

**Textual Memory and the Problem
of Coherence in Edmund Spenser's
*The Faerie Queene***

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Abstract

*Long fictional narratives with complex plots challenge readers who seek coherence within them, especially when narrative frames are complicated by repetition, narrative intrusions, and many other disruptive elements. This essay focuses on Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* as an early modern narrative that employs textual memory as one form of experientiality. Textual memory is cued by words, settings, and experiential episodes that invite embodied noetic, affective, and kinetic response. Textual memories may be evoked intratextually through repetition and heightened emotional valence, and they may persist over long narrative diversions of interlaced sub-narratives and differences such as varied focalization and action. As instances of distributed cognition, textual memories are embodied and enactive. They may extend beyond one text to others, forming intertextual networks. Such intertextuality can be seen in memorial experiences in *The Faerie Queene* and early modern texts and translations of Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* and Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata*.*

Keywords: *The Faerie Queene*; textual memory; textual coherence; narrative; distributed cognition.