

The Implications of Form for *The Shepheardes Calender*



THE *Shepheardes Calender* is the most avowedly eclectic masterpiece in English. Spenser acknowledges several borrowings in the names of the speakers and in the emblems, as well as in the lines of the poem themselves; and E. K. points to many more. The only really new ingredient is the form, a framework which links the separate eclogues into a connected series.¹ Everything else is conscious imitation of a convention, or at least of a precedent. Therefore the implications of the form become salient in any attempt to assess the distinctive genius of the work.

The calendar form is pointedly announced in the title, and pointedly stressed by the subtitle, 'twelve Æglogues proportionable to the twelve monethes'. A handbook of popular astrology was also sold as a *Calendar of Shepherds*, but the relation between these publications should not be overworked. They are two quite different things, and in actual fact share little except their titles. Spenser certainly would not proclaim affinities with the other *Calendar of Shepherds*, that vulgar, clumsy, old-fashioned manual sold in quantity to the untutored, unlike anything approved by the Areopagus. Spenser chose his title, instead, to announce its pastoral nature (then a relatively untried mode in English) and its calendar form. These were the two most notable qualities which the work exhibited.

We clearly must ask, then, why so much emphasis on physical form, and why the choice of the twelve-part form in particular? None of Spenser's predecessors in pastoral had published precisely twelve ec-

¹ Only W. W. Greg has made anything of this framework, offering criticism based on its 'architectural design . . . [its] geometrical pattern'; see *Pastoral Poetry and Pastoral Drama* (London, 1906), pp. 84 ff. See also A. C. Hamilton, 'The Argument of Spenser's *Shepheardes Calender*', *ELH* xxiii (1956), 171-182, who suggests that the arrangement of eclogues reveals Spenser's 'rejection of the pastoral life for the truly dedicated life in the world' (p. 181).

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logues except Petrarch, and his eclogues were presented singly with no framework to suggest interrelationships.

Although a calendar had never before been used to organize a series of eclogues, the literary calendar was itself a well established form. Even here Spenser is borrowing; his originality lies only in combining two alien genres. The literary calendar had been instituted by Ovid in the *Fasti*, planned for twelve months but surviving in only six books. And this work was indisputably in Spenser's mind, because Cuddy's emblem which closes the 'October' eclogue comes from book vi of the *Fasti*. Ovid lists the Roman holy days month by month with day-by-day entries, but often pauses to digress—and these digressions are the memorable passages. There are three major strands in Ovid's poem: historical, astronomical (casual and incorrect), and religious—three strands which also interweave the fabric of Spenser's *Shepheardes Calender*.

Christians were ready to adapt the calendar form to their own poetic purposes, and c. 850 a German monk, Wandalbert, wrote a *Martyrologium* using the form of the *Fasti* for Christian saints rather than pagan sinners. These hexameters had been assimilated into the corpus of Bede, where the *Martyrologium* regularly appeared without attribution to Wandalbert.² More to the point, perhaps, is a lengthy calendar of saints' days in hexameters by Baptista Mantuanus, the model of the satiric eclogue as Spenser practised it. Mantuanus composed twelve books *De sacris diebus*, in obvious imitation of the *Fasti*. But in his poetic preface he sententiously warned the reader that here are no heathen deities; instead,

Liber iste docet quo tramite ad astra
Pervenere illi Heroes quibus annuit arcem
Aetheream Pater omnipotens.³

In the Christian tradition, then, the literary calendar had become a means of religious instruction, of pointing out the pathway to heaven blazed by the saints under the guidance of Our Father omnipotent.

The most conspicuous poem in calendar form in the 1570s was Palingenius' *Zodiake of Life*, arranged in twelve books corresponding to the signs of the zodiac. In England the second complete edition of Barnabe Googe's translation had appeared in 1576. It is not a calendar in the

² Cf., for example, Bede Venerabilis, *Opera* (Basle, 1563), I, 243–265. Wandalbert's *Martyrologium* most recently appears in J.-P. Migne, *Patrologia Latina* cxxi, 586–623.

³ In *Ultima pars operis* (Lyons, 1516), aiii.

strict sense, but rather an encyclopedia of morality, exemplified in classical mythology, natural philosophy, homely adage, and religious satire. Its appeal for Spenser is inherent in the title page of the 1576 edition:

The Zodiake of life . . . Wherein are contained twelve severall labours, painting out moste lively, the whole compasse of the world, the reformation of manners, the miseries of mankinde, the pathway to vertue and vice, the eternitie of the Soule, the course of the Heavens, the mysteries of nature, and divers other circumstances of great learning, and no lesse judgement.

Rosemond Tuve has pointed out the importance of Palingenius for many descriptive passages in *The Faerie Queene*,⁴ but his work was an even more formative influence on *The Shepheardes Calender*.

These poems in twelve parts share a common implication: because all twelve months are included, because the entire year is covered from beginning to end, there is a feeling of completeness. As Palingenius advertised, they set forth 'the whole compasse of the world'. Despite the individuality of each month with its distinctive characteristics, the calendar framework provides an all-inclusive unity. There is the greatest possible variety, which by exhausting infinity leads paradoxically to oneness.

This implication of the literary calendar is made even more manifest in an analogous literary tradition likewise dependent upon number for form, in the hexaemera—those compendia of knowledge based on the six days of creation. The usual form is a poetic description of the phenomena created day by day, so that the discussion of man culminates the exposition of all philosophy, both natural and moral. God appears as ποιητής, and the mortal poet tries to reproduce in small the harmonious amplitude of His making.

The hexaemeron, if anything, is a more vigorous genre than the literary calendar. It is as old as the early church fathers, and enjoyed much vogue in the Renaissance.⁵ Prominent examples are Pico della Mirandola's *Heptaplus*, Tasso's *Le Sette giornate*, and John Swan's *Speculum mundi*. The most impressive poem in the hexaemeron tradition,

⁴ 'Spenser and the *Zodiake of Life*', *JEGP* xxxiv (1935), 1-19.

⁵ The hexaemeral tradition from classical times to the Renaissance has been outlined by Frank E. Robbins, *The Hexaemeral Literature: A Study of the Greek and Latin Commentaries on Genesis* (Chicago, 1912). See also *The Works of Guillaume de Salluste Sieur Du Bartas*, ed. Urban T. Holmes Jr. et al. (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1935-1940), I, 111-116; and Maury Thibaut de Maisières, *Les Poèmes inspirés du début de la Génèse à l'époque de la Renaissance* (Louvain, 1931).

however, is du Bartas's *La Sepmaine*, which appeared embarrassingly close to *The Shepheardes Calender*. In 1578 du Bartas offered his monumental poem to the public, and it was an immediate sensation. Not only was it encyclopedic in scope, not only was it poetic in treatment, but also it was Protestant in point of view. Gabriel Harvey recorded on the flyleaf of one of his books that Spenser conceived particular pleasure in the Fourth Day of the First Week, which contains a forty-eight-line description of the seasons in mythological terms, interlaced with an account of the zodiac.⁶

The point of the hexaemeron tradition was, literally, here is God's plenty presented in due order as God intended. The heavens in particular manifested His handiwork; as Sylvester translated du Bartas into English:

There's nothing precious in Sea, Earth, or Ayr,
But hath in Heav'n some like resemblance fair. . . .
And sacred patterns, which, to serve all Ages,
Th'Almighty printed on Heav'ns ample stages.⁷

The circle of the zodiac with its concretion of mythology and allegorical meanings was the most obvious example of the 'sacred patterns . . . to serve all Ages'.

My discussion so far has been little more than amplification of a comment made by Alexander Pope, who composed four eclogues corresponding to the four seasons—a truncated calendar form—accompanied by 'A Discourse of Pastoral Poetry'. In this tribute to and analysis of the venerated pastoral tradition, Pope extols Spenser's *Shepheardes Calender* (with reservations, of course), and then with unerring directness pinpoints its claim to greatness:

The addition he has made of a Calendar to his Eclogues, is very beautiful; since by this, besides the general moral of innocence and simplicity, which is common to other authors of Pastoral, he has one peculiar to himself; he compares human Life to the several Seasons, and at once exposes to his readers a view of the great and little worlds, in their various changes and aspects.⁸

⁶ *Gabriel Harvey's Marginalia*, ed. G. C. Mobre Smith (Stratford-upon-Avon, 1913), p. 161. The book is Dionysius Periegetes' *Surveye of the World*. The title page of this volume bears Harvey's signature and the date 1574, though this seems too early for a reference to du Bartas's *Sepmaine*.

⁷ *Bartas his Devine Weekes and Workes* (London, 1608), p. 388.

⁸ *Works*, ed. William Warburton (London, 1751), I, 43.

Pope makes two major points: (1) Spenser's use of the calendar is the distinguishing innovation in his use of pastoral, and (2) by means of the calendar Spenser provides a literary microcosm, 'he compares human Life to the several Seasons, and at once exposes to his readers a view of the great and little worlds'.

The next focus of discussion must be the question, how in specific terms did the calendar imply a microcosm-macrocosm analogy? The answer, though esoteric today, was omnipresent in Spenser's time. The signs of the zodiac naturally fell into a circular arrangement around the terrestrial globe, an arrangement which with equal naturalness suggested the endless repetition of a finite cycle as the sun made its ceaseless journey. Moreover, in the middle ages a characteristic activity had been associated with each month, so that a circle of the occupations of man had appeared repeatedly as a decorative motif in church architecture.⁹ It was also a commonplace in almanacs and handbooks of astrology. The old *Calendar of Shepherds* itself has a representative example: in the outermost circle are the zodiacal signs, in the inner circle are men doing things appropriate to each of the twelve months.¹⁰ The multifarious activities of man are presented in their widest variety.

This diagram is in reality a medieval adaptation of a figure purportedly devised by Pythagoras to represent the cosmos. Pythagoras, according to Plutarch and other ancients, first conceived the notion of cosmos,¹¹ and he presented his concept characteristically in a geometrical form, in a tetrad.¹² Spenser in the *Mutabilitie cantos* (VII.vii.25.7-9) agrees to the tetrad arrangement of the four elements propounded by Pythagoras, their contrarieties and yet their unification into a stable system:

... Water fights

With Fire, and Aire with Earth approaching neere:

Yet all are in one body, and as one appeare.¹³

⁹ See Rosemond Tuve, *Seasons and Months: Studies in a Tradition of Middle English Poetry* (Paris, 1933), *passim*, esp. pp. 122-170. There is a bibliography on this well-documented subject in Nils Erik Enkvist, *The Seasons of the Year: Chapters on a Motif from Beowulf to The Shepherd's Calendar* (Helsingfors, 1957), p. 184.

¹⁰ *The Kalender of Shepherdes*, ed. H. Oskar Sommer (London, 1892), h7v.

¹¹ *Moralia*, tr. Philemon Holland (2d ed., London, 1657), p. 670 [*Opinions of Philosophers*, II, 1].

¹² For complete description of the Pythagorean tetrad and several Renaissance examples of it, see my article, 'Some Renaissance Versions of the Pythagorean Tetrad', *Studies in the Renaissance* VIII (1961), 7-33.

¹³ Cf. Spenser, *An Hymne of Love*, ll. 78-91.

In this configuration, there is a reconciliation of opposites, an orderly arrangement of a diversified whole. This is *concordia discors*. The elements, as Milton put it, 'in quaternion run | Perpetual circle' (*Paradise Lost* v, 181-182).

This tetrad pattern was thought to subsist at all levels of creation—in all strata of nature's hierarchy, and in all links of the great chain—and therefore it provided the ideological basis for the entire microcosm-macrocosm analogy. For an example, Isidore of Seville in his *De natura rerum* explains how the pattern interrelates the cosmoi of *mundus*, *annus*, and *homo*.¹⁴ For another example, particularly pertinent here because it shows how the signs of the zodiac were fitted to this scheme, Johann Eck in his edition of Aristotle's *Meteorologica* (Augsburg, 1519) diagrammed a wind-rose which displays not only the four prime points of the compass and the twelve cardinal winds arranged in four groups, but also the twelve signs of the zodiac arranged in four groups, the four basic qualities, the four humors, the four ages of man, the four seasons, and the four elements.¹⁵ The old *Calendar of Shepherds* delineates this pattern in prose:

Some shepetherdes saye that a man is a lytell worlde by hym selfe for the lykenesses and symyltitudes that he hathe of the grete worlde whiche is the aggregacyon of the .ix. skyes .iiii. elementes and all thynges in them conteyned. Fyrste man hathe suche a lykenes in the fyrste mobyle y^t is the soverayne skye & pryncypall party of the grete worlde for lyke as in this fyrste mobyle the zodyake is devyded in .xii. partyes that ben the .xii. sygnes so man is devyded in .xii. partyes . . . Of y^e whiche thre ben of nature of fyre y^t is Aries leo & sagittarius & .iii. of nature of the ayre. Gemini libra & aquarius. And thre of the nature of water. Cancer scorpio and pisces. And thre of the nature of erth. Taurus virgo & capricornus.¹⁶

The same correspondences, including the zodiac, are designated by the tetrad diagram offered by Thomas Walkington in *The Optick glasse of humors* (London, 1607),¹⁷ so the tradition was persistent.

¹⁴ See figure 9 of 'Renaissance Versions of the Pythagorean Tetrad' (cf. note 12 above).

¹⁵ See figure 12 of 'Renaissance Versions of the Pythagorean Tetrad' (cf. note 12 above).

¹⁶ *Kalender of Shepherdes*, ed. Sommer, III, 99-100. Cf. *The Compost of Ptholomeus* (London, 1532?) [S.T.C. 20480], c2; Godfridus, *Boke of knowledge* (London, 1530?) [S.T.C. 11931], 64 ff.; and Erra Pater, *Pronostycacion for ever* (London, 1540?) [S.T.C. 10517], A3^v-A7^v.

¹⁷ Fol. 39^v; cf. Charles F. Mullett, "Thomas Walkington and His "Optick Glasse" ", *Isis* xxxvi (1946), 99. The same cut embellishes the title page of Robert Anton's *The Philosophers Satyrs* (London, 1616); reproduced by Allardyce Nicoll, *The Elizabethans* (Cambridge, 1957), p. 21.

Turning again to the woodcut of the zodiac in the old *Calendar of Shepherds*,¹⁸ we can see that the intention to depict a reconciliation of opposites is made manifest here too. The innermost circle shows a man beside a fire and a lady with flowers, clearly representing winter and summer, the alchemical male and female, integrated within a perfect androgynous sphere.

Delineations of the cosmic tetrad are also frequent in poetry. The first example in western literature is Homer's description of Achilles' shield, which George Chapman singled out for special publication. In the epistle dedicatory preceding his translation, Chapman begins by quoting Spondanus to the effect that Achilles' shield is a literary microcosm: 'What is here prefigured by our miraculous Artist, but the universall world, which being so spacious and almost unmeasurable, one circlet of a Shield representes and imbraceth?'¹⁹ Citing Eustathius, Chapman continues to explicate the analogy: Homer intended 'by the Orbicuitie of the Shield the roundnesse of the world: by the foure mettalles, the foure elementes . . . that which he calls *ανθυγα τριπλακα μαρμαρενη*, he understands the Zodiak'. So for Chapman the zodiac properly encloses this symbolic representation of the great world.

In a direct literary line from Achilles' shield is Ovid's description of the doors to the Sun's palace, opening book II of the *Metamorphoses*. There again are four materials and the four elements, and over all shine the signs of the zodiac (ll. 5-18). When translating this text, Arthur Golding took the liberty of inserting: 'For there a perfect plat, | Had *Vulcane* drawne of all the worlde'.²⁰ Ovid more overtly expounds the notion of cosmos in book XV of the *Metamorphoses*, where Pythagoras is cited at length (ll. 60-478). In one passage, as Golding translates it, Pythagoras exclaims to his pupils:

What? seest thou not how that thy yeere as representing playne
The age of man, departs it self in quartars foure.²¹

And then he proceeds to elaborate the analogy between the seasons and the ages of man.

Alanus de Insulis, one of the medieval authors best known to Spenser,

¹⁸ See note 10 above. The woodcut is reproduced as figure 13 of 'Renaissance Versions of the Pythagorean Tetrad' (cf. note 12 above).

¹⁹ (London, 1598), A2.

²⁰ (London, 1575), fol. 17.

²¹ *Ibid.*, fol. 190. Levinus Lemnius cites Pythagoras from this passage in the *Metamorphoses* (*Touchstone of Complexions*, tr. Thomas Newton, 3d ed., London, 1581, fol. 30^v).

relied heavily upon Pythagorean numerology in his *De planctu naturae*, and often specifically evoked the tetrad; e.g., Nature instructs us:

I am she who have fashioned the form and eminence of man into the likeness of the original mundane mechanism, that in him, as in a mirror of the world itself, combined nature may appear. For just as, of the four elements, the concordant discord, the single plurality, the dissonant consonance, the dissenting agreement, produce the structures of the palace of earth, so, of four ingredients the similar unsimilarity, the unequal equality, the unformed conformity, the separate identity, firmly erect the building of the human body. And those qualities which come together as mediators among the elements—these establish a firm peace among the four humors.²²

John Lydgate didactically set forth these commonplaces in 'A Pageant of Knowledge'.²³ Another example of the poetic tetrad, perhaps more pertinent because it is more preceptive and also closer in time to Spenser, is du Bartas's discussion of the winds, as Sylvester translated *La Sepmaine*:

In their effects I finde fower Tempraments,
 Foure Times, foure Ages, and foure Elements.
 Th'*East-winde* in working, follows properly
 Fire, Choller, Summer, and soft Infancy:
 That, which dries-up wild *Affrick* with his wing,
 Resembles Aire, Bloud, Youth, and lively Spring:
 That, which blowes moistly from the *Western* stage,
 Like Water, Phlegme, Winter, and heavie Age:
 That, which comes shiv'ring from cold Climates solely,
 Earth, withered Eld, Autumn, and Melancholy.²⁴

One famous Neolatin poem, the *Quatuor libri amorum* of Conrad Celtis (Nuremberg, 1502), was constructed according to this scheme, and its title page exhibits a well-wrought tetrad which includes the four cities at the geographical extremes of Germany, the four bodies of water which mark its boundaries, the four parts of the day, and the four ages of man.²⁵ In 1603 John Davies of Hereford eloquently elaborated the tetrad in *Microcosmos*; and in 1638 a Scotsman, Robert Farley, published *The Kalender of Mans Life*, undeniably in the shadow of Spenser's

²² Tr. Douglas M. Moffat (New York, 1908, Yale Studies in English 36), Prose III, 72–84.

²³ See *Minor Poems*, ed. Henry N. MacCracken (London, 1934, E.E.T.S. 192), pp. 729–734. Cf. Tuve, *Seasons and Months*, p. 68.

²⁴ *Devine Weekes and Workes*, p. 42.

²⁵ See figure 15 of 'Renaissance Versions of the Pythagorean Tetrad' (cf. note 12 above).

Shepherd's Calender, with an eclogue for each month but classified in four groups according to the seasons.²⁶

The point to be made by this welter of evidence is simply this: the calendar form, by its derivation from the Pythagorean tetrad, implied a synthesis of all disparate factors into a single well-ordered unity. One of each radical kind was to be incorporated into an all-inclusive whole. This accounts for the careful variety with which Spenser infused his literary microcosm. He scrupulously included every sort of eclogue—the love-complaint, the singing-match, the dirge, the encomium, the moral fable—and he took equal pains to offer variety in his metrics. Spenser had no precedent in pastoral tradition for such metrical variety.²⁷ He crammed the greatest possible multitude into the unity of his calendar.

The calendar is a natural microcosm because it is a comprehensive unit, a pattern repeated endlessly throughout eternity. And Spenser took steps to suggest unbroken repetition for his calendar. The 'December' eclogue, like 'January', is a melancholy complaint on the same theme, unrequited love, presented as a monologue by Colin; and Spenser further stressed the continuity between 'December' and 'January' by using the same metrics for both. The wheel has come full circle, as E. K. proclaims in the argument to 'December': 'This Æglogue (even as the first beganne) is ended with a complaynte of Colin to God Pan'. Or rather, the wheel, having returned to its starting-point, will continue to roll without disruption. This is the intimation of Spenser's envoy at the end of the work:

Loe I have made a Calender for every yeare,
That steele in strength, and time in durance shall outweare:
And if I marked well the starres revolution,
It shall continewe till the worlds dissolution.

This calendar can be extrapolated to eternity because it is microcosmic. If he has 'marked well the starres revolution', Spenser says, he will have recorded an everlasting statement of truth, a 'sacred pattern . . . to serve all Ages'. There is perhaps a notion of 'in my end is my beginning', and Spenser has reinforced the religious significance of the repeated cycle by

²⁶ This volume is described in considerable detail by Elbert N. S. Thompson, 'Between the Shepherds Calender and the Seasons', *PQ* 1 (1922), 23-30.

²⁷ Ernest de Selincourt, ed., *The Poetical Works of Edmund Spenser* (Oxford, 1912), p. xix.

starting his calendar in January with the birth of Christ,²⁸ rather than in the more conventional March, as he does in the procession of months in the *Mutabilitie cantos*. The idea appears graphically as one of the ten emblems adorning the title page of John Case's *Lapis philosophicus* (Oxford, 1599): the zodiac arches over a full-length figure laid out on a tomb with the sun in the sign of Leo declining in the west, while a caption proclaims, 'Casus in occasum vergit vivitque sepultus'. To extrapolate the thought, decay approaches its own demise; Death, thou shalt die.

The calendar is a natural microcosm, then, with religious implications. And a *shepherds'* calendar is doubly useful to exemplify the macrocosm, because shepherds inhabit the ideal world of the golden age, and therefore by association idealize any concept of its perfect statement. Being a literary microcosm, *The Shepheardes Calender* presents a universal. As Robert Recorde commented about the number symbolism of the hexaemeron:

In whiche is contained, not onely the secretes of the creation of all thynges: and the consummation of the whole worlde againe, with the state of eternitie: But also by it is the Sabbathes reste, and therby the full life and conversation of godlie persones, represented and insinuate.²⁹

So Spenser prepared a *Shepherds' Calendar* where *shepherds* is plural, including all men.

But in addition to the pattern of repeated cycles, Spenser traced another, straight-line pattern, a pattern of continuous decline. This pattern emerges most clearly from the love of Colin for Rosalind, embodied prominently in the three eclogues for January, June, and December, spaced skillfully and significantly at the beginning, middle, and end of the work. Colin is the specific shepherd, perhaps Spenser himself—the title can be read ambiguously as a single *Shepherd's Calendar*, where Colin is the shepherd in question³⁰—and the seasons correspond to the ages of this particular man, going not in any cyclic pattern, but leading relentlessly to death in 'December'.

²⁸ Hamilton suggests the associations of pastoral and the Nativity ('Argument of Spenser's *Shepheardes Calender*', p. 174).

²⁹ *Whetstone of witte* (London, 1557), b1^v.

³⁰ See the editor's note on 'Shepheardes' in Edmund Spenser, *Workes*, ed. Edwin Greenlaw et al. (Baltimore, 1932–1949), *Minor Poems*, I, 235. The ambiguous spelling 'shepheardes', rather than 'shepherds' or 'shepherd's', is essential, I say, to retaining the double reference here to both a universal and an individual.

Poets had measured man against the seasons ever since Horace (*Odes*, iv.vii.9-16):

Frigora mitescunt zephyris, ver proterit aestas
interitura, simul
pomifer autumnus fruges effuderit, et mox
bruma recurrit iners.

damna tamen celeres reparant caelestia lunae;
nos ubi decidimus,
quo pius Aeneas, quo Tullus dives et Ancus,
pulvis et umbra sumus.

Homo, like *annus*, goes through a pattern of seasonal change. But unlike the year, man when he reaches the final stage cannot repeat the cycle. As an aged shepherd in Sidney's *Arcadia* laments:

Time ever old, and yong is still revolved
Within it selfe, and never tasteth ende:
But mankind is for aye to nought resolved.³¹

This statement of man's mortality, his finiteness, is the sobering side of the mutability theme.

The Shepheardes Calender elaborates these two patterns operating simultaneously: the cyclic calendar, and the straight-line demise of Colin. With astounding poetic imagination, Spenser delineates the relation between the universal and the specific, between the eternal and the finite, between the macrocosm and the individual. He has provided objective correlatives for the paradox which T. S. Eliot poses in *Murder in the Cathedral*:

. . . that the wheel may turn and still
Be forever still.

The individual follows his inexorable course through generation and corruption, but the beneficent One, encompassing the continuous change, unknowing of alpha or omega, remains unmoved, undiminished, unaltered. The summation of infinite change is stasis, so that each item, though inconstant, partakes of permanence. This is the optimistic view of mutability.

Spenser returned to this paradox in the *Mutabilitie cantos*, because in

³¹ Sir Philip Sidney, *Complete Works*, ed. Albert Feuillerat (Cambridge, 1922), II, 141.

essence the problem is an explanation of mutability, of how order can persist despite the continuous change wrought by the passage of time. The *Two Cantos of Mutabilitie* open with an image very much like Eliot's (*FQ* vii.vi.1.1-2):

... the ever-whirling wheele
Of *Change*, the which all mortall things doth sway.

Change is personified as a titaness who has challenged the dominion of Jove in this world. Nature, the ultimate authority in the universe, is called to adjudicate the dispute, and she appears as a series of paradoxes reminiscent of the opposite qualities reconciled by the Pythagorean tetrad (vii.vii.13.2-4):

... ever young yet full of eld,
Still mooving, yet unmoved from her sted;
Unseene of any, yet of all beheld. ...

Nature is the greatest power because she has successfully integrated the opposing forces in the cosmos, and therefore is stable. She has fulfilled the condition of always moving, and yet remaining fixed. However, Change in her claim to sovereignty bases her argument on the apparent fact that everything—from the four elements up—is unstable, is subject to mutability. To substantiate her demand for recognition, Change asks Nature to call in witness the 'times and seasons of the year' (vii.vii.27). As a result of this summoning, the four seasons and twelve months parade in vivid succession. After the months come Day and Night, the Hours, Life and Death. Then Change examines each of the seven planets to show that the supralunary spheres are also subject to her rule. Finally Nature is forced to announce a decision in the case, a somewhat unexpected decision in view of the persuasive testimony educed by Change. But Nature decrees (vii.vii.58.2-9):

... [I] find that all things stedfastnes doe hate
And changed be: yet being rightly wayd
They are not changed from their first estate;
But by their change their being doe dilate:
And turning to themselves at length againe,
Doe worke their owne perfection so by fate:
Then over them Change doth not rule and raigne;
But they raigne over change, and doe their states maintaine.

Nature admits that the individual goes through a cycle of constant change; but completion of this pattern results in a return to the original point, in an affirmation of the status quo. Elsewhere, in the Garden of Adonis, souls caught in the eternal cycles of transmigration wait to be embodied: 'So like a wheele around they runne from old to new' (*FQ* III.vi.33.9).³² Evidently, the continuous change is essential to realization of the pattern, to fulfillment of the design. In this sense, the wheel forever turns, yet still is forever still. This is the paradox of mutability, and in these cantos Spenser is optimistic.

In *The Shepheardes Calender*, however, Spenser writes in the elegiac strain. *Et in Arcadia ego*. When human experience has run through every extreme and returned to its point of origin, then there can be the thorough synthesis which makes man a microcosm, the perfectly balanced *concordia discors* implied by the Pythagorean tetrad, the four seasons of the complete man's life. But ironically, alas! the moment of perfection is also the moment of death—hence the inescapable melancholy in 'December'.

Spenser chose the calendar form because, through its association with cathedral decor and saints' days, it gave religious overtones to his moral didacticism. More important, the calendar incorporated the meaning of a literary microcosm, thereby providing the necessary backdrop of cyclic pattern against which his linear tale of Colin could be properly displayed as an expression of man's relation to the universe. The pastoral mode, perhaps itself secondary to this primary purpose, was chosen because it accorded with this general plan. Spenser knew that 'eclogues' mean 'selections' even if E. K. did not, and he saw in pastoral tradition the multiplicity of moods requisite for his aim. What first strikes us in *The Shepheardes Calender* is its eclecticism—of style, sources, and subject-matter. There is on first reading a confusing multitude. And yet, the variety is essential to the plan of presenting an organized picture of life in its infinite complexity, a picture that reveals the paradox of man: created in the image of an inexhaustible God, subjected to the limitations of mortality.

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³² On the context for this image of the wheel, see the notes for this line in Spenser, *Works*, ed. Greenlaw, III, 257.