grave, erotically "stretched upon the seaweed of the shore" (54).<sup>16</sup> In Sannazaro's second eclogue, "Galatea," coastal tropes inspire the fisher-youth Lycon's lament for his absent beloved Galatea: in vain, he offers her robes that are "softer than the ocean's spray" (41). The sea-loving Lycon chides the ungrateful Galatea for deserting the seacoast's bounty:

Misenum's hanging rocks have yielded scores  
Of oysters, gifts for you; Euploea's shores  
A thousand keep; her sister-island saves  
As great a store beneath the glassy waves.  
So Nesis' isle, in never-ending store,  
Of spiny urchins keeps a thousand more. (27-32)

Loyal to Lycon is the mythic Glaucus, a once lowly fisherman transformed into a sea-deity of "swelling wave and pleasing shore." In sympathy with Lycon, Glaucus becomes a poignant "watcher of the watery strand" (54), the Bay of Naples' presiding genius.

Spenser's familiarity with Sannazaro is evident in E. K.'s preface to *The Shepheardes Calender* where the Neapolitan poet is praised as one of the "divers other excellent both Italian and French poetes whose foting this Author euery where followeth."<sup>17</sup> Poetic traces of Sannazaro's "foting" are particularly observable in the pseudo-Mediterranean depths of *The Faerie Queene's* sea-nymph Cymoent, mother of the Faerie knight Marinell. Though her marine world is reflected in any number of Elizabethan venues (emblems, maps, iconographies, court festivities, pageants,

---

<sup>15</sup> For a brief discussion of Sannazaro's figure of Proteus, see A. Bartlett Giamatti's chapter "Proteus Unbound: Some Versions of the Sea God in the Renaissance," in his *Exile and Change in Renaissance Literature* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 125-26.

<sup>16</sup> The English verse translations are by W. Leonard Grant in his *Neo-Latin Literature and the Pastoral* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1965).

<sup>17</sup> All references to Spenser's shorter poems are from *The Yale Edition of the Shorter Poems of Edmund Spenser*, W. A. Oram, E. Bjorvand, R. Bond, T. H. Cain, and R. Schell, eds. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

entertainments), Cymoent's balmy seas and quaint sea-shell treasures seem directly indebted to the elegance of Sannazaro's eclogues.

"Deuoyd of mortal slime," Cymoent dwells in a protective realm of mythic marine plenitude (3.4.35). Intercourse with Marinell's father Dumarin is elliptically described as his "by her closely lay[ing]" while she sleeps (3.4.19) – perhaps the only way to limn the consummated love of "mortal sire" and "immortal wombe" (4.12.4). As the daughter of Nereus, Cymoent – like all the Nereids – possesses arcane marine powers: "with her least word [she] can assuage / The surging seas, when they do sorest rage" (4.11.52). The poet also singles out her capacity "To rule his [Nereus's] tides, and surges to vprere" (4.12.52). Cymoent lives an idyllic life of marine-pastoral bliss. In Book 4, in gratitude to Tryphon (quaintly dubbed "the seagods surgeon") for healing her son's wound, she gives the god a whistle "that of a fishes shell was wrought with rare delight" (4.11.6).

The neo-Latinate charm of Cymoent's domain is never so cloying as when she and her sisters summon sea-chariots to carry them to the wounded Marinell, smeared "all in gore / And cruddy bloud" (3.4.34) on the Faerie strand. Neptune responds to her maternal crisis by calming his "mightie waters" for the sea-nymphs' train of chariots:

The waves obedient to their beheast,  
Them yielded readie passage, and their rage surceast.

Great *Neptune* stood amazd at their sight,  
Whiles on his broad round back they softly slid  
And eke himself mournd at their mournfull plight. . .  
For great compassion of their sorrow, bid  
His mightie waters to them buxome bee. (3.4.31-2)

A school of graceful dolphins, "raunged in array," draws Cymoent's chariot, amidst some of *The Faerie Queene's* most self-consciously mannered poetry:

As swift as swallowes, on the waues they went,  
That their broad flaggie fins no fome did reare,  
Ne bubbling roundel they behind them sent,  
The rest of other fishes drawen weare,

Which with their finny oars the swelling sea did sheare. (3.4.33)

Cymoent's chariot gliding softly on Neptune's back, her graceful, broad-finned dolphins so delicately propelling their way through the ocean they leave "ne bubbling roundel" in their wakes, the other chariot-drawing fish "shear[ing]" the sea-swells with their "finny oars," are all images so exquisite in their piscine perfection that, at this moment, readers are altogether seduced into neglecting the fate of Cymoent's wounded son. For six carefully-crafted stanzas, Cymoent's grief is the poetic occasion for a synchronized marine ballet distracting readers from Marinell's coastal misery.

All of which serves as Spenser's virtuosic tribute to Sannazaro's Mediterranean poetics. But as *The Faerie Queene's* narrative approaches the shallow waters of the Faerie strand, it founders on a tide-ripped coastline at odds with Sannazaro's awareness of Theocritean and Virgilian shores as an ideal training ground for aspiring poets. When the nymphs dismount their chariots near the shoreline, Spenser no longer maps Marinell's coast in his mother's pseudo-Mediterranean. In the gorgeous poetry typically describing Cymoent's depths, the graceful dolphins instead sequester themselves in safer waters:

. . . their temed fishes softly swim

Along the margent of the fomy shore,

Least they their fines should bruze, and surbate sore

Their tender feet vpon the stony ground. (3.4.34)

The poet pointedly notes that the sea-nymphs' dolphins and other "temed" fish steer clear of the shoreline, protecting their delicate fins from the "surbat[ing]" perils of Marinell's dwelling. No longer the "buxome" waters of Cymoent's marine depths, Marinell's turbid strand does not nurture but "bruze"; and here exist no exquisitely intact "fishes shells wrought with rare delight" – only whatever primal marine life can survive the waves that continually scour the rocks. Marinell's coast is a trauma-zone where the plenitude of his mother's Sannazaran depths ends and the tidal violence of a different coastal topography begins.

Spenser does not disclose the location of this terror-"margent." But when Cymoent's sea-creatures prudently halt their shoreward progress, they effectively mime antiquity's dread of the breakdown of a protective liminality between land and sea. Put

another way, Marinell dwells in a coastal realm the poet refuses to claim as the site of a numinous poetics.

Relevant here is a brief digression on Marinell's literary historical antecedents. *The Faerie Queene's* third and fourth books present readers with three largely unrelated Marinells: Book 3's "doughty, rich young man," in the words of Thomas Roche (184); the same book's maternally overprotected adolescent reluctant to fall in love; and Book 4's pining lover of Florimell, whom he did "learne to loue, by learning louers paines to rew" (4.12.13). The latter two Marinells, despite their unrelatedness, sustain ongoing associations with the Faerie seacoast, prompting a consideration of their literary historical prototypes. Of Book 3's overprotected Marinell, one can recognize two key classical antecedents, the narcissistic Achilles and Adonis who are, at times, explicitly coastal precursors for Marinell.<sup>18</sup> The epic's second Marinell, Florimell's pining coastal beloved, also has a literary history at least superficially traceable to the piscatory eclogue's Lycidas and Lycon.

But Marinell dwells on a seacoast exiled from literary history. Though he himself is an archetype, Spenser pointedly foregrounds the dangerous reality of the knight's lived life on the Faerie strand. In Marinell's coastal domain, from which Cymoent's dolphins keep their distance, the echoes of a Mediterranean literary history become fainter – drowned out, as it were – by the deafening roar of

the surges hore,

That against the craggy cliffs did loudly rore,

---

<sup>18</sup> For more on Marinell as a type of the "reluctant" Achilles, see Isabel E. Rathborne, *The Meaning of Spenser's Fairyland* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1945), 279-89, and Thomas P. Roche, Jr., who also observes that Marinell's parentage, like Achilles', is half mortal, half immortal (*The Kindly Flame: A Study of the Third and Fourth Books of "The Faerie Queene"* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964], 185-86). In his discussion of Marinell, James Nohrnberg calls attention to Silius Italicus's obscure first-century *Punica*, where Achilles, the overprotected son of the sea-nymph Thetis, is explicitly associated with the seacoast (*The Analogy of "The Faerie Queene"* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976]). In this work, the sea-nymph Cymodoce asks Proteus to prophesy the future of the Italian shore; and in order to do so, he must tell a story that includes Achilles (VII.409ff.). (Interestingly, the *Punica's* Cymodoce, hearing the future of the seacoast, resurfaces – almost literally – in Book 3 of *The Faerie Queene* as the Thetis-like mother of Marinell, determined to shield him from woman's love by confining him to the seacoast.) Another obvious classical antecedent of Marinell is Adonis, doted on by Venus – and, at times, an explicitly coastal figure. In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Adonis's body is laid out on the shore (10.716); and Theocritus describes Adonis's mourners as carrying the dead god forth "among the waves that break upon the beach" (*Idylls* XV.132-36). Marinell's other possible Virgilian-Ovidian source may be the Trojan Polydorus, whose wounded body is lamented on the shore by the Trojan women in both the *Aeneid* (6.536-46) and the *Metamorphoses*.

And in their raging surquedry disdaynd,  
 That the fast earth affronted them so sore,  
 And their deuouring couetize restrained. (3.4.7)<sup>19</sup>

Here, Spenser's poetry is as cacophonous and jarring as his earlier depictions of Cymoent's depths were elegant and sonorous. In this migrainous zone, there is no "meeting" of land and sea, but rather thunderous breakers smashing against defiant, tide-ripped rocks. Spenser's nineteenth-century readers might have placed the Faerie seacoast within an aesthetics of the sublime. But for early modern readers accustomed to viewing poetic seacoasts through a Sannazaran lens, this shoreline utterly mocks the Neapolitan poet's sequestering *peirar*. The Faerie seacoast is, rather, the graveyard of any attempt to accommodate a Mediterranean poetics within its tidal chaos.<sup>20</sup> In contrast to E. R. Curtius's poignant vision of the *Odyssey*'s many "blessed shores . . . free from ills and where the pains of death are unknown," Marinell's inaccessible domain, always presents the threat of drowning.<sup>21</sup> His past defeats of "An hundred knights" have contributed to his putative "noble fame" throughout Faerie land (3.4.21); but because he has been displaced from the Mediterranean's tide-caressed shores, he has also thereby been displaced from a numinous poetics to the Faerie coast's "raging" asynchrony of time and tide.

Of Marinell's mortal father Dumarin one knows nothing, except for his name's etymology as "of the sea." Further probing the watery mysteries of Marinell's genealogy, his liminal status as neither human nor deity, can shed light on one of *The Faerie Queene*'s many oddities – why Marinell is never as compatible with water as his

---

<sup>19</sup> Two cantos earlier, readers catch their first glimpse of Marinell's seacoast through the eyes of Britomart, for whom the rock-strewn shore is less real than psychological, mirroring the dynastic heroine's adolescent pining for Arthegall. For an account of Britomart's coastal lament for Arthegall as unfolding on the boundary between narrative and allegory, see Susanne Lindgren Wofford, "Britomart's Petrarchan Lament: Allegory and Narrative in *The Faerie Queene* III.iv," *Comparative Literature* 39:1 [1987], 53.

<sup>20</sup> To be sure, one might argue that Marinell's domain possesses at least some measure of beauty, "bestowed," as it is, "all with rich aray / Of pearles and pretious stones of great assay" (3.4.18). But these "pretious stones," anticipatory parodies of John of Gaunt's famous depiction of England, in *Richard II*, as "a precious stone," have been cast ashore by the sea-god Nereus as the lost treasure of shipwrecks. They do not so much adorn but litter the coast, transforming it into the sea-gods' designated dumping ground for the plundered "spoyle of all the world," a graveyard of doomed cargo (4.18). Leonard Barkan has described these coastal gems as "multiple, cold, and infertile" (*Nature's Work of Art: The Human Body as Image of the World* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975], 271).

<sup>21</sup> E. R. Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York, 1953), 186.

name signifies. Though “half mortall” (4.12.4), Marinell strikes readers as ontologically distinct from, say, Sannazaro’s Glaucus, a mortal fisherman turned sea-deity – as if the dalliance between Marinell’s mother and father, Dumarin and Cymoent, had not been fully endorsed by Nereus, Neptune, and his mother’s other sea-chaperones. Given the twin etymologies of his parents’ names (Dumarin as “of the sea,” and Cymoent as a “wave-tamer”), one would anticipate that the happy result of their union would be a water-baby at home on land or sea, a child ordained into a life of marine fulfillment. But Marinell, as Dumarin and Cymoent’s half mortal son, is neither secure in the waves of his mother’s “buxome” ocean nor at home at the battering, battered Faerie seacoast – in Marinell’s own words, “this forbidden way” where he must live out his days (3.4.14); and although raised in a coastal “rocky caue as wighte forlorne” (3.4.20), he never swims. (In this regard, Marinell presents a curious contrast to Arthegall who, even when fully armed, “in swimming skilful was” [5.2.14].) And even on the coast, he is always susceptible to drowning, a real (or satirically comic?) danger at odds with antiquity’s topos of the Achillean, protected youth.

Marinell’s marine limitations are exposed in Book 4, where he accompanies his mother to the Thames and Medway’s river-wedding festivities “to learne and see / The manner of the Gods, when they at banquet be” (4.12.3). In attendance are mythology’s renowned sea-gods, including Neptune, who “rules the Seas, and makes them rise or fall”; Euryplus, who “calmes the waters wroth”; and Alebius, who “know’th / The waters depth, and doth their bottome tread” (3.11.11-14). All three sea-gods dwell, literally, in their element. But Marinell is unable to join his mother (now renamed Cymodoce) at the sea-gods’ banquet:

He might not with immortal food be fed,  
 Ne with th’eternall Gods to banquet come;  
 But walkt abrode, and round about did come,  
 To view the building of that vncouth place. (4.12.4)

Marinell’s exile from Mediterranean antiquity is all the more obvious upon recalling that in Virgil’s celebrated fourth *Georgic*, Aristaeus, son of the sea-nymph Cyrene, is wondrously conveyed by a mountain-wave beneath the ocean to visit the source of all the

rivers.<sup>22</sup> But Marinell, though also at the confluence of the world's seas, is strangely hydrophobic: readers are told that Cymoent “of his father Marinell did name” (3.4.20), but the *marin* of *Du-marin* has not been fully enfolded into the *marin* of *Marin-ell*. Or, perhaps *Mari-nell*, though Dumarin and Cymoent's son, is the negation of the sea, exiled on Othe Faerie strand's grievous “margent.”

Marinell's marine discontents extend beyond his role as overprotected son to his other role in *The Faerie Queene* as the lamenting coastal lover of Florimell, imprisoned in the sea-god Proteus's bower. (How this imperiled heroine gets there will be discussed in this chapter's final section.) Spenser locates the dwelling “at the bottome of the maine,” tracing the boundaries of Marinell's strand. Forcing the knight to cling to the coastal rocks “Vnder the hanging of an hideous clieffe,” Proteus's bower is Spenser's coastal realm at its most bone-crushing, located

Vnder a mightie rocke, gairst which do raue  
The roaring billowes in their proud disdaine,  
That with the angry working of the waue,  
Therein is eaten out a hollow caue  
That seems rough Masons hand with engines keene  
Had long while labored it to engraue. (3.8.270)

In Book 4, Proteus's dungeon is further described as “Deepe in the bottome of an huge great rock” and “wall'd . . . with waues, which rag'd and ror'd / As they the cliffe in peeces would haue cleft” (4.11.3-4). Perhaps anticipated by the “rocky caue” where Marinell was raised as a child, Proteus's sea-dungeon constitutes a churning zone of precipitous drop-offs and high tides disguising undersea turbulence – a grim boundary where land and sea grudgingly fight to establish dominance. Wave-smacked rocks shatter the walls of water, and with each impact, the rocks themselves lose mass, resulting in caves “engraue[d]” by the “Masons hand” of erosion. The imprisoned Florimell's pleas for help are lost amidst the pounding, cliff-cleaving waves that “pearce the rockes, and hardest marble weare” (4.12.7).

---

<sup>22</sup> For more on Cyreme's cave as the origin of the world's rivers, see David Quint's chapter “The Virgilian Source,” in his *Origin and Originality in Renaissance Literature: Versions of the Source* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 32-42.

In an attempt to recover Spenser's allegorical voice, critics have glossed over the all-too-real dangers of the Faerie coastline, customarily identifying Marinell and Florimell's eventual betrothal as the poet's allegorical unity of water and earth.<sup>23</sup> But Marinell's marine exile undermines this anticipated elemental *discordia concors*. Despite the promise of his watery name, Marinell cannot approach Proteus's cave to rescue Florimell: ". . . he found no way / To enter in, or issue forth below: / For all about that rocke the sea did flow" (4.12.15). Unlike the sea-god Alebius, whose marine agility enables him to explore the water's depths, Marinell is imprisoned amidst his own coastal rocks, on the brink of being dashed to bits should he seek to "issue forth below." Unable to swim, dive, or hold his breath while submerged, "In this sad plight he walked here and there, / And romed round about the rocke in vaine, / As he had lost him selfe, he wist not where" (4.12.17). Even when he is at home (either on the coast or accompanying his sea-nymph mother), Marinell is in exile – a "walker abroad" amidst "vncouth" marine realms, a lonely coastal roamer "round about" the dangerous breakers, and "lost . . . he wist not where."

The piscatory eclogue, as we have seen, lingers on Mediterranean seacoasts as perhaps nature's most protective havens for bereaved lovers. So attuned to lovers' plaintive sadness are the genre's wave-resounding waters (i.e., Glaucus as "a watcher of the watery strand") that rocky coast and ocean wave work in tandem create a shoreline more seductive than threatening. The eclogue's "vasty deep" rhythmically merges with the shore-lovers' laments, and the breakers' pounding energy erotically intensifies in response to their pathos. Marinell's Faerie "margent," however does not sequester him within an erotic solipsism but rather exposes him to coastal exile.

#### **v. Local rivers, local coasts in *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe***

Although the similarities between Marinell's strand and the rugged coastlines of the British Isles are obvious, Spenser refuses to specify its "Faerie" location. His pastoral *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe*, written in the early 1590s, does unfold in view of the local coastlines of the British Isles; but the result is far from celebratory. In contrast to

---

<sup>23</sup> Northrop Frye interprets them as Proserpina-Adonis or Ishtar-Tammuz, myths of vegetative decay and renewal (*Anatomy of Criticism* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957], 153. See also Roche, 185.

Sannazaro, Spenser's persona Colin refines his pastoral voice by *refusies* to lay claim to local coastlines, and by mapping both his provincial Ireland and Queen Elizabeth's "greatest Isle" as equidistant from antiquity's *axis mundi*.

*Colin Clouts* is an often thinly-disguised autobiography of Spenser's 1589 journey from Ireland to England to present the first three books of *The Faerie Queene* to his printer William Ponsonby – and to seek an audience from Elizabeth. Written between the two installments of Spenser's epic, *Colin Clout* also briefly positions readers between Ireland and England on the Irish Sea. Colin / Spenser's pastoral voice at times sounds a note of worldly disillusionment, never so audible as when Colin approaches Cynthia's (Elizabeth's) coastline. If David Shore argues correctly that *Colin Clout* is "in large part a poem about poetry," then it is also a poem about how Spenser refuses to transform local English coastlines into a green world where verse can flourish.<sup>24</sup>

This argument begins not with seacoasts but with rivers – that is, the probability that if asked to recall local bodies of water in Spenser's poetry, one will turn not, as in Sannazaro's eclogues, to coastlines but to rivers. In his 1596 betrothal poem, the *Prothalamion*, the synergy between riverine flow and poetic eloquence comprise Spenser's refrain, "Sweete *Themmes* runne softly, till I end my Song." Rivers, of course, are lavishly celebrated in the fourth book of *The Faerie Queene* and its marriage of the Thames and Medway. Much has been written about Spenser's riverine imagination, how it places such world-renowned rivers as "the fertile Nile," the "Great Ganges," and the "immortall Euphrates" in proximity with such quaintly provincial English tributaries as the "chaulky Kenet," the "soft sliding Breane," and the "wanton Lee."<sup>25</sup> Of the wedding ceremony's incantatory roll call of British rivers, Coleridge once observed that "the mere names constitute half the pleasure we receive."<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> David R. Shore, *Spenser and the Poetics of Pastoral: A Study of the World of Colin Clout* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1985), 105.

<sup>25</sup> Key studies of the Thames and Medway episode include Charles G. Osgood, "Spenser's English Rivers," *Transactions of the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences*, 23 (1920); Roche, *The Kindly Flame*; Gordon Braden, "riverrun: An Epic Catalogue in *The Faerie Queene*," *ELR* 5 (1975): 25-48; Jack B. Oruch, "Spenser, Camden, and the Poetic Marriage of Rivers," *Studies in Philology* 64: 606-24; and Wyman H. Herendeen, *From Landscape to Literature: The River and the Myth of Geography* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1986).

<sup>26</sup> Quoted in Raysor, 36.

Venerating the Tudors' Welsh roots, the marriage ceremony showcases the rivers Severn and Dee, the latter "which Britons long ygone / Did call diuine" (39). But just when readers might conclude that Spenser's exhaustive catalogue of English and Welsh rivers has spent its chorographic energy, the poet announces that "Ne thence the Irishe Riuers absent were" (40). As if reminding the queen where he wrote so much of his epic tribute to her, such rivers as the Liffy, Slane, Aubrian, Boyne, Trowis, and Allo sustain another five stanzas of poetry.<sup>27</sup> It should be noted that of all the guests in attendance at this river marriage, the poet reserves his most personal chorographic praise for the beloved river flowing through his Kilcolman estate, the "Mulla mine, whose waues I whilom taught to weep" (4.11.41). And thus Spenser's autobiographical counterpart to Sannazaro's Bay of Naples is not a Mediterranean seacoast but Ireland's river Mulla.

Eight cantos earlier, "Ne thence" were the Irish rivers absent from Cambell and Triamond's chivalric combat; and at this point, we can make the transition from local rivers to local coastlines. Spenser's chorographic glimpse of the Shannon, Ireland's (and, in fact, the British Isles') longest river, idly interrupts the knights' combat and intentionally anticipates the eleventh canto's river poetry. Flowing into the Atlantic near Limerick, this river, the same "spacious Shenan" attending the wedding ceremony, becomes the vehicle of an extended epic simile, augmenting the poet's observation that neither combatant is able to establish dominance:

Like as the tide that comes fro th'Ocean mayne,  
Flowes vp the Shenan with contrarie forse,  
And ouerruling him in his own rayne,  
Driues back the current of his kindly course,  
And makes it seems to haue some other source:  
But when the floud is spent, then backe againe  
His borrowed waters forst to redisbourse,  
He sends the sea his owne double gaine,  
And tribute eke withal, as to his Soueraine. (4.3.27)

---

<sup>27</sup> In *A View of the State of Ireland*, New English colonial politics briefly cedes place to Irenius's reflection on "beautifull and sweet" Ireland – particularly its "many goodly rivers, replenished with all sort of fish more abundantly" (27). In the wake of scholarship on the question of Spenser in/and Ireland, recent studies have focused on the colonial politics embedded in the marriage ceremony's Irish rivers (Hadfield, *Edmund Spenser's Irish Experience*; McCabe, *Spenser's Monstrous Regiment*, van Es, *Spenser's Forms of History*, and Joan Fitzpatrick, *Shakespeare, Spenser and the Contours of Britain* [Hertfordshire: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2004]).

The simile takes on a poignant autobiographical life of its own, reflecting the poet's keen observation of the commingled fresh and salt waters of local Irish estuaries. Freeing himself from the demands of chivalric narrative, the poet indulges his fascination with Irish tidal bores, courses, and "redisbours[ings]."

Among other things, the simile reminds us it is a topographical necessity that estuaries eventually empty into seas; and local seas comprise a zone that, in the wedding ceremony of the Thames and Medway, Spenser declares poetically off limits. Although seventeen sea gods from mythic antiquity are summoned to attend the ceremony, conspicuously absent are any presiding deities of local English seacoasts – as if Spenser judged the sea caves eating into the chalky headlands of Flamborough, or the steep escarpments of the North and South Downs, or the tide-shredded coasts of Lulworth Cove as lacking the incantatory magic of a riverine mythpoesis. Irish coastlines, unlike Irish rivers, are indeed "absent thence": the Shannon has been invited to the wedding ceremony, but the same local seas that trade tidal flow with the estuary's "redisbourse[d]" waters never make the guest list.

Before turning to *Colin Clout*, we should not overlook the asynchrony of (poetic) time and (salt water) tide that opens the *Amoretti 75*, perhaps Spenser's most widely-admired sonnet. The poet writes the name of his beloved Elizabeth Boyle not on a riverbank but "vpon the strand" (1), only to have the script washed away by the tide. Determined that his poetry achieve eternal fame, the poet then announces his ambition to inscribe her name "in the heuens" (12). Here, the sonnet tropes away from a mutable, tide-scoured coastline to a permanent home for celebrating his beloved. But the tide that, in the *Amoretti 75*, once "made my paynes his pray" (4) threatens again to wash over his poetry – this time as *Colin Clout* approaches the coastal realm of another Elizabeth, Spenser's queen Elizabeth Tudor. Here, Colin gives the *Amoretti 75*'s unmapped tide a local habitation and a name – the churning waters between Ireland and England.

Hobbinol's inviting Colin to narrate his and the Shepherd of the Ocean's (Raleigh's) journey from Ireland to Cynthia's court is a recognizably pastoral convention. Less conventional, however, is Colin's alarm at how quickly local estuarial "redisbours[ings]" become the depths of dangerous straits:

So to the sea we came; *the sea?* That is

A world of waters heaped vp on hie,  
 Rolling like mountains in wide wilderness,  
 Horrible, hideous, roaring with hoarse crie. (196-99; emphasis mine)

“The sea?” From one perspective, Spenser’s urbane wit mocks the outcry of a “shepherdes boye” accustomed to watching his sheep under the local “greene alders by the *Mullaes* shore” (59) - the only “shore” he had ever before seen.<sup>28</sup> But from another, *Colin Clout*’s autobiographical impulses might have drawn upon Spenser’s own memory of how the sea’s shoreward-racing “wide wilderness” toyed with the vessel carrying the precious manuscript intended for his queen – the Irish Sea, that is, as yet another threat to the fragile bond between poet and patron.

Though Elizabethan England and Ireland experienced widely divergent histories of the colonizer and colonized, *Colin Clout*’s water-“heaped” Irish Sea makes no coastal distinction between them. The sea that assaults both islands with indiscriminate force is neither inherently Irish nor English. Elizabethan courtiers may have often regarded Ireland as “overseas,” but *Colin Clout* reminds us that the two islands’ coastal borders share the topography of antiquity’s *apeiron*. Typically, Elizabethan pastoral engages in a richly intertextual dialogue with its classical sources. But as Colin records his visceral fear of the Irish Sea, the strains of Mediterranean pastoral are no longer audible. Instead, one hears Colin’s revisiting of classical poetry’s topos of an *ultima Britannia*. The Irish Sea mimics not Horace’s Mediterranean *oceanus dissociabilis* but rather Catullus’ *horribile aequor* of the North Sea (11.11), exposing Colin’s own adjective “Horrible” as a particularly motivated echo of antiquity’s geographical topos.

No longer evident in Colin/Spenser’s account of Cynthia’s looming coastline is the chorographic eye once so tenderly cast on England’s local rivers – as if, unlike the “soft runnings” of the *Prothalamion*’s Thames, the Irish Sea’s “hoarse crie” resists transposing into poetic song. The Shepherd of the Ocean, in his role as guardian of Virgilian pastoral innocence, attempts to reassure Colin that he is sailing not on a “wide wilderness” but rather on the idyllic coastal domain of the shepherdess Cynthia’s flocks: her “heards be thousand fishes with their frie, / Which in the bosome of the billowes breed” (242-43). But Colin, scarcely distracted by the Shepherd’s idealized, mythopoeic

---

<sup>28</sup> Earlier in the poem, Colin recounts the river Bregog’s wooing of the Mulla.

waters, focuses warily on the all too real topography of England's southwest-facing coastline. He narrates that after passing Lundy on the north coast of Devon,

From thence another world of land we kend,  
Floting amid the sea in ieopardie,  
And round about with mightie white rocks hemd  
Against the seas encroaching crueltie.  
Those same the shepheard told me, were the fields  
In which dame *Cynthia* her landheards fed. (272-77)

The last two lines of this passage comprise the Shepherd of the Ocean's second effort to reassure Colin that they are not "amid the sea in ieopardie" but rather entering Cynthia's white-rocked Fortunate Isle. But again, Colin resists viewing the scene through the Shepherd's eyes. As the ship nears the coastline, Colin spots the headlands of Cornwall: "a stately heape of stones [did] upreare, / That seemd amid the surges for to fleet, / Much greater then that frame, which us did beare" (185-87). The Cornish headlands viewed by Colin are at once Albion's "stately" sentinel and a tide-battered terror-zone, "Floting amid the sea in ieopardie," an unpromising port for *The Faerie Queene's* landfall on Elizabeth's shores.

Perhaps Spenser's aim is to expose Colin's homesickness, registering not a paradise but a brazen world, as distorting the Shepherd's description of Cynthia's realm. But just as likely, Spenser suggests that Colin's fear accurately maps Cynthia's realm within antiquity's *ultima Britannia*.

To return briefly to the marriage of the Thames and Medway, the river guests, as they make their entrance into Proteus's hall, flow in a stately dignity enfolded within the classical heritage of Hesiodic, Homeric, Ovidian, and Virgilian rivers. If the local coastal waters smashing against *Colin Clout's* Lundy and Cornwall curled with the same gentleness as the Mediterranean tides of Marlowe's *Hero and Leander*, they too might have been invited. Idle speculation, perhaps. But it is a fact that Spenser's aesthetic imagination forecloses on any accommodation of the British Isles' *apeiron* within his poetics of the river marriage. And even his favored pastoral mode - from *The Shepheardes Calender* to the Mount Acidale episode of his epic's sixth book, so crucial to the shaping of his poetic career - will not transform local English coastlines into the pastoral green world of Mulla's "greene alder[ed]" banks. Though Colin's poetry once

taught the Mulla's waves to weep, he refuses to become the Irish Sea's Orpheus calming its "hoarse crie." Put another way, Colin refuses to imitate Sannazaro's fondness for his local coastlines (Misenum, Eupleoa, Nisis), sites of the latter's autobiographical poetics.

Colin's fear of the Irish Sea prompts the question: if, in 1589, this strait had swallowed his ship and, along with it, his epic manuscript, how deeply would Elizabeth have mourned the event? However one ponders this question, Spenser exposes the futility of the Shepherd of the Ocean's effort to glorify Cynthia's realm as a pastoral paradise: the very fact of Colin's sea-voyage reminds his readers that in the golden age, sea travel had yet to be invented. Inconceivable was the prospect of a poet having to brave the *apeiron's* dangerous seas only to gain access to a potentially indifferent patron

#### **vi. Prophecy as slander: Britomart's Thames, Paridell's Briton seacoast**

*The Faerie Queene* features several key prophetic voices (Contemplation, Eumnestes, Merlin) who comprise the building blocks of Spenser's rhetoric of praise for Elizabeth's Trojan ancestry. But the voices of slander's rhetoric of blame and accusation also abound, most notably the Blatant Best whose loud bark and venomous bite entangle both poet and queen in a web of mutual distrust culminating in the epic's abandonment before completion.<sup>29</sup> A dominant prophetic thread woven throughout *The Faerie Queene* – what Angus Fletcher years ago termed the "Galfridian matrix" – is the epic's many ambitious genealogical linkages of Brutus's ancient Britain and Elizabeth's Tudor empire, culled from Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae* (c. 1136).<sup>30</sup> But in Book 3.9, Spenser allows slander to insinuate itself into this prophetic matrix during an exchange between the Faerie knight Paridell, more often viewed by readers as a voluptuary than a slanderer, and Elizabeth's female warrior-surrogate Britomart. As this section argues, had the queen lingered over this exchange, she might have caught Spenser in the act of portraying her ancestors not as elite Trojans enjoying the abundance of her

---

<sup>29</sup> On the Blatant Beast as the extension of the poet's own voice, see Kenneth Gross, "Reflections on the Blatant Beast," *Spenser Studies* 13 (1999: 101-23. For the general topic of slander in *The Faerie Queene*, see M. Lindsay Kaplan, *The Culture of Slander in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

<sup>30</sup> Angus Fletcher, *The Prophetic Moment: An Essay on Spenser* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 106-21.

“greatest Isle” but as a line of “embaste ofspring” (3.9.33) justly exiled on the shores of *ultima Britannia*.)

A few cantos earlier, amidst Book 3.3’s remapping of a New Troy via Merlin’s prophecy at Cayr-Merdin (discussed earlier in this chapter), readers encounter a happy merging of epic prophecy, royal praise, and British Isles’s coastlines. Merlin, during his account of the Briton-Saxon wars gleaned from Geoffrey, catalogues a series of ancient regional monarchs ethnically cut off from the line of “Renowned kings” who will be Arthegall’s and Britomart’s descendants. For example, the magus pointedly relegates Adin, “the king of *Orkeny*” (3.37), to an isolated archipelago, one of “six Islands, comprouinciall” (32), lying beyond the bounds of Briton destiny, beyond the island nation’s eventual emergence as “Great Britain.”<sup>31</sup> Merlin’s marginalized “Orkeny” is one outcome of the epic’s calculated plan to define the integrity of Britain’s coastal boundaries via a Briton politico-ethnicity authoritatively cordoned from North Sea islands.

Elizabeth would have been pleased with Merlin’s marginalization of the isolated Orkneys from her imperial epicenter. But less pleasing might have been a passage at the outset of *The Faerie Queene*’s earlier prophetic history – i.e., the *Briton monuments*, whose heavy borrowing from Geoffrey to narrate British history from Brutus to Uther explicitly maps much nearer coastlines in an *ultima Britannia*. Here, Spenser digresses from Geoffrey to ponder the ancient Mediterranean sailors who first espied Britain’s coastlines. The poet revisits not the exhilaration of discovery but rather antiquity’s fear of the region’s coastal hazards: an anonymous “venturous Mariner” struggles “his ship from whose white rocks to saue, / Which all along the Southerne sea-coast lay, / Threatning vnheedy wrecke and rash decay” (2.10.6). Early Greek mariners, as mentioned in the previous chapter, customarily chose to hug the Mediterranean coastline, deferring to the concept of the *peirar*. But Spenser’s “venturous Mariner” learns a hard lesson in the coastal topography of *ultima Britannia*: to hug the transgressive waters of the British Isles’ coastlines is to forfeit the protections of the Mediterranean’s tide-

---

<sup>31</sup> Harry Berger, Jr. identifies the other five islands/coastlines “comprovinciall” as Norway, Denmark, Ireland, Iceland, and Gotland (“The Structure of Merlin’s Chronicle in *The Faerie Queene* III.iii,” in his *Revisionary Play: Studies in the Spenserian Dynamic*, intro. Louis Montrose [Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988], 123-34).

caressed shoreline. In this digression, Spenser is less invested in Geoffrey's fertile Albion than in the region's daunting white cliffs as the bane of Mediterranean sailors exhausting their nautical skills to avoid "vnheedy wrecke and rash decay."

This menacing coastline reappears in Book 3.9, where Spenser revives the Galfridian matrix in the form of an exchange between Elizabeth's surrogate, the naive Britomart, and the jaded knight Paridell. This Aegean-born knight sets his own genealogy in competition with Britomart's right to recruit Geoffrey in the service of British history.<sup>32</sup> To be sure, this descendant of the Helen-abducting Paris is an obsolete vestige of Homeric epic. And true to his notorious ancestry, he later initiates a tawdry seduction of Hellenore ("Helen-whore") - but not before he cheapens Elizabeth's elite Trojan descent by stranding it on the shores of an *ultima Britannia*.

Attempting to lend prestige to his upbringing on the pseudo-mythic Aegean island of Paros - from an Elizabethan perspective, a geographically perverse *eastering* of empire - Paridell attacks the aims of dynastic epic itself by exposing the vanity of any attempt to found New Troys: Troy is "now nought, but an idle name," "buried low" in its own ashes, punished by a "direfull destinie," its "worthy prayeses being blent" by a disgraceful and "embaste ofspring" (3.9.33). Britain's coastal boundaries determine the direction of their exchange when Britomart diverts attention from Paridell's doomed version of the *fata Troiana* to recall the rich history of the Thames, the riverine embodiment of the New Troy. At this juncture, *The Faerie Queene's* contemporary readership might have been reminded of this preeminently nationalist river's role in Tudor court ceremonies - for example, Elizabeth's travelling upriver from Greenwich to the Tower of London for her 1558 coronation.

But Britomart invokes not the stately dignity of the *Prothalamion's* inland Thames but rather the river's estuarial turbulence as it approaches an inhospitable land's end:

It *Troynouant* is hight, that with the waues

---

<sup>32</sup> Key studies of their exchange include Roche, *The Kindly Flame*; Michael O'Connell, *Mirror and Veil: The Historical Dimension of Spenser's "Faerie Queene"* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1977); Mihoko Suzuki, *Metamorphoses of Helen: Authority, Difference, and the Epic* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989); Heather Dubrow, "The Arraignment of Paridell: Tudor Historiography in *The Faerie Queene*, III.ix," *Studies in Philology*, 87 (1990): 312-28. For Paridell as a trope for "cultural exhaustion," see Harry Berger, Jr.'s chapter "The Discarding of Malbecco in *The Faerie Queene* III.ix-x," in his *Revisionary Play*, 1988.

Of wealthy *Thamis* washed is along,  
 Vpon whose stubborne neck whereat he raues  
 With roring rage, and sore him selfe does throng,  
 That all men feare to tempt his billowes strong,  
 She fastned hath her foot, which standes so hy,  
 That it a wonder of the world is song  
 In forreine landes, and all which passen by,  
 Beholding it from farre, doe thinke it threates the skye. (3.9.45)

From one perspective, Britomart's iconic depiction of Troynovant's foot on the neck of the Thames is a robust tribute to Brutus's nation-founding heroism, exemplifying how, in Fletcher's apt reading of the image, "heroes create a *civitas* to harness brute energy" (136). The foot of Brutus' London Bridge attempts a "brutal" mastery of the Thames, rendering the estuary a gateway to an emergent maritime power, heir to imperial Rome as history's New Troy.

But from another perspective, Britomart's salute to the estuary, swirling in "billowes strong," threatens to drown in a poetics of marine turbulence.<sup>33</sup> Seeking a poetic harnessing of the river's escalating energy that hurls it toward the English Channel, she struggles to contain the waters within a static emblem of imperial glory; and her salute is evidence that any description of the Thames's undisciplined hydraulics is itself subject to assault by the dangerous currents under the London Bridge. Her noting the Thames's reputation "In forreine lands" also inadvertently reminds readers that the estuary is, in fact, the same hazardous flood necessitating Britain's long-overdue first tide-table. (See introductory chapter.) The estuary both anticipates the emergent nation's imperial future and recedes into the past to recall antiquity's seemingly obsolete maps of the British Isles as not a *civitas* but a coastline scarcely habitable, swallowed up in the "brute energy" of a marine remoteness.

---

<sup>33</sup> Even the inexhaustible riverine imagination of Michael Drayton's *Poly-olbion* became more tentative at the Thames estuary. Of Brutus' choice of location for Lud's town, Drayton noted

Where fair *Thames* has course into a crescent cast  
 (That forced by his tides, as still by her he hasts,  
 He might his surging waves into her bosom send)  
 Because too far in length, his Town should not extend. (16:325-28)

Here, Drayton fashions an etiological myth of why the Thames is crescent-shaped – a personifying myth suggesting the river's fear of its own tidal bores. Avoiding the "surging" tides that threatened to annihilate its status as a river, Drayton's Thames (and, by extension, his river poetry) refused to extend "too far in length" – too far, that is, into the churning ocean that exposed the waters of the New Troy as antiquity's waters of non-resemblance.

Paridell seizes on Britomart's Thames as an opening to turn *The Faerie Queene's* Galfridian matrix against itself. He counters Britomart's panegyric by turning not to Brutus the nation founder, but to Brutus the patricidal son; and thus, the knight's revisionist early Briton history rewrites Britomart's "roring" estuary as the curse of an isolated coastal periphery.

If Britomart's Geoffrey inspires her praise of Brutus's founding of London ("so huge a mind could not in lesser rest" [46.7]), Paridell adduces Geoffrey to remind his interlocutor why Brutus sailed to Albion in the first place: fleeing "for feare. . . / Or els for shame" after accidentally slaying his father Sylvius "through luckles arrowes glaunce," Paridell dredges up Geoffrey's own initial portrayal of Brutus as doomed to a marine "wearie wandring" and "fatall course" (48) that sweep him away to an isolated coastline. Epic destiny cedes place to the vagaries of ocean currents as Paridell pointedly revisits Geoffrey's account of Brutus's protracted western wanderings from Rome to the island of Loegecia to Aquitaine and, finally, to an island "wholly waste, and void of peoples trode, / Saue an huge nation of the Geaunts broode" (3.10.49). Paridell's Brutus is not so much a new Aeneas as, echoing Othello's self-description, an "extravagant and wheeling stranger" (1.1.138) cut loose from Rome's imperial moorings. And if Geoffrey's Briton coast eventually becomes the heroic site of Brutus's defeat of indigenous giants, Paridell's coast is little more than an island prison for patricidal Mediterranean vagabonds.

No "wealthy *Thamis*" in Brutus's Albion – just exile "Into the vtmost Angle of the world he knew," driven to an island "The furthest North, that did to them appear" (3.9.47). The knight's locating of Britain as "the vtmost Angle of the world" is strategically double-edged. On the one hand, it gestures in the direction of England's Saxon lineage, particularly Bede's well known story of Bishop Gregory's word play on "Angleshmen" as heavenly "angels."<sup>34</sup> But on the other hand, Paridell's hinting at England's Saxon ethnicity sounds a discordant, ill-timed note within the manifestly Briton context of Britomart's praise of the Thames. He implies that in antiquity's geography, Briton coastlines – including the estuary presumably leading to Brutus's New

---

<sup>34</sup> In his 1605 *Remains Concerning Britain* (1605), Camden summarizes Bede's story of how Gregory recognized the "Angleshmen . . . for they have Angelike faces, and seeme meete to be made coheires with the Angells in heaven" (ed. D. R. Dunn [Toronto, 1984], 16).

Troy - were considered no less marginal than the marginalized “Orkeny” of Merlin’s Adin; and he implies that the Britons, far from “angelic,” were “angled, unmistakably echoing Ptolemy’s designation of the British Isles as an “unknown land”; or Tacitus’s depiction of the British Isles as “far away”; or Pliny’s British Isles as positioned “even to the utmost bounds of the earth.”<sup>35</sup>

And thus does Paridell insert Greco-Roman geography’s perceptions of an *ultima Britannia* into the origin of British history. Readers wholly invested in the authenticity of Britain as a New Troy (most notably, Elizabeth) had the option of dismissing Paridell’s “Angle[d]” Britain as the jaded cant of Paris’s descendant, himself a vagabond as estranged from Britain’s imperial future as Brutus was from Rome’s. By way of linking Paridell to his creator’s intentions, one could argue that the knight is as obsolete as Spenser was marginal on his “overseas” Ireland. But Paridell (Spenser-as-Paridell?) does successfully demonstrate that no British version of the westering of empire could render obsolete the far more venerable history of a geographical topos originating in antiquity. In the final analysis, Paridell, reviving antiquity’s original slander against British coastlines, does as much damage to the epic’s prophetic structure as the Blatant Beast.

### **vii. North by northwest: Ariosto’s Ptolemaic Hebrides**

After visiting Colin’s tide-scarred Devon coastline and Paridell’s “angled” early Briton coastline, we are prepared to return to Marinell’s Faerie strand, where no Theocritean shepherds catch seductive glimpses of the sea, and no Sannazaran Lycons pause to observe delicate, rock-clinging urchins. This shoreline comes into focus not as a “Faerie” seacoast but rather as a coastline somewhere in the British Isles; and final evidence for this mapping is found in Spenser’s borrowings from Ariosto’s *Orlando furioso*, whose heroine Angelica is terrorized on a coastline so remote one has to resort to the maps of antiquity to find it. And as this section argues, where one finds it is in *ultima Britannia* – namely, Ptolemy’s Hebrides.

---

<sup>35</sup> In his 1327 *Polychronicon*, Higden writes: “Anglia hath that name as it were an angle and a corner of the world” (22-5), in *The English Translation of John Trevisa and of an Unknown Writer of the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Churchill Babington et al., 9 vols. (London, 1865-86).

The *Orlando* comprises a vast *mappa mundi*, enfolding several detailed itineraries into its sprawling narrative. Ruggiero, soaring on his wayward hippogriff, travels from Cathay to the south of France to the West Indies to the East Pacific. Astolfo's journeys on the hippogriff take him from Asia to North Africa to the straits of Gibraltar.<sup>36</sup> The world maps of antiquity particularly captured Ariosto's attention. Luciano Serra has demonstrated that the *cinquecento* city-state of Ferrara was an important European center of cartographical study, and the Estense library housed a large collection of the maps of Pliny, Strabo, and – particularly significant, as will become clear – Ptolemy.<sup>37</sup>

In his epic's final canto, Ariosto offers his own tribute to Sannazaro as "he who lures / The Muses from the mountains to the shores" (46.17). But twice, Ariosto isolates imperiled heroines not on the Neapolitan beauty-coasts of his admired predecessors, but on wave-beaten, muse-abandoned islands just off the Scottish coastline. Compared to his epic's other far-flung locations, these islands are not that distant from continental Europe; but the poet suggests they might as well lie on the earth's remote edges. In the eighth canto, Angelica is stranded on the lonely shore of Ebuda where, naked and chained to a rock, she is preyed upon by hungry orcs. Two cantos later, the poet, still indulging his sado-comic impulse to map female vulnerability on a forbidden coastline, locates his narrative off the northeast coast of Scotland (*vers Scozia*), where Olimpia, sailing northeast from Holland to Zealand, is stranded after her ship, tacking sharply left (*alla sinistra banda*), is blown off course by a North Atlantic storm (10.15). Replaying Angelica's tribulation, Ariosto strands Olimpia on yet another bleak, orc-patrolled coastline.

As the lurid model for the perils of Spenser's Florimell (to be discussed in this chapter's final section), Angelica's coastal ordeal calls for a brief summary. The heroine, fleeing Europe to return to her native Cathay, is pursued by a lecherous but impotent hermit. He conjures a demon that frightens her horse into bolting out to sea, eventually carrying her to a remote island (6.37-49). On this harsh and lonely (*aspro et ermo*) coast,

---

<sup>36</sup> For Ruggiero's tracing of three-quarters of the world of Ptolemy's *Geography*, see Douglas Biow, "Mirabile Dictu": *Representations of the Marvelous in Medieval and Renaissance Epic* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 108.

<sup>37</sup> On early modern Ferrara as a center of cartography, see Luciano Serra, "Da Tolomeo alla Garfagnana: La Geografia dell'Ariosto," in *Ludovico Ariosto: Il suo tempo, la sua terra, la sua gente* (Regio Emilia, A. Manzoni,; 1974), 153-56.

Angelica is trapped among dark rocks (*scuri sassi*) and frightening sea-caves (*spaventose grotte*), reduced to praying that she will drown amidst protruding rock (*rilevato sasso*) and horrid reef (*scoglio*). When the hermit overtakes her, readers discover that the heroine is destined not for rape but rather for a fate almost as dreaded – an even more distant coastal exile. The inhabitants of the bleakly remote island of Ebuda, scouring the coastal waters in search of women to sacrifice to the sea-god Proteus’s monstrous orc, capture her and chain her naked body to Ebuda’s coastal rocks. (One can pause to note that in Sannazaro’s “Galatea,” by contrast, the Mediterranean’s coastal orcs do not devour victims, but rather slumber in sympathy with grieving lovers.) Awaiting sacrifice to Proteus’s orc, Angelica is eventually rescued by Ruggiero, traversing Europe on his hippogriff (but not, it bears noting, before her coastal terror had undoubtedly left its mark on the *Orlando*’s female readership).

It is worth speculating on the extent to which this episode may have contributed to Ariosto’s dubious reputation among certain *cinquecento* literary critics for violating the decorum of epic high seriousness. Inherited from Boiardo, Ariosto’s interweaving of epic and romance was reviled by, among many others, the epic theorist Antonio Minturno for generating page-filler plots where “many things mingle neither according to verisimilitude nor necessity.”<sup>38</sup> Minturno undoubtedly read Ariosto’s chaining of Angelica’s naked body to a coastal rock as just such a page-filler - as titillating for male readers as it was distasteful for female readers, and lacking any epic “necessity” within the *Orlando*’s dynastic matter of Charlemagne.

At the same time, Ariosto’s low-comic breach of epic high seriousness gains momentum from ancient geography’s aversion to the world’s northwest edges. Though lacking epic “necessity,” the Ebudan episode charts Angelica’s vulnerability as directly proportionate to antiquity’s perceptions of this archipelago’s remoteness. As if the towering rocks and craggy reefs where Angelica’s horse initially strands her are not alien enough, Ariosto’s narrative sweeps his heroine further westward to the Ebudan coast.

---

<sup>38</sup> *L’Arte Poetica*, in *Anthology of Critical Theory from Plato*, ed. Allan Gilbert, 276. For the authoritative summary of *cinquecento* critical controversie concerning the *Orlando*’s generic status, see Bernard Weinberg, *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance*, 2 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961).

For that matter, Angelica is swept away from the genre of dynastic epic – literary history’s *medius mundi locus* – to what antiquity judged the edge of the world.<sup>39</sup>

A Mediterranean source for Ariosto’s explicit association of female terror and coastal remoteness could well have been Ovid’s myth of Europa, seized by Jove and carried off to Crete. But Ariosto’s low comedy luridly escalates Ovidian representations of female terror by sweeping a distressed damsel to the North Atlantic. A visual source for this North Atlantic might have been an early fifteenth-century Duerer engraving [**to be included in the final manuscript**] that depicts a grisly merman abducting a mermaid from a churning surf, while, on the sea-bluffs in the background, a quasi-medieval city fortress coldly walls off its inhabitants from her terror. Ariosto seemingly gives Duerer’s otherwise unidentifiable coast, conceived within a northern European imagination, a local (or, more accurately, remote) habitation and a name in antiquity’s extreme North Atlantic periphery.

At this point in the narrative, the *Orlando*’s readers cannot be blamed for their uncertainty as to exactly where, on the world map, Angelica’s fate further unfolds. The islands off Scotland where Olimpia is abandoned are *alla sinistra banda* (“on the left tack”), perhaps in the vicinity of the Orkneys. Ebuda, the poet informs us, is in the Hebrides; but where is *Ariosto*’s Hebrides? The poet narrates that Ruggiero spots Angelica while gliding north-by-northwest beyond the straits of Hercules, beyond the *ultima terra* (the “distant land”) of England, arriving at Ebuda, which lies *nel mar di tramontana inver l’ocaso, / oltre l’Irlanda* (“in the great northern sea, toward the west, beyond Ireland” [8.51]). And thus particularly relevant here is Ariosto’s access to the maps of Ptolemy that were housed in the Estense collection. In his *Geography*, Ptolemy writes: “Above Hibernia are the Ebudan islands five in number, the largest of which toward the west is called Ebuda. . .” (II.i; p. 49).<sup>40</sup> As the historian O. A. W. Dilke usefully points out, Ptolemy’s Ireland is six degrees too far north, occupying the same latitudes as north Britain; and the extreme northern region of mainland Scotland is, in

<sup>39</sup> Noting Ruggiero’s lack of control over the hippogriff, Albert Ascoli ponders Ebuda’s remoteness by observing that the paladin is swept “beyond the long-established limits of human experience” (*Ariosto’s Bitter Harmony: Crisis and Evasion in the Italian Renaissance* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987], 136).

<sup>40</sup> In the third century A.D., Solinus reported that the Ebudan islands were separated by narrow, dangerous straits (*angusta interluvie*), and that agriculture was unknown to the island’s primitive inhabitants (Solinus, *Collectanea rerum memorabilium*, quoted in Boas, et al., 367).

Dilke's words, a "conspicuous deformation," jutting far out to the northeast.<sup>41</sup> **[map to be included in the final manuscript]** As a result, Ptolemy's Hebrides are stranded in the remotest northwest boundaries of his world map. They seemingly drift away from Scotland, which turns its "deformed" back on its own longitudinally skewed archipelago.

Ptolemy's cartographic error, then, marks the "truth" of Angelica's terror-Hebrides as located in antiquity's otherwise obsolete topos of an *ultima Britannia*. When Ariosto chose to (dis)locating Ebuda beyond Ireland in the extreme northwest corner of the globe, he also introduced the topos of an *ultima Britannia* into the literary history of dynastic epic. Like Angelica's refractory horse, or Ruggiero's uncontrollable hippogriff, the *Orlando's* urbane westering of empire goes momentarily berserk, hurling the narrative *too* far northwest, warped into an improbably remote Hebrides geo-culturally estranged from the more serious epic matter of Charlemagne. But Ariosto's whimsical Ebuda does have the more serious consequence of offering a useful literary historical clue that the coordinates of Marinell and Florimell's terror-strand should be plotted not in the fictive space of "Faerie" but rather in the maps of antiquity's *ultima Britannia*.

### viii. Reading Spenser reading Ariosto's Hebrides

Spenser likely pegged the *Orlando's* eighth canto as introducing a different kind of coastline into both the geography and the gender politics of epic literary history: in Homeric epic, men are tragically seduced by the blandishments of Circean, Mediterranean beauty-coasts, but in Ariostan epic, women such as Angelica (and Olimpia) are low comically tortured on northern British Isles terror-coasts. For *cinquecento* literary critics, as we have seen, Ariosto's coastal stranding of Angelica was likely one of the *Orlando's* many dispensable episodes. But Spenser undoubtedly perceived a larger significance in Ariosto's toying with the British Isles as a cartographic extremity in the top left corner of the Ferrarese geo-literary imagination. Ariosto's low coastal comedy may have presented Spenser with a strategy for acting out his discontents

---

<sup>41</sup> O. A. W. Dilke, *Greek and Roman Maps* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 82. At the same time, Dilke also gives Ptolemy credit for being generally recognized as the first cartographer to develop a coordinated, more mathematically precise system of latitudes and longitudes.

with the queen by remapping her courtly epicenter in the remote northern islands of Ariosto's Ptolemaic Hebrides.

Whereas Ariosto comically exploited what his continental perspective viewed as the Hebrides' remoteness, the *Orlando's* Elizabethan readers would have been hard pressed to ignore the eighth canto's insistent drift to the north-northwest boundaries of their own British Isles, described two cantos later as *ultima Inghilterra* (10.72). But if, as is likely, many of these readers turned instead to the *Orlando's* 1591 English translation by Elizabeth's godson Sir John Harington, then they escaped being swept into Ariosto's Hebrides. In Canto 10.60 of his translation (verse 72 of the original), the epic's protagonist Ruggiero, traversing Europe on his hippogriff, briefly lands in England, just prior to his rescue (and own decidedly unheroic, attempted rape) of Angelica. In his translation's margins, Harington briefly nods to his Italian original, noting that "Ariosto cal's us ultima Ingleterra, the uttermost country. So in time past the old Romans wrate."<sup>42</sup> The tone of Harington's marginal note on a once "marginal" England is casually informative, even patronizing: he reduces antiquity's venerable geographic imagination to the writings of "old Romans" – a demystification of *ultima Britannia* as an obsolete holdover from "time past."

Though Harington imports the low comedy of Ariosto's impotent hermit, he abstracts away from the geographical specificity of this terror-coast, perhaps the devoted godson's recognition of the original episode as all too proximate to his monarch. Harington's Angelica is stranded on "a solitarie place" (40.2) vaguely located (not unlike the mythic Fortunate Isles) "about the setting of the sonne" (45.4). But he never identifies the coastline as the Hebrides; and Angelica's translated terror-coast lacks the original coast's telltale cartographic detail, its attention to the all too real dangers of the Ebudan straits. Absent from his translation are the island's protruding rocks, dark sea-caves, and jagged reefs that, for antiquity, traced a dreaded *apeiron*. As if by way of apology for dwelling on the hermit's lurid desires, Harington appends a compensatory "Moral" to Angelica's perils: "In the hard adventures of *Angelica* we may note how perilous a thing beautie is if it be not especially garded with the grace of God and with

---

<sup>42</sup> All references to Harington's translation are taken from *Ludovico Ariosto's "Orlando Furioso," translated into English Heroical Verse by Sir John Harington*, ed., intro. Robert McNulty (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 117.

virtue of the mynde, being continually assayld with enemies spirituall and temporall” (99). Determined to extract a maxim from an episode that Minturno likely judged unnecessary to the epic plot, Harington’s moral glosses over Ariosto’s intentionally low comic triangulation of male impotence, female vulnerability, and coastal remoteness.

Spenser also refuses to identify the coastline where his heroine Florimell is stranded as the Hebrides. But as my earlier discussion of Marinell argued, the topographic specificity of the Faerie coast is a convincing facsimile of Ariosto’s *ultima Britannia*. On Spenser’s Faerie seacoast, female terror on a menacing shoreline is also sado-comically showcased; and Florimell’s imprisonment in Proteus’s sea-walled dungeon closely mirrors Angelica’s imprisonment amidst the Ebudan rocks. So extensive, in fact, were Spenser’s borrowings from Ebuda that the queen’s surrogate, unlike Angelica, is almost exclusively a coastal heroine.<sup>43</sup>

As critics have often noted, Florimell is *The Faerie Queene*’s paradigmatic “fearefull damzell” – all the more desirable for being perpetually chased by male pursuers; and on Spenser’s terror-coast, Florimell becomes allegorized as fear itself. As she flees from “the griesly Forster” and the witch’s hyena-monster that craves “feed[ing] on womens flesh” (3.7.22), the poet depicts her escape route topographically: she is “compeld to change / The land for sea, at randon there to raunge” (3.8.20). Though wandering “at randon” is romance’s definitive itinerary, Florimell’s “randon” wandering leads her specifically to Marinell’s seacoast, where she endures – literally and metaphorically - “new waues of “weary wretchednesse” (3.8.20). When Spenser narrates that “now she gan approach to the sea shore” (3.7.25), he might as well have alerted readers that his heroine has wandered into the low comic genre he inherited from Ariosto’s Ebuda. The poet pauses to compare Florimell to Ovid’s Daphne fleeing Apollo “on th’*Aegean* strond” (3.7.26), but this comparative nod toward the Mediterranean proves cynical. Whereas Daphne is saved by her father Peneus via transformation into a laurel tree, Florimell must endure a lonely struggle for survival on the Faerie strand, its terror absurdly heightened when the witch’s hyena-monster disembowels her horse. The Ovidian exoticism of Daphne’s “*Aegean* strond” is replaced by Florimell’s arrival at a “roaring shore” (3.7.27), where roving hyenas devour horses – all the more distant from

---

<sup>43</sup> William Blissett notes Angelica’s influence on Florimell (“Florimell and Marinell,” *SEL* 5 [1965], 91).

the mythic shores of an Ovidian Mediterranean where wondrous metamorphoses save women from rape.

Spenser never so faithfully aspires to Ariosto's characteristic mix of debased sexuality and threatened virginity as when Florimell, seeking refuge in a fishing boat, "with the tide droue forward careleslie" into the ocean – only to encounter a lecherous but impotent fisherman, "droncke with drowsinesse" but incited by lust upon awakening and gazing upon her (3.8.21-22). In crude response to her pleas to return his boat to shore, the fisherman "threw her downe, ne car'd to spill / Her garments gay with scales of fish that all did fill" (3.8.26), reducing Sannazaro's piscine pathos to fishy bathos. The sea-god Proteus eventually rescues the heroine from the fisherman, only to imprison her in his own coastal dungeon when she spurns his own attempts to seduce her.<sup>44</sup> Florimell, like Angelica, is not rescued but displaced - "chaung'd from one to other feare" (3.8.33) - from peril in the coastal fishing waters to even greater peril amidst Proteus's "roaring billowes," raging as if "they the cliffe in peeces would haue cleft." And thus does Spenser relocate Proteus, "Shepherd of the seas of yore" (3.8.30), from the Mediterranean to the Hebrides, where he is transformed into a sadistic warden of an Ariostan marine-prison. (Here, one is well reminded that Proteus was not in attendance at the marriage of the Thames and the Medway.)

Like Angelica, Florimell is also eventually rescued. But her impending marriage to Marinell is deferred, left "to another place to be perfected" (4.12). The Faerie seacoast disappears from Spenser's narrative – but not until the poet has suspended his readers amidst a number of unresolved questions. How can Elizabeth expect her Trojan *renovatio* to overgo the *Orlando*'s strategic encoding of any further westering of empire beyond Charlemagne's court (or the Ferrara of Ariosto's patron Ippolito) as lost in antiquity's remote edges of the world? How can an epic poet residing on a marginal Ireland be expected to surpass a continental predecessor who has succeeded in transporting antiquity's topos of an *ultima Britannia* into the literary history of dynastic epic? How can Spenser prevent the queen's coastal "envy of less happier lands," echoing *Richard II*'s John of Gaunt, from becoming an unenviable literary historical joke whose

---

<sup>44</sup> For Spenser's imitations of Ariosto's Proteus, see Alpers, 195; Roche, 11-14; and A. Bartlett Giamatti, *Play of Double Senses: Spenser's Faerie Queene* (Prentice-Hall, 1975). Pamela J. Benson reads Florimell's rescue by Proteus as an act of Grace ("Florimell at Sea," *Spenser Studies* 6 [1985]).

recondite punch line originates in Ariosto's low-comic deployments of an *ultima Britannia*? Finally, how can we return to the Ditchley portrait without discerning the spectral geography of a Ptolemaic Hebrides that lurks behind the queen's imperial stance?