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Review Essay: John D. Bernard, *Ceremonies of Innocence: Pastoralism in the Poetry of Edmund Spenser*

Steven Max Miller
Millersville University of Pennsylvania

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John D. Bernard, *Ceremonies of Innocence: Pastoralism in the Poetry of Edmund Spenser*, Cambridge University Press, 1989, ix, 242 pp., biblio., \$42.50.

Although densely concise prose sometimes obscures his argument, John D. Bernard has written what the book's dust jacket aptly describes as "the most comprehensive study of pastoralism in Edmund Spenser's poetry" to date. Bernard traces pastoral elements through the bulk of Spenser's poetry, focusing on relationships between the *vita contemplativa* represented by pastoral poetry and the contrasting *vita activa* associated with heroic poetry and courtly values. Bernard asserts that "Spenser never resolved his personal and social conflicts as a poet" (165), but Bernard demonstrates a progression in the poet's work toward a "pastoral of contemplation" distinct from new historicists' "pastoral of power." Bernard sees Spenser's pastoral as peculiarly mediating between the poet's inspired contemplation and the political exigencies of Elizabethan court life. As his poetic career mirrored Vergil's composition of eclogues, georgics, and epic, Spenser became increasingly disillusioned with Vergil's Arcadian model of pastoral poetry and the court poet's role, ultimately seeming to retreat into *contemptus mundi* as a thinly veiled criticism of court life.

Bernard sees the pivotal events in Spenser's life around 1591 (the publication date of *Complaints* and the prefatory date of *Colin Clouts Come Home Againe*) as the biographical corollary to Spenser's reevaluation of the poet's role as it appears in his works. This emphasizes Spenser's failure to obtain preferment with the publication of the first installment of *The Faerie Queene*, but Bernard's theory of Spenser as poet stresses a positive role for poetry even when the poet's social and didactic goals seem blighted. The pastoral is a locus of appropriation of authority in which Spenser often demonstrated his own agency by creating in dissembling form the images of imperial power as well as the reflection of inspired contemplation. Bernard acknowledges the important recent work of Louis A. Montrose and points to the roots of his own perspective on the pastoral in the criticism of William Empson, Paul J. Alpers, and Harry Berger, Jr. In some respects Bernard's work can be seen as an attempt to accommodate more traditional readings of Spenser's poetry to the politically conscious work of New Historicism. Bernard pursues this goal by analyzing Spenser's poetry in a biographical framework that utilizes archetypal and formalist approaches; and his examination of the arrangement of the poems in the 1591 volume of *Complaints* is particularly interesting. His reading of *The Sheperdes Calender* is provocative, and he treats *The Faerie Queene* as the two separate parts that Spenser committed to print in 1590 and 1596, stressing continuity in the poet's role.

Certainly the pattern that Bernard observes in Spenser's career is not surprising, but the comprehensive survey of pastoralism is a valuable contribution

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to Spenser studies. As a concise examination of the genre in Spenser's works, the book offers a learned and thoughtful perspective, but not the last word, on Spenser's pastoral.

Steven Max Miller

Millersville University of Pennsylvania

Richard Dutton, *William Shakespeare: A Literary Life*, St. Martin's Press, 1989, xii, 180 pp., biblio., index, \$35.00.

Not a conventional biography, this book focuses on Shakespeare's professional career: his life as a poet, playwright, and shareholder in the Globe theater. It is little concerned with his immediate family, education, property investments, or private relationships. Instead it treats subjects and issues such as the status of actors and the acting profession; patronage; censorship; topical allusions; coterie vs. public drama; rivalry between the major companies; Shakespeare's earnings and other business details connected with the dramatic professions; and his choice of dramatic subjects and style compared to the choices of his contemporaries, especially Ben Jonson. In fact, one of the questions Dutton, author or editor of several books on Jonson, contemplates is why Shakespeare worked "in modes and styles so different from those adopted by his younger rival" (xi). This treatment of Shakespeare within the context of other playwrights and their various responses to the theatrical marketplace is one of the more interesting topics of the book.

This treatment of Shakespeare is also why the book will be useful primarily to undergraduates who tend to read Shakespeare in a vacuum, and who have never heard of Middleton, Marston, or Beaumont, much less read them. This book will expand their conception of Shakespeare as a romantic genius and allow them to see him as a consummate working professional affected by the practical exigencies of his craft and the business of satisfying paying customers at the court or Bankside. While it is, of course, impossible to state the precise effect of, for instance, the dimensions of the Globe theater on the plays, Dutton takes such information and explores its repercussions in a balanced and impartial fashion. For example, Shakespeare's steady income as an actor, playwright, and shareholder allowed him to get by writing approximately two plays per year, compared to the average of as many as six for most playwrights. Dutton suggests that this comparatively light work load gave Shakespeare an advantage over his rivals by allowing him to compose for quality rather than quantity, a privilege Ben Jonson also acquired after he received the court masque commission.