

An Annotated Copy of *The Faerie Queene*
(II.ix.22)

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A footnote to the recent scholarly interest in the so-called "arithmological stanza" in Book II of Spenser's poem is provided by an annotated copy of the 1596 edition (that is, the first edition to contain all six books) in the library of Lincoln Minster. The text of the first volume is lightly annotated mainly by way of correcting misprints and by the underlining of certain passages. No clear purpose to this latter class of annotations may be discerned except, perhaps, an interest in sensuous, mildly erotic verse.

The blank pages at the end of the volume contain a much more copious annotation, the text of which follows. The annotator in transcribing this stanza inserted the superior numerals and changed the spelling of some words. He drew a strong rule at the foot of the stanza, and wrote his comments beneath.

Lib: 2. Cant: 9. pag. 313

The frame thereof seemd partly ¹.circular,
And part ².triangular, O work divine:
These two the ³.first and ⁴.last proportions are,
The one ⁵.imperfect, mortall, feminine,
Th' other ⁶.immortal perfect masculine:
And twixt them both a ⁷.quadrate was the base,
Proportion'd equally by ⁸.seven and nine,
Nine⁹. was the circle sett in heaven's place,

All w^{ch} compacted made a goodly Dyapase¹⁰.

It is evident first by the title of the Canto (*The Castle of Temperance*)/ and secondly by the Lady of the Castle (*Alma, w^{ch} is the Soule*)/ and lastly by the materiall wherewith it was made [*e*]xpress'd in y.^e precedent stanza (like to Egyptian slime; and which soone must/ turne to earth) that this Castle is the frame of man &.

1. circular: w.^{ch} is y.^e soule.
2. triangular: w.^{ch} is y.^e Heart, and is taken for y.^e whole body.
3. y.^e first proportion: as first made, or Δ . being y.^e first mathemat[ical] p[ro]portion.
4. y.^e last: as being afterward infused: or \circ . being y.^e last and p[er]fectest p[ro]portion.

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5. imperfect; comparatively: mortall: feminine: because weake, and generative.
6. immortal: a created: perfect, masculine; as vigorous, com[m]anding y.^e body.
7. a Quadrate, y.^e 4. elements whereof bodyes consist: or y.^e 4 humours in y.^e body.
8. proportioned by 7. & 9. Either because the 7 Planets gouerne the Body:/ and y.^e 9 Intelligences y.^e soule: or alluding to y.^e climaterick, consisting of 9 times 7.
9. The Circle: the soule; sett to com[m]and y.^e body: or afterward translatabe to Heaven,/ where its onely ioy can be.
10. Dyapase. The harmony betwixt y.^e Body and Soule.
/G. T./

I could discover nothing about the identity of "G.T.". His handwriting is a characteristic italic hand of the first half of the seventeenth century with some secretary elements; it is different from the annotations in the rest of the volume, as it is from the hand that copied the "Mutabilitie" Cantos on to the blank pages of the second volume of this edition. His account of the arithmological stanza is independent of Kenelm Digby's explication published in 1643/44, and may well have been written earlier. As these volumes of *The Faerie Queene* appear to have been in the library since the seventeenth century, it is likely that "G.T." had some connections with the Dean and Chapter of Lincoln. His account, while less elaborate than Digby's, let alone modern "numerological" explications, shows that this manner of reading poetic texts was not restricted to the *virtuosi*.