

Mara Yanni

THE ALLEGORY OF THE SEA IN *THE FAERIE QUEENE*

In the tradition of literary representation that reaches the Renaissance the sea often appears as a correlative of dark impulses, the instability of Fortune, or the disorder of passions. Homer's sea is the terrain on which the Odyssean impulse for the exploration of the unknown moves steadily towards a definition of the world and the individual's place in it: Odysseus «saw the townlands / and learned the minds of many distant men, / and weathered many bitter nights and days / in his deep heart at sea» (*Odyssey* 1.3-4). And when *pious* Aeneas exposes himself to the perils of the ocean, Neptune tempers the wave with the principle of Justice triumphant over Discord which lurks in both human nature and the universe: «et vastas aperit syrtis et temperat aequor / atque rotis summas levibus perlabitur undas. / Ac veluti magno in populo cum saepe coorta est / seditio saevitque animis ignobile vulgus» (*Aeneid* 1.145-49). Centuries later Petrarch, transmuting Virgil's abstraction into lyric form, wrote: «Passa la nava mia colma d'oblio / per aspro mare, a mezza notte, il verno» (Rima 179); here, the sixteenth-century commendator Alessandro Vellutello from Venice tells us, «per aspro mare» stands for «delle passioni ed umane perturbazioni» (in *Petrarcha Rime* 18).

The medieval view of the sea as an element of disorder and instability partly accounts for the fact that in England the sea occupies very small space in the literature written between the Norman conquest and the accession of the Tudors: Trenner notes that while *Beowulf* is a perfect expression of the wild moods of the «fealu» Northern sea in Old English poetry, Chaucer represents men as wayfarers rather than seafarers, while early Tudor poetry offers only scanty notices of the sea, as in Wyatt, Surrey, *Tottel's Miscellany*, and the *Mirror for Magistrates* (45, 171-74). It is indeed surprising that the poetry of the first half of the sixteenth century does not reflect effectively the adventures and discoveries of the English sailors. It was only in the second half of the century that the sea played a role in poetic inspiration. The sea imagery in *The Faerie Queene* is a case in point. Spenser's interest in the subject appears to be the result of classical and Italian epic influences, along with a maturing consciousness of the English achievement at sea — especially the defeat of the Spanish Armada, which established England as the new naval power.

No one doubts that the episodes taking place in a marine environment in *The Faerie Queene* have been analysed exhaustively as moral and political

allegories.¹ Yet very few studies have paid close attention to the dynamics of the sea imagery in each case. Most importantly, there has been no attempt to define the special significance that the sea acquires in the context of the poem as a whole.² This study undertakes a synthesis of the literary meaning of the sea in *The Faerie Queene*. It proposes that within the totality of Spenser's design the sea appears as a poetic manifestation of the Renaissance concept of *discordia concors*: each view of the sea presented in the course of the poem works as a pictorial commentary in a situation of discord, and leads progressively to a grand and inclusive image of the sea as an expression of the harmonious convergence of all the discordant elements of the world. In supporting this argument I will examine Guyon's voyages to the Idle Lake and the Bower of Bliss (II.vi, xii), Britomart's complaint and her encounter with Marinell at the Rich Strond (III.iv), and the Florimell-Marinell-Proteus story (III.viii, IV.xi-xii). The treatment of each episode will extend only as far as it highlights the nature and function of the sea imagery, with an emphasis on Spenser's original adaptation of sources for supporting the special needs of his allegory.

I

In the legend of Temperance Guyon's voyage to the «many island sea» is a blend of conventional Renaissance sea imagery, spiced up with a Spenserian adaptation of Aristotelian and Neoplatonic notions. Phaedria's boat «withouten oare or Pilot it to guide» (II.vi.5), and her telling Guyon that «who fares on sea may not commaund his way» (II.vi.23), recall the medieval view of the sea as chance or passion, in which one's boat of life is in mortal danger unless it is steered by Reason, the right pilot. Boethius, in the *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, had written that only the man who is guided by Reason is free from the vicissitudes of Fortune; if, on the other hand, the steering pilot is Love or Will, shipwreck is inevitable. In this

1. Pauline Henley, for example, defines Florimell as Ireland, Proteus as Spain, and Marinell as the sea power first of Spain and then of England (*Variorum* 3:380). Rathbane insists upon a Virgilian theme of imperial destiny, and identifies Marinell as an Achilles-Turnus figure, and Florimell as «civility» which is native to England and exiled in Spain. Roche emphasizes the moral aspect of the allegory viewing the Florimell-Marinell story as an exploration of the effect of beauty true and false on love and lust.

2. Weld examines the complaint of Britomart (III.iv.8-10), and concludes that the sea signifies passion, while he traces the concept as far back as Augustine. Murtaugh contrasts the fertility of the Garden of Adonis with the life denying sea as lust in the third book, until Florimell's union with Marinell in the fourth book redeems Spenser's poetic world. A more concise study on the subject is written by Williams: it examines some of the familiar emblematic uses of the sea and ships known to the Renaissance, and suggests that the iconographic tradition depicts all the characteristic meanings that Spenser incorporated in his imagery.

context, the substitution of the Palmer by mirthful Phaedria as Guyon's guide is an apt commentary on the situation.

However, a difficulty to accommodate the emblematic depiction of a tempestuous sea of chance or passion with the static nature of the Idle Lake arises at this point: «dull billowes thicke as troubled mire / Whom neither wind out of their seat could forse / Nor timely tides did driue out of their sluggish source» (II.vi.20). Another difficulty is added on when later Phaedria contradicts this by saying that the instability of wind and weather may suddenly endanger the voyage (II.vi.23). Against Gottfried's contention that this is an indication of Spenser's inability to be consistent with his imagery, one may argue that what is of more importance in this case is the poet's creation of a rich blend of allusions that unfolds for the reader the less visible dimensions of the narrative. Spenser attempts a bold adaptation of the recognizable cliché of the ungoverned boat in a tempestuous sea, which he combines with a different — and apparently contradictory — type of imagery that alludes to Dante's «la morta gora,» and Tasso's «asphaltic lake.» But how does this complex imagery function within the framework of the allegory of Temperance?

The Idle Lake, this «wide Inland sea,» is an ominous image of the evils in deficiency of action — in particular heroic action. Lack of involvement, sloth, living death are clearly suggested in its depiction. It is a correlative of «apraxia,» that despicable vice of the classical world, the enemy of civic life. If Temperance is the middle point between excess and deficiency, «apraxia» is undoubtedly a deficiency referring to the complete lack of initiative for virtuous action, and followed, as a rule, by fruitless indulgence in sensuality. Cymocles, who «to week wench did yield his martial might,» is a victim of apraxia; Pyrocles, at the other end of the scale, is an example of excess manifested as unchecked martial action. Both extremes are balanced in Guyon, who defeats Pyrocles and overcomes the temptation of Phaedria's invitation to irresponsibility:

So did she all, that might his constant hart
Withdraw from thought of warlike enterprize,
And drowne in dissolute delights apart,
Where noyse of armes, or vew of martiall guise
Might not reuiue desire of knightly exercise.

(II.vi.25)

In this episode Spenser is developing the argument on the conflict of duty and love — a situation with many precedents the closest of which seems to be the Rinaldo-Armida affair in *Gerusalemme Liberata*. The Renaissance placed the resolution of this conflict in the union of Venus and Mars, which was viewed as an emblem of *discordia concors* (Wind 91). The harmony

which is supposed to result from the union of these two opposites, however, appears here in a reverse way. For when Phaedria mentions Venus and Mars she is actually arguing in favor of lust and apraxia:

...Mars is Cupidoes frend,
And is for Venus' loues renowned more,
Then all his wars and spoils, the which he did of yore.

(II.vi.35)

Thus, the image of Guyon and the temptress Phaedria gliding on «dull billows thick as troubled mire,» becomes a powerful emblem of discord.

Guyon sails next to the Bower of Bliss. A voyage through perilous waters, such as this, has been a standard feature of a number of myths, commentaries, romances, travel narratives. While it will not do to confine Spenser to one source, as Lotspeich observes, the most probable source for moral symbolism and allegory is the voyages of Odysseus, Jason, and Aeneias, while «it seems clear that here as elsewhere, the mythographers, especially Comes, supplied him with much of his symbolism, and with its meaning made ready to his hand» (*Variorum* 2.351). Guyon voyages on the sea of life strewn with potential dangers and temptations, for which the moral attached to one of George Withers' emblems advises: «He that his Course directly steers / Nor Stormes, nor windy — Censures fears» (in Williams 142). Unlike his experience with Phaedria, this time the hero is in good hands: the Palmer, that shadowy apparition of Reason, is with him to steer a direct course.³

Spenser treats this conventional material with freshness and renewed vigor. While the sea in the classical epics appears as a natural element pliable to the moods and wishes of the gods and animated by a thick population of nymphs and sea creatures, the sea of this episode is uninhabitable and empty of the presence of any friendly creature (with the exception of two incidental references to Neptune and Tethys). The hero encounters nothing but formidable allegorical images, concrete externalizations of various forms of incontinence: the Gulf of Greediness, the Whirlpool of Decay, the Rock of Reproach, the Sirens, the Sea Monsters. Spenser's achievement, however, lies elsewhere — in the invention of a seascape in which the waves are projections of the hero's inner conflicts as he faces all these frights and temptations.

Here is how Guyon's fear is infused into the description of the sea: the Gulf of Greediness sucks and spouts out again the water «that all the seas for

3. Catherine Bates relates the nautical imagery of this episode with the idea of government in «Images of Government in *The Faerie Queene*, Book II,» *Notes and Queries*, 1989 Sept.; 36 234 (3) : 314-38.

fear seem away to fly» (3). Just before the host of sea monsters appeared, «the waves came rolling, and the billows roar / Outrageously as they enrag'd were, / Or Wrathful Neptune did them drive before / His whirling chariot for exceeding fear» (22). And then the sea monsters «came rushing in the foamy waves enrolled / Which seemed to fly for fear, them to behold» (25). Finally, here is how the rocking movement of the sea conveys effectively the hero's fascination at the song of the Sirens:

With that the rolling sea resounding soft,
In his big bass them fittly answered,
And on the rock the waves breaking aloft,
A solemn mean unto them measured.
The whiles sweet Zephyrus loud whistled
His tremble — a strange kind of harmony;
Which Guyon's senses softly tickled,
That he the boatman bade row easily,
And let him hear some part of their rare melody.

(II.xii.33)

While the knights' voyage in *Gerusalemme Liberata* 15 is a linear process defined by the number of ports which they encounter, the sea in Guyon's voyage suggests a rhythm that accompanies the wild beat of his heart. Fortunately, his alter ego, the Palmer, is there to check and assuage the tempests of fear or desire that threaten him with loss of control. Spenser's originality in the treatment of this episode lies in the renewal of the traditional literary motif of the perilous sea voyage: he created a sea which is a mirror of the hero's inner conflicts.

II

Originality has no part in Spenser's treatment of Britomart's complaint at the seashore (III.iv). All the well known images and metaphors connected with the tempest-tossed boat piloted by blind love or Fortune, are listed with Petrarchan accuracy. Only a few lines are given to the actual description of the seascape; the sea becomes the allegorical «huge sea of sorrow, and tempestuous griefe, / Wherein my feeble bark is tossed long» (8). Britomart interpretes the landscape as a mental picture of her lovelorn state; and it is all so commonplace that it would be futile to look for a specific source. It is of some interest though, that the heroine's invocation to both Aeolus and Neptunus is actually an appeal to Reason — an echo of Horace's ode 1.5 is found in it, as well:

Then when I shall by selfe in safty see,
A table for eternall monument

Of thy great grace, and my great ieopardie,
Great Neptune, I auow to hallow vnto thee.⁶

(III.iv.10)

J. C. Weld claims that this is a piece of dramatic irony showing Britomart's blindness, because she wants grace and Neptune is not the deity to give it (550); yet he also admits that Spenser could be following Landino's interpretation of *Aeneid* 1.50-156, in which Neptune is the higher Reason contrasted with Aeolus, the lower reason (551). Surely, this last explanation, in combination with the fact that here Spenser imitates a serious Horatian pose, argues more for directness of intent rather than irony.

Britomart's sea of passion is finally muted and sublimated through the heroic impulse. As soon as she sees Marinell from afar, she mounds her horse — a Platonic symbol of sensuous passion, now under control — and charges. Her spirit, troubled by love so far, converts into a mood of sudden wrath. The simile which follows presents a seascape suggestive of this conversion:

As when a foggy mist hath ouercast
The face of heauen, and the cleare aire engrost,
The world in darknesse dwels, till that at last
The watry Southwinde from the seabord cost
Vpblowing, doth disperse the vapour lo'st,
And poures it selfe forth in a stormy showre;
So the faire Britomart hauing disclo'st
Her cloudy care into a wrathfull stowre,
The mist of grieve dissolu'd, did into
vengeance powre.

(III.iv.13)

This is a «chastened» Britomart, a figure of *Venus armata* in which the principles of Venus and Mars, as Wind explains (94), mix in the right proportion.

If Britomart's is a sea of passion tempered by the martial impulse, it is not so with Marinell's ambiguous sea of the Rich Strond. The poet tells us that he is a «doughtie dreaded knight,» but also «loues enemy.» He does not excell in the usual chivalric exploits in the name of honor or love, but in the defense of the Rich Strond, where «gold, amber, yuorie, perles, owches, rings, / And all that else was pretious and deare, / The sea vnto him voluntary brings» (III.iv.23). Marinell is partly mortal and partly the offspring of a sea nymph; he lives suspended between the two worlds, right at the seashore line. But this is an illusory balance and a false commitment. The signs of alarm are present in the sea imagery: the Rich Strond is a wicked and

artificial shore strewn with treasures that come from shipwrecks, and which Nereus has offered the hero:

And him enriched through the ouerthrow
 And wreckes of many wretches, which did weepe,
 And often waile their wealth, which he from them did keepe.
 (III.iv.22)

In the context of the legend of Chastity, Marinell's abstinence from love and the realities of knighthood is the wrong kind of chastity. His position, as a defender of the Rich Strond, has much in common with the sterility of action characteristic of the heavy waters of the Idle Lake, while his «hautiness places him in a state of «hubris» »: «So fell proud Marinell upon the pretious shore» defeated by Britomart.

The elusive security in Marinell's existence also defines the idyllic nature of his mother's sea world. Cymoent's adode is presented as ambiguously benevolent as the Bower of Bliss. It is an artificial world totally removed from the realities of human experience, whose beauty and uninterrupted bliss belongs solely to the realm of poetry or art. As Paul Alpers notes, «Spenser brilliantly adapts the rationale of the idyllic pastoral — that nature responds to and is in a sense created by man's desires» (382). Taken as a standpoint for life, however, this beauty becomes deleterious leading to a precarious and narrow existence like Marinell's. After Britomart wounds the hero, Cymoent's world collapses and mortal grief mars the nymphs' calm countenances. This is the animated world of Homer's sea, where Thetis leads the lament for Achilles, while her sister nymphs beat together on their breasts in *Iliad* 18.50-52. It is a sea of tenderness, softness, and compassion, where the waves give ready passage as the procession of the mourning nymphs slides slowly till they reach the shore and «let their temed fishes softly swim / Along the margent of the fomy shore, / Least they their finnes should bruze, and surbate / Their tender feet vpon the stony ground» (III.iv.34). The elusive sea of the Rich Strond complements strongly the intellectual point of the situation, while it establishes the precedents of a new mythology of the sea, which is further developed in III, viii and xi-xii.

III

The figure of Proteus, which gives the decisive turn to Florimell's story, deserves special attention since Proteus has come to be regarded as identical in nature with the mutability of the sea; thus, it is possible to interpret the seascapes related to his presence in terms of his role. Flying Florimell — like Ariosto's Angelica — proves once more how «ticle be the termes of mortall state» (III.iv), when seeking safety she, instead, finds

herself sailing in a sea of chance inside the ungoverned boat of a lusty fisherman. What rectifies the melodrama of another conventional usage of sea imagery is the beauty of the poetry describing Proteus' intervention as a rescuer:

Her up betwixt his rugged hands he reared,
And with his frory lips full softly kist,
Whiles the cold y sickles from his rough beard,
Dropped adowne vpon her yuorie brest.⁴

(III.viii.35)

The underwater bower where Proteus carries Florimell becomes now the focal point — a stage for the enactment of Proteus' transformations. In his big act Proteus is imitating the mystery of the totality of experience in order to seduce Florimell. He assumes all kinds of masks, «but euermore she him refused flat»; then the rescuer and unsuccessful seducer turns into oppressor and encarcerates her in a deep dungeon.⁵

All these go a lot further than the exaltation of the heroine's chastity. The story of Florimell, Proteus, and Marinell is, among other things, a declaration of Spenser's Neoplatonism on the issue of individual fulfillment through true love. The key lies in the Protean figure. In all probability Spenser conceived of Proteus in terms of the implications that some of the renown Renaissance Neoplatonists had read in him.⁶ Ficino and Pico in particular had associated Proteus with man's mutability, and saw him as a means for comprehending the unity that actually underlies the diversity of the universe (cf. Wind 191). In their thought, the principle denoting the unity of All is expressed by Pan, the sacred shepherd of the land; Pan, however, is inherent in Proteus, and each principle is fully comprehended in the context of the other. «He who cannot attract Pan,» wrote Pico, «approaches Proteus in vain» (in Wind 191). This Platonic theologizing had even saturated Tasso's *Aminia*, as Cody points out (63): the Proteo of the first intermedio is complemented by Pan in the

4. Spenser calls Proteus «shepherd of the seas» echoing Virgil (*Georgics* 4.394), or more possibly Ariosto, whose following lines seem to be in close relation with Spenser's stanza 30: «Proteo marin, che pasce il fiero armento / di Nettuno che l'onda tutta regge, / sente de la sua donna aspro tormento, / e per grand'ira, rompe ordine e legge» (*Orlando Furioso* 8.54).

5. The themes of sexual violence and divine grace are treated by Pamela J. Benson in «Florimell at Sea: The Action of Grace in *Faerie Queene*, Book III,» *Spenser Studies: A Renaissance Poetry Annual* 6 (1985): 83-94.

6. Other readings of Proteus include C.S. Lewis' contention that Proteus signifies matter and Florimell's imprisonment the descent of the soul into material embodiment; and Weld's interpretation of Proteus as lust or as the transformations imposed by passion on the lover's identity.

last. I think that Spenser's familiarity with the doctrines of the Florentines also argues for a possible influence in his conception of Proteus.⁷

Spenser is using the figure of Proteus as an expression of the mutability and vast diversity in experience; yet, at the same time, all the ambiguity and disorder created by Proteus in this episode calls desperately for some kind of meaningful ordering. Because the unity of Pan must become manifest, if existence is to be of any value — Florimell's adventures will otherwise remain a senseless flux of events prompted by chance. A poetic redemption of the individual and his world underlies the construction of the marine mythology that starts in III.viii and is concluded in IV.xi-xii with the wedding of Thames and Medua. For Florimell, the harmony of Pan's unity is possible only through the fulfillment of her love for Marinell; the same holds true for Marinell, who is waiting, as if in limbo, for his regeneration into a more meaningful kind of life. In Spenser's terms fulfillment through true love is as close as a human can get to a state of harmony with one's self and the natural world — this harmonious union has been the goal of the quests of all his chaste lovers. Florimell's quest ends here, with her union with Marinell, whose «wound» heals when he finally learns to love «by learning louers paines to rew» (IV.xii.13). Like another Adonis under Venus' care, he revives, and his recovery is given in terms of generation and growth in the natural world:

As withered weed through cruell winters time,
That feels the warmth of sunny beames reflection
Lifts vp his head, that did before decline
And gins to spread his leafe before the faire sunshine.
Right so himselfe did Marinell vpreare,
When he in place his dearest loue did spy.

(IV.xii.34)

The harmonious pattern that emerges at Proteus' realm is the same one underlying the Garden of Adonis and referring to the cyclical movement of natural generation.

The description of the flowing procession of water deities sliding rhythmically towards Proteus' house to celebrate the wedding of Thames and Medua (IV.xi), is a figurative representation of the meaningful order inherent in the flux and mutability of the Protean principle in life.⁸ The picture

7. Wind mentions that in the *Shepherd's Calendar* Spenser expressed the union of balance and transcendence, «which he knew from his study of Italian Neoplatonists...» (47); moreover, Spenser's correspondence with Harvey shows that they were studying the works of Gianfrancesco Pico (225).

8. Williams compares this with emblem 28 in *Achilles Boetii Symbolicarum Questionum de*

celebrates the ordered fecundity of the sea's diverse progeny and, through it, the power of Venus, who «of the fomy sea was bred»: «So fertile be the floods in generation, / So huge their numbers and so numberlesse their nation» (IV.xii.l). The sources for this imagery, notes Lotspeich, «present difficulty and food for scholarship in determining the degree that Spenser derived from *Natalis Comes Mythologiae*, or from primary sources like Homer, Virgil, Hesiod, Ovid» (*Variorum* 4, 275). The difficulty, I believe, stems primarily from the persuasive autonomy of Spenser's recreation of mythology. The scenery depicts Proteus' house and Florimell's dungeon. The sacramental procession of the water deities that come in waves defines the rest of the space: Spenser translates and abstracts the seascape in terms of deities incarnating all the forms and colors of waterlife. And above all stands Neptune for Justice. The Virgilian concept of the justice of the sea finds here a new application: it is Neptune's authority that releases Florimell from her unjust imprisonment.⁹ The euphoria that informs these waters elevates the sea of Proteus' realm into a symbol whose diversity of manifestations suggests the unifying pattern of fertility and generation in the natural world.

IV

The voyage from Phaedria's Idle Lake to Proteus's realm has unfolded for the reader a kaleidoscopic view of the sea. Spenser adapted a variety of traditional images of the sea in a variety of contexts, guided each time by the special needs of his poetic design. Yet, the poet's greatest contribution in the renewal of this material lies beyond his successful integration of sea imagery at particular allegorical situations. It must be clear that out of Spenser's diverse uses of the sea in the episodes discussed above, emerges a symbolic pattern which shows the sea as a depository of various tensions, even conflicts, among disparate elements. For example, Phaedria's «slothful wave» asserts a powerful presence as a correlative of the unheroic life of leisure and lust that tempts the chivalric ideal. In Guyon's voyage towards the Bower of Bliss the sea is animated by the turmoil of Guyon's emotions, which the Palmer, as Reason, checks consistently. Britomart's tempestuous sea of passion is in turn tempered by the martial impulse; and the ambiguous

Univers Genere, in which «the primal matter and the divine mind which operates upon it are shown in an enchanting picture of the sea with figures of fecundity, order and intention» (136).

9. For Spenser's use of mythological sea figures see Brenda Thaon, «Spenser's Neptune, Nereus, and Proteus: Renaissance Mythography made Verse,» in R. J. Schoeck, ed., *Acta Conventus Neo-Latini Bononiensis*, Medieval and Renaissance Texts & Studies (Binghampton, N.Y.: 1985), 630-37.

beauty of the Rich Strond, a signifier for Marinell's questionable commitment, falls apart as soon as it conflicts with the realities of knighthood. Finally all these lead to the vantage point of Proteus's sea, which appears as the place in which all the disparate elements in the flux and mutability of the world converge harmoniously under the unifying power of love.

In the topography of *The Faerie Queene* there are some landmarks to remind one that the horrors of a seemingly disjunct existence could be assuaged in the wider perspective of a natural world informed with a design of divine order. Such landmarks are the Garden of Adonis, the temple of Venus, Arlo Hill, and Proteus' realm. Eric Laguardia writes that the «Garden of Adonis defines a natural world perfected by a harmony of the divine principle of eternal order and the natural principle of generation, growth and mutability. The Temple of Venus defines a natural world perfected by the harmony of the divine principle of chastity and the natural principle of sensuality» (125). Similarly, I would like to add, Arlo Hill foregrounds the redemption of the pains of existence in a mutable world, since Mutability proves ineffective to disturb stability in a cosmic scale. And in Proteus' realm, the focus is on the redemption of the individual faced by the insecurities of disjointed experience through the unifying power of love which orders nature in fertility and generation. This last inclusive image of the sea presents a plateau on which all the contradictions of the world's diversity meet and harmonize under the presiding of the «sea bred» Venus, the force that can turn Protean mutability from a principle of discord into *discordia concors*.

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ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Μάρα Γιαννή, *Η αλληγορία της θάλασσας στο The Faerie Queene*.

Η σημασία της θάλασσας στο σύνολο της αλληγορίας του *The Faerie Queene* δεν έχει ερευνηθεί επαρκώς. Στο άρθρο αυτό υποστηρίζω ότι στο συγκεκριμένο ποίημα τού Spenser η θάλασσα λειτουργεί ως σύμβολο της γνωστής στην Αναγέννηση έννοιας *discordia concors*, η οποία αναφέρεται στην ενότητα και την αρμονία που προέρχονται από τη σύζευξη αντιθετικών στοιχείων. Εξετάζονται τα επεισόδια του ποιήματος που περιέχουν αναφορές στη θάλασσα, καθώς και ο τρόπος με τον οποίο ο ποιητής χρησιμοποιεί τις πηγές του.

Στο *The Faerie Queene* συναντάμε τις περισσότερες από τις εμβληματικές χρήσεις της θάλασσας, που περιέχονται στην εικονογραφική παράδοση της Αναγέννησης, προσαρμοσμένες κάθε φορά στις θεματικές ανάγκες του περιεχομένου. Όλες αυτές οι όψεις της θάλασσας, παρόλες τις διαφορές που υπάρχουν μεταξύ τους, αποκτούν μια ευρύτερη κοινή σημασία στο σύνολο του ποιήματος: σημασιοδοτούν καταστάσεις εσωτερικών συγκρούσεων (λογική-συναίσθημα, έρως-καθήκον κ.λπ.), και οδηγούν σταδιακά σε μια Πρωτεϊκή αντίληψη της ζωής, ως φαινόμενου δυναμικού, αντιφατικού, πολύμορφου, και διαρκώς μεταβαλλόμενου. Η «θάλασσα του Πρωτέα» στο τελευταίο υπό εξέταση επεισόδιο, είναι η επιτομή αυτής της αντίληψης και, συγχρόνως, δείκτης των Νεοπλατωνικών καταβολών του ιδεαλισμού του Spenser. Πρόκειται για ένα χώρο όπου όλες οι αντιφάσεις, η πολυμορφία, και η μεταβλητότητα του φυσικού κόσμου ρυθμίζονται από την ενοποιητική δύναμη της θαλασσογέννητη Αφροδίτης — θεάς που εποπτεύει την κυκλική πορεία της γονιμότητας σε ολόκληρη τη φύση.

Στην τοπογραφία του *The Faerie Queene* η θάλασσα, ως ιδιαίτερη έκφραση του *discordia concors*, εντάσσεται στην κατηγορία των άλλων συμβολικών χώρων (Temple of Venus, Garden of Adonis, Arlo Hill), οι οποίοι προβάλλουν ανάλογες απόψεις για την ενυπάρχουσα τάξη και αρμονία στον κόσμο, ενισχύοντας έτσι τον ιδεολογικό κορμό του ποιήματος με αναγνωρισμένες αναγεννησιακές αξίες.