

turn, it further illuminates one of the significant traditions and practices that contributed to what was unique about al-Andalus.

Ross Brann, *Cornell University*

doi:10.1017/rqx.2023.410

Spenser's Ethics: Empire, Mutability, and Moral Philosophy in Early Modernity.
Andrew Wadoski.

The Manchester Spenser. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2022. xii + 216 pp. £80.

Andrew Wadoski's new book, *Spenser's Ethics: Empire, Mutability, and Moral Philosophy in Early Modernity*, aims to reconcile the competing scholarly views on the moral and mimetic purpose of Spenser's *Faerie Queene*. Wadoski contends that Spenser's allegorical epic participates in the early modern transition from didactic portrayals of classical virtue ethics to reconceptualized moral philosophies focused on efficacious political and social activity. Spenser's work thereby attempts to address the increasingly complex and informational necessities of Elizabethan England's nascent empire. In so doing, Wadoski seeks to recast Spenser as a moral philosopher whose chief work contributes to the evolving conceptualization of "moral life answerable to the realities of its cultural and historical moment" rather than a mere poet reflecting on the "various ethical modes" (2).

Wadoski elucidates the framework of Spenser's new ethics across six enterprising chapters, each centering on key moments or figures in *The Faerie Queene*. Chapter 1 discusses Guyon and the Palmer of book 2 in conjunction with Milton's desire for ethical modes that can function in a mutable or fallen world. Wadoski examines how Milton affirms Spenser's rendering of virtue not as the "perfection" of "self-sufficient excellence" but as the "practice" of social collaboration in the formation of civil society (63). Chapter 2 posits that moral valences of Britomart and her search for Arthegall in book 3 reconstitute the teleology of human virtue as the "generative desire" of empire building and so challenge Aristotelian moral theory with the notion that imperial expansion offers an achievable *eudaimonia* or flourishing (86). Chapter 3 reconsiders Spenser's characterization of Prince Arthur and his association with the virtue of magnificence. Wadoski insists that Spenser's Arthur represents a critique of Aristotelian virtue and claims that the moral function of magnificence signals a need for a new civic class whose "generative and expansive communities" will form the basis of a flourishing empire (113).

Chapter 4 investigates the Garden of Adonis episode from book 3, revealing how Spenser's moral vision comes to embrace the organic body, through which virtue becomes a "collaborative and self-extensive project of sustaining life" and, by extension, civilization (134). Chapter 5 investigates the Mutabilitie cantos alongside the

destruction of the Bower of Bliss, locating Spenser's rationale that the civil self requires "imposing and reinforcing the regime of civility on others" through the exercise of state power and the coercive violence of governmental agents (140). Chapter 6 traces the influence of Machiavellian thinking on Spenser's later writings. Wadoski interprets Artegall's defeat at the hands of Rade Gund in book 5 as exemplifying the inadequacy of classical virtue ethics in the brutalizing process of colonization, and he asserts that Spenser embodies in Lord Grey, under whom he served as secretary in the 1580s to the 1590s, the ethics of Machiavelli's virtuoso agent, who aspires to make the best of bad situations (182). Wadoski concludes his book with a short coda comparing *The Faerie Queene* with Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Wadoski finds the "moral formation" and "ideological vocabulary" of England's imperial expansion and colonizing efforts underwrite Conrad's narrative (191). For Wadoski, Spenser's fashioned gentleman ultimately belongs to and helps advance "the expansive progress of English power" (195).

The stakes for Wadoski's argument are significant. His study eschews the traditional criticism of Spenser's moral discourse as either a nostalgic recollection of the classical virtue ethics of Scholasticism and humanism or a repudiation of those ethics due to the collapse of political and social order in Ireland and England. Rather, Wadoski convincingly shows how Spenser's ethics anticipate an emerging moral philosophy that can operate in the shifting sociopolitical landscapes of early modern nation-states and their colonizing empires. Although *The Faerie Queene* is the central work on which he formulates his argument, Wadoski keeps in his purview Spenser's "Letter of the Authours" and *The View of the Present State of Ireland*. These works function as critical points in Spenser's developing moral philosophy, and Wadoski shrewdly demonstrates how *The Faerie Queene* is in conversation with them, specifically with respect to Spenser's stated purpose of fashioning virtuous gentlemen and his justification of Lord Grey's severe repression of Irish rebellions.

Spenser's Ethics is an enriching book with a profound argument, nuanced analyses, and a remarkable synthesis of Spenserian criticism and moral philosophy (of which this review has only scratched the surface). Wadoski writes with lucid academic prose that expresses his sophisticated lines of inquiry with easy elegance. As an incisive and innovative study of Spenser's moral philosophy, this book is a valuable contribution to Spenserian scholarship—if not a necessary reference for future studies on this subject—as well as a worthy addition to the broader fields of early modern literature and general philosophy.

Russell L. Keck, *Harding University*
doi:10.1017/rqx.2023.596