INTRODUCTION

'The Wits have sent for the Book'
(Non-)Reading, and Spenserian Books before 1700

> Sir *Guyon* chaunst eke on another booke,
> That hight *Antiquitie* of *Faerie* lond.
> In which when as he greedily did looke;
> Th'off-spring of Elues and Faries there he fond,
> As it deliuered was from hond to hond . . .
> But *Guyon* all this while his booke did read,
> Ne yet has ended: for it was a great
> And ample volume, that doth far excead
> My leasure, so long leaues here to repeat
>
> Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, II.ix.60, II.x.70

The most conspicuous quality of Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* never to have received serious critical attention is its unreadability. Those who have broached the subject have often done so to comic effect, intentionally or otherwise. Thomas Babington Macaulay wrote that

> Of the persons who read the first Canto, not one in ten reaches the end of the first Book, and not one in a hundred perseveres to the end of the poem. Very few and weary are those who are in at the death of the Blatant Beast.[1]

The error was perhaps a joke, but Macaulay's comment has been dismissed as a piece of ironically apt misreading (*The Faerie Queene* ends with the Blatant Beast very much alive and 'at liberty againe').[2] C. A. Patrides archly commented that 'Macaulay himself, it is clear, did not persevere to the end.' Patrides went on to defend Spenser from the charge of tediousness, and to imply that those who struggle with the poem are guilty of various

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[1] Thomas Babington Macaulay, 'Review of Southey's Edition of *The Pilgrim's Progress*', *Edinburgh Review* 54 (Dec. 1831): 450–61, 452.

[2] VI.xii.40. Unless otherwise specified, all quotations from *The Faerie Queene* are from the edition by A. C. Hamilton et al. (London, 1980); henceforth referred to in the notes as *FQ*. For ease of reference I refer to the 'Mutabilitie Cantos' as Book VII.

misreadings themselves.[3] Edmund Gosse was more sympathetic, reasoning that *The Faerie Queene* is 'so long that it really is excusable not to be aware that the Blatant Beast does not die',[4] and David Hill Radcliffe described Macaulay's supposed blunder as 'one of the most endearing passages in Spenser criticism', before concluding that 'one cannot but suspect that many ... handsome [nineteenth-century] library editions of Spenser's works merely gathered dust.'[5] The few who have acknowledged Spenser's unreadability have characterised *The Faerie Queene* as requiring special study. T. S. Eliot wondered

> Who, except scholars, and except the eccentric few who are born with a sympathy for such work, or others who have deliberately studied themselves into the right appreciation, can now read through the whole of *The Faerie Queene*?[6]

The New Critics Harry Berger Jr, Donald Cheney, and Paul Alpers showed that the whole of *The Faerie Queene* is well worth reading closely, but the assured refusal of Spenserian scholars to acknowledge Eliot's pessimism has continued to obscure the fact, briefly alluded to by David Hill Radcliffe, that the history of Spenserian books is unlikely to be one of diligent and exhaustive readings.[7] Spenser himself alluded to the fact that his poem had the potential to grow to an enormous and unwieldy size. In Book II Sir Guyon fails to finish reading the '*Antiquitie* of *Faerie* lond', Spenser's analogue for his own poem, 'for it was a great / And ample volume'. Guyon's fatigue alerts us to Spenser's awareness that his own history of '*Faerie* lond' was always in danger of remaining unfinished by both author and reader.

A. C. Hamilton wrote that '*The Faerie Queene* is not meant to be understood but to be possessed.'[8] This statement was intended to defend the poem from interpretative criticism that sought to explain or summarise its allegory, or as Hamilton put it, to 'violate' the poem's 'subtlety, complexity, and wholeness by rationalizing its imaginative

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[3] C. A. Patrides, 'Edmund Spenser: The Definition of Poetry' (1980), collected in *Figures in a Renaissance Context*, ed. Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth (Ann Arbor, MI, 1989), 35, 39–43.

[4] Edmund Gosse, *From Shakespeare to Pope* (Cambridge, 1885, repr. 2013), 26.

[5] David Hill Radcliffe, *Edmund Spenser: A Reception History* (Colombia, SC, 1996), 114.

[6] T. S. Eliot, 'Charles Whibley' (1931), in *Selected Essays 1917–1932* (London, 1999), 403–15, 405.

[7] See Harry Berger Jr, *The Allegorical Temper* (New Haven, CT, 1957). Also see Donald Cheney, *Spenser's Image of Nature* (New Haven, CT, 1966), Paul Alpers, *The Poetry of 'The Faerie Queene'* (Princeton, NJ, 1967).

[8] A. C. Hamilton, '*The Faerie Queene*', in *Critical Approaches to Six Major English Works*, ed. R. M. Lumiansky and Herschel Baker (Philadelphia, PA, 1968), 132–66, 161.

statements'.[9] As a maxim, the assertion that '*The Faerie Queene* is not meant to be understood but to be possessed' also works more literally. Spenser's poem has a history of being purchased in order to be displayed, admired, and possessed, rather than read. The few who do read it in full often become possess*ive*, emphasising its difficulty to others in order to confirm their achievement. *The Faerie Queene* has this in common with later works like Richardson's *Clarissa*, Browning's *The Ring and the Book*, and Melville's *Moby Dick. The Faerie Queene*, however, has a unique physical presence as a tome (or tomes). In 1941 C. S. Lewis advised newcomers to Spenser that

> it is imperative that you should think of *The Faerie Queene* as a book suitable for reading in a heavy volume, at a table – a book to which limp leather is insulting – a massy, antique story with a blackletter flavour about it.[10]

It was the 'blackletter flavour' of 'massy' volumes that fuelled the 'Spensermania' of the eighteenth century.[11] According to Matthew Prior, a Spenser revival began on 6 July 1706, with the publication of his own *Ode, Humbly Inscrib'd to the Queen*, a celebration of the Duke of Marlborough's victory in the Battle of Ramillies, 'written in imitation of Spencers Stile'. I discuss the *Ode* itself in Chapter 1. Relevant here is Prior's assessment of its influence a month after its publication:

> every body acknowledges [Spenser] to have been a fine Poet, tho three Months since not one in 50 had read him: Upon my Soul, tis true, the Wits have sent for the Book, the Fairy Queen is on their Toilette table, and some of our Ducal acquaintance will be deep in that Mythologico-Poetical way of thinking.[12]

The 'Wits' may have 'sent for the Book', but whether they were actually reading it was another matter, and Prior ridiculed those who were over-doing it. '[D]eep in that Mythologico-Poetical way of thinking', their intimacy with the poem was a grandiose affectation. Prior imagined consumers of Spenser to be wealthy and intellectually ambitious men, though his image of *The Faerie Queene* on the 'Toilette table' also anticipated Pope's satire of female book ownership in *The Rape of the Lock*. In that

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[9] Ibid., 160.

[10] C. S. Lewis, 'On Reading *The Faerie Queene*' (1941), in *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Literature*, ed. Walter Hooper (Cambridge, 1998), 146–48, 146–47.

[11] Greg Kucich used the term 'Spensermania' in *Keats, Shelley, and Romantic Spenserianism* (University Park, PA, 1991), 33.

[12] Prior to Lord Cholmondeley, 1 Aug. 1706, in *The Literary Works of Matthew Prior*, 2 vols, ed. H. Bunker Wright and Monroe K. Spears (Oxford, 1971), 1.896.

poem, Belinda keeps bibles as domestic paraphernalia, arranged on her table alongside 'Puffs, Powders, Patches', and 'Billet-Doux'. It has been suggested that Pope was implying that Belinda habitually tore out pages to curl her hair with.[13] Spenser's *Faerie Queene* was even more sensationally misappropriated in 1756, when, according to newspaper reports, a reader used her copy of the poem as a cryptic suicide note:

> They write now from Bath, that the Hon. Miss C – having lost a large Sum of Money at play, was found dead in her Lodgings, supposed by Poison. She had been reading Spencer's Fairy Queen, and turned down the Leaf at these Lines:
>
> > Unhappy Maid! – whose dread
> > Untry'd, is less than when thou shalt it try:
> > Death is to him that wretched Life doth lead
> > Both Grace and Gain, but he in Hell doth lie
> > That lives a loathsome Life, but wishing, cannot die.[14]

The story of the unfortunate 'Miss C – ' is a macabre example of a failure to finish *The Faerie Queene*, and one which suggests that it may have been best kept as a toilet table ornament after all, if a consequence of actually reading it was suicide.

There were always those who did survive complete readings of *The Faerie Queene*, of course. Some of these, especially Spenser's editors, were consumed by the poem, while others developed unique reading strategies to make it manageable. Abraham Cowley provided one of the earliest accounts of reading Spenser:

> I remember when I began to read, and to take some pleasure in it, there was wont to lie in my Mothers Parlour (I know not by what accident, for she her self never in her life read any Book but of Devotion) but there was wont to lie Spencers Works; this I happened to fall upon, and was infinitely delighted with the Stories of the Knights, and Giants, and Monsters, and brave Houses, which I found every where there (Though my understanding had little to do with all this) and by degrees with the tinckling of the Rhyme and Dance of the Numbers, so that I think I had read him all over before I was twelve years old, and was thus made a Poet as irremediably as a Child is made an Eunuch.[15]

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[13] Geoffrey Carnall, 'Belinda's Bibles', in *Alexander Pope: Essays for the Tercentenary*, ed. Colin Nicholson (Aberdeen, 1988), 130–38, 136.

[14] *The Public Advertiser* 6769 (12 Jul. 1756). The stanza quoted is FQ IV.vii.11, Amoret's speech following her rape by the Salvage Man.

[15] Abraham Cowley, 'Of My Self' (ca. 1664), collected in *The English Writings of Abraham Cowley*, ed. A. R. Waller, 2 vols (Cambridge, 1906), 2.455–64, 457–58.

Revealing that he had read Spenser 'all over', Cowley was quick to provide disclaimers, averring that his 'understanding had little to do with all this', and that his mother owned Spenser only by 'accident', possibly having confused it with a book 'of Devotion' (or perhaps she used the protestant allegory as a devotional aid). Cowley characterised the reading experience as a series of disjointed impressions that refused to make sense as a whole. This was no barrier to inspiration, and Cowley was irremediably 'made a Poet', but the process was not subtle, intellectual, or even necessarily positive, if we admit the full force of the 'Eunuch' simile. By his own admission, in Cowley's household Spenser was possessed but not understood, literally by his mother, and figuratively by the young poet himself.

   Non-reading, and partial, selective, or aborted readings are not exclusive to Spenser, of course. Leah Price has advocated for greater recognition of the fact that 'reading is only one among many uses to which printed matter can be put'. Books are also 'Bought, sold, exchanged, transported, displayed, defaced, stored, ignored, collected, neglected, dispersed, discarded'.[16] David Cressy has devoted particular attention to non-reading practices in his study of seventeenth-century appropriations of the Bible 'as a magical talisman, as an aid to divination, as medicine, and as a device for social display'.[17] Investigations of the totemic use of non-biblical books are scarce, though Nicholas Havely has investigated the various ways in which editions of Dante became prized possessions in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[18] The field of library history also offers material on this subject, since library historians are sensitive to the function of books as devices for social display. Giles Mandelbrote has identified a significant shift in the cultural value of libraries between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries:

> At the beginning of this period, books were kept in studies and closets; many were in Latin; their contents were praised for their learning and their appearance for their 'neatness', a term which included a sense of appropriateness to function. By the middle of the [eighteenth] century, larger personal collections of books were housed in library rooms, which also acted as a social space; most of the books were in English; they were admired for their 'politeness' and the prevailing aesthetic was one of elegance. At all

[16] Leah Price, 'From *The History of a Book* to a "History of the Book"', *Representations* 108 (special issue 'The Way We Read Now') (2009): 120–38, 120. See also James Raven, 'New Reading Histories, Print Culture and the Identification of Change', *Social History* 23.3 (1998): 268–87, esp. 279.

[17] David Cressy, 'Books as Totems in Seventeenth-Century England', *Journal of Library History* 21 (1986): 92–106, 92.

[18] Nicholas Havely, *Dante's British Public* (Oxford, 2014), 68–127.

levels of society many more books were owned, but it may be that propor-
tionately fewer were being read.[19]

Mandelbrote's claim is borne out by contemporary anxieties about book
collection. Jonathan Swift was quick to notice that the fashion for libraries
encouraged people to purchase books to display rather than to read, a practice
Swift considered 'dishonourable'.[20] John Adams, Provost of King's College,
Cambridge, agreed, condemning

> that unprofitable Vanity, which obtains so much now a-days, of collecting
> Great Libraries, which serve for nothing but to dress, or entertain in, while
> the well-bound Volumes enjoy as perfect rest, as their Authors do in their
> Graves.[21]

Despite emphatic declarations such as Adams's, and calls to arms by the
likes of Price and Raven, the history of the non-reading of secular texts has
not been investigated thoroughly. C. S. Lewis may have been playfully
indulging his own medievalist bibliophilia when he penned his advice to
readers of *The Faerie Queene*, but he hit on a truth about the history of
Spenser studies that had not been explored before or since: Spenser's
readers have often placed more value on Spenserian books-as-artefacts,
and their manifold cultural meanings, than on the texts they contain. This
phenomenon has its roots in the eighteenth century, and my aim is to
uncover them.

   This is a study of the editions of Spenser published between 1715 and
1795. In this period, five editions of Spenser's collected works were printed,
and *The Faerie Queene* appeared alone an additional four times. Separate
publications of the shorter works were sporadic. Three were made of *The
Shepheardes Calender* (1579), and one each of *Amoretti* (1595), *Daphnaida*
(1592), and *A View of the Present State of Ireland* (ca. 1598, printed 1633).
These books shaped the way in which Spenser has been read and possessed
ever since. They also had a broader effect on the literary landscape of the
eighteenth century. Drawing on the growing body of work on the forma-
tion of the literary canon in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, I
argue that publications of Spenser played a particularly important part in
the process, and that Spenser's role differed from those of Shakespeare,

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[19] Giles Mandelbrote, 'Personal Owners of Books', in *The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and
      Ireland Volume II*, ed. Giles Mandelbrote and K. A. Manley (Cambridge, 2006), 173–89, 189.
[20] Quoted in Paddy Bullard, 'What Swift Did in Libraries', in *Jonathan Swift and the Eighteenth-
      Century Book*, ed. Paddy Bullard and James McLaverty (Cambridge, 2013), 65–84, 66.
[21] John Adams, *A Sermon Preach'd at St. Paul's Cathedral* (1702), sig. C4v.

Milton, and Chaucer.[22] The canon was formed by numerous parties, whose interests were not always purely literary. In the case of Spenser, many of these parties have remained anonymous until now. The printers of seven major eighteenth-century editions of Spenser were unknown, as were some of their contributors. I identify Spenser's unknown printers, and two anonymous contributors to editions of his works. This is therefore the first comprehensive study of the individuals and groups who controlled the eighteenth-century Spenser industry. Only one survey of the eighteenth-century editions of Spenser has been made, by Jewel Wurtsbaugh in 1936.[23] For eighty years Wurtsbaugh has been the only authority on the subject, and she includes only cursory information on the eighteenth-century editions, several of which are not acknowledged at all. The present book covers every eighteenth-century edition, as well as miscellanies in which Spenser played a significant role. Each of the chapters is structured around a major edition of *The Faerie Queene*, with the exception of Chapter 2, which covers the years from 1716–49, when no editions of Spenser's longest poem were published. During this period Spenser was a staple of the poetic miscellany, and important advances were made in the fields of Spenserian biography and criticism. By necessity, in the central chapters much space is given to the 1750s, arguably the most Spenserian decade of the century. The five editions that occupy Chapters 3 and 4 were all published between 1750 and 1759. Publishing revolutions of the 1770s produced new types of editions, and London lost its monopoly on Spenser. Chapter 5 explores editions published in Scotland and Ireland and exported to America from 1778 to 1795.

There are a number of ways in which eighteenth-century Spenserianism could be studied, including through imitations, criticism, and fine art. However, none of these subjects can be explored to its full extent until we have a better understanding of the editions. The methodology of this book is therefore chiefly bibliographical. I have compiled a bibliography of Spenser's eighteenth-century editions, which can be found in the Appendix. This is intended to supplement F. R. Johnson's *Critical Bibliography of the Works of*

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[22] On canon formation generally, see Trevor Ross, *The Making of the English Literary Canon* (Montreal, 1998), Richard Terry, *Poetry and the Making of the English Literary Past* (Oxford, 2001), and Jack Lynch, *The Age of Elizabeth in the Age of Johnson* (Cambridge, 2003). Studies focusing on Shakespeare, Milton, and Chaucer include Dobson, *The Making of the National Poet* (Oxford, 1992), Marcus Walsh, *Shakespeare, Milton and Eighteenth-Century Literary Editing* (Cambridge, 1997), Andrew Murphy, *Shakespeare in Print* (Cambridge, 2003), Dustin Griffin, *Milton and the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, 2009), and J. A. Dane, *Who Is Buried in Chaucer's Tomb?* (East Lansing, MI, 1988).

[23] Jewel Wurtsbaugh, *Two Centuries of Spenserian Scholarship 1609–1805* (Baltimore, MD, 1936).

Edmund Spenser, which does not go past 1700. I refer to imitations where they inform my understanding of the editions, but for the most part they are not included in this study. This is the aspect of eighteenth-century Spenserianism that has received most attention already, in reception histories by Richard C. Frushell, Earl R. Wasserman, and David Hill Radcliffe.[24] A better understanding of the contexts in which Spenser was printed in the eighteenth century will enable further studies of his influence on other poets. Criticism and art are drawn on frequently, particularly where they are included in editions as introductions and illustrations, and also when major Spenserian public events occurred. In Shakespeare studies, Michael Dobson has shown that the texts that now form the Shakespearean corpus were relatively low on the list of artefacts that constituted the playwright's cultural presence in the eighteenth century.[25] The concept of 'Bardolatry' still has as much to do with social politics as with Shakespeare's works.[26] The same is somewhat true of eighteenth-century Spensermania. Architecture, sculpture, painting, and performance were employed, but they were all mediated through the book trade. Guidebooks, engravings, and illustrated editions transformed local events into national spectacles. I do devote space to the theory and practice of editing Spenser, since alongside printer-publishers, Spenser's editors made some of the most important decisions regarding the design and production of the editions. Textual criticism and bibliography are intricately connected for this reason. Some work has already been done on the subject of Spenser's eighteenth-century texts. Joseph Loewenstein has made a brief but useful survey of some of the major editors' methods, and John G. Radcliffe published an edition of the notes of Spenser's most diligent editor, John Upton.[27] I have collated sections of each of the editions to confirm and supplement the findings of Loewenstein and Radcliffe, and I report my conclusions here.

The eighteenth-century afterlives of Chaucer, Shakespeare, Jonson, and Milton have all been explored to greater or lesser extents.[28] The case of Spenser is different, and worthy of investigation, for several important

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[24] See Frushell, *Edmund Spenser in the Early Eighteenth Century* (Pittsburgh, PA, 1999), Radcliffe, *Edmund Spenser: A Reception History*, and Wasserman, *Elizabethan Poetry in the Eighteenth Century* (Urbana, IL, 1947).

[25] Dobson, *The Making of the National Poet*, 134–84.

[26] See Graham Holderness (ed.), *The Shakespeare Myth* (Manchester, 1988), and Gary Taylor, *Reinventing Shakespeare* (London, 1989), esp. chapters 2–3.

[27] Joseph Loewenstein, 'Spenser's Textual History', in *The Oxford Handbook of Edmund Spenser*, ed. Richard A. McCabe (Oxford, 2010), 640–57. John G. Radcliffe (ed.), *John Upton: Notes on The Fairy Queen*, 2 vols (New York, 1987).

[28] See note 22, earlier in this chapter, and also Tom Lockwood, *Ben Jonson in the Romantic Age* (Oxford, 2005).

reasons. The conspicuous allegory of *The Faerie Queene* encouraged its adoption for political purposes. Opposition satirists in the first half of the century found that the duplicitous Archimago mapped neatly onto Walpole. As Christine Gerrard has put it, 'Spenser's double-sided political profile – both Elizabeth's royal panegyrist and yet a critic of court corruption and advocate of a more extreme form of Protestant mission than Elizabeth herself – made him infinitely malleable to political manipulation.'[29] Spenser's allegory was also malleable enough to provide convenient examples of vice and virtue throughout the century. This made him eminently quotable in miscellanies, and Una became a moral paradigm for young women in the 1770s. Spenser had a unique status in literary history. The vast majority of accounts agreed that the canon of English poetry began with Chaucer, but that Spenser was the first poet who could be read without being translated. Since he bridged the gap between medieval and renaissance writings, there was little agreement about whether Spenser was an ancient or a modern, but by all accounts he presided over the canon as its oldest intelligible authority. This meant that Spenser was turned to when debates arose about the origins and proper use of English, and the revival of supposedly "native" literary qualities, in particular Gothic and romance. There was very little interest in Spenser's shorter poems, which were rarely printed separately, and were not popular in miscellanies. Sonnets were simply unfashionable for much of the century, and Spenser's other works, such as *The Shepheardes Calender* and 'Mother Hubberds Tale', contained his most self-conscious archaisms, which made them appear difficult. The language of *The Faerie Queene* may be more accessible, but at more than 4,000 stanzas long, it was expensive to print, and therefore to buy. Until the last quarter of the century it appeared exclusively in luxury editions, often with extensive illustrations. Shakespeare could be read in cheap single-play texts by the middle to lower classes, or enjoyed in performance, and in 1739 Milton's *Paradise Lost* was published in twelve instalments that cost only 2*d.* each. By contrast, the market for Spenser was wealthy and often aristocratic, since the whole *Faerie Queene* demanded wealth and literacy. This meant that Spenser's cultural value differed greatly from that of other early writers. Editions of Spenser obtained a totemic status that has not been explored.

[29] Christine Gerrard, *The Patriot Opposition to Walpole* (Oxford, 1994), 167. Gerrard's survey of 'political Spenserianism' at 166–85 is an essential resource for the study of Spenser's adoption by the Opposition Patriots in the 1730s, and includes analyses of the Spenserian poetry of West, Thomson, and Pope. Gerrard does not refer to Spenser's eighteenth-century editions.

Spenser's publication history has not been neglected by oversight or chance, but in part because of a series of myths about the conditions in which his poems were produced. These myths have their origins in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The remainder of this introduction is divided into two sections. The first contains an overview of modern Spenserian textual scholarship. I argue that traditional readings of Spenser's biography have led to the false assumption that Spenser's texts are relatively free from the textual cruces that have attracted textual scholars and bibliographers to Shakespeare. The eighteenth-century editions have been considered hopelessly corrupt, and ignored as a consequence. The final section of the introduction is an overview of seventeenth-century Spenserianism, with a focus on the three early folio editions. This overview provides an essential context for the first Spenser revival of the early eighteenth century, with which Chapter 1 begins.

I.1   'Published by Himself'? The Mythology of the Early Quartos

The traditional narrative of the first publications of *The Faerie Queene* in the 1590s insists that

> Spenser supervised the poem through the press . . . and attended the print shop very faithfully when he was in London, as is attested by the number of works printed during his London visits.[30]

The editions of *The Faerie Queene* published in quarto in 1590 (Books I–III) and 1596 (Books I–III and IV–VI) are supposedly paradigms of the authoritative text, as defined by R. B. McKerrow and W. W. Greg.[31] The assumption that Spenser 'attended the print shop' has also guided responses to the shorter poems. F. R. Johnson, compiler of the critical bibliography of pre-1700 editions of Spenser, claimed that 'there is every reason to suppose that [Spenser] attended the printing-house to correct the proofs.'[32] The evidence in support of this has been questioned more recently. Jean Brink used the fact that the dedicatory poems were printed in the wrong order to show that 'Spenser was less responsible for the presentation of his poem than has been assumed', and Andrew Zurcher's meticulous examinations of the 1590 quarto have shown that compositors corrected the text idiosyncratically, and that there is no evidence of

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[30] W. P. Williams, 'Bibliography, Critical', in *SEnc*, 91.
[31] See W. W. Greg, 'The Rationale of Copy-Text', *SB* 3 (1950–51): 19–36.
[32] F. R. Johnson, *A Critical Bibliography of the Works of Edmund Spenser Published before 1700* (Baltimore, MD, 1934), 27.