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Andrew Hadfield, Ed.
The Cambridge Companion to Spenser
£13.95 paperback
ISBN: 0-521-64570-0

This collection contains thirteen specially-commissioned essays by some of today's most respected Spenserian scholars. Spenser's best known work, *The Faerie Queene*, does not dominate the volume since, of the four chapters which are devoted exclusively to literary texts, two consider his pastoral poetry and the shorter poems. That Andrew Hadfield is the editor of this collection points to the recent interest generated by a focus on the Irish context of Spenser's writing; Richard A. McCabe's essay "Ireland: policy, poetics and parody" is essential reading for the uninitiated in this area. Unfortunately, Spenser's prose tract *A View of the Present State of Ireland* whilst discussed in particular essays, especially McCabe's, apparently did not merit individual consideration. As well as the crucial Irish context there are chapters tracing, amongst other subjects, Spenser's biography, the classical influences on his writing, his position on religious matters, and his attitude to sexual politics, particularly in response to Petrarchan representations of women. In general, a good balance has been struck between essays which contextualise Spenser's writing and those which focus on individual literary texts and a particular strength of the collection is the tendency for each essay to focus on contextualising via discussion of Spenser's writing. Each essay contains a useful 'further reading' section and a very usable index; this excellent collection is essential reading for any scholar working in the field of Spenser studies.